HOW TO

UNDERSTAND AND APPLY

THE OLD TESTAMENT

TWELVE STEPS FROM EXEGESIS TO THEOLOGY

Jason S. DeRouchie

"For nearly a century, only a handful of scholars have published manuals for the exegesis of the Hebrew Bible. *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* surpasses all previous works with its biblical-theological orientation, purposeful organization, depth of analytical guidance, clarity of explanation, illustrative examples, and direction regarding interpretive implications. DeRouchie walks the aspiring exegete and expositor through the steps of a text-focused, genre-aware, and context-sensitive methodology. No matter what one's theological views might be on any particular text, this volume gives users superb guidance for interpreting the Old Testament. I commend it to every teacher and student of Hebrew exegesis as the best textbook available."

    —**William D. Barrick**, Retired Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary; Old Testament Editor, Evangelical Commentary on the Old Testament

"This book is an invaluable resource for anyone serious about preaching and teaching the Old Testament in a way consistent with our Lord's words (Luke 24:25–27, 44–49). From genre classification to the biblical, systematic, and practical theological implications of expositing the Old Testament, DeRouchie works through every step necessary for establishing a Christ-centered (biblical-theological) exegetical methodology; the examples provided throughout are extremely helpful. This is the book I longed for as a student and pastor and am now excited to be using in several of my courses (Hebrew Syntax, Hebrew Prose, Hebrew Poetry, Old Testament Biblical Theology) as I train the next generation of international pastors and church-planters to preach Christ rightly from all of Scripture for the glory of Christ's name among the nations."

    —**Derek D. Bass**, Assistant Professor of Old Testament Language and Literature, Tyndale Theological Seminary, The Netherlands

"DeRouchie's latest offering provides exegetical and theological tools for how to read and apply the Old Testament in a way that is centered on Christ, while having controls to ensure that we are reading out of the text what the authors intended rather than reading into the text our own ideas. Two contributions stand out. The first is the extended discussion of various genres, explaining the literary conventions that are required for responsible interpretation and showing how each genre contributes to the Bible's coherent message, which centers its hope in the coming Messiah. The second is the thorough explanation of the method of discourse analysis that DeRouchie developed in his doctoral dissertation. The analysis begins with building a text hierarchy, which in turn supplies an objective basis for tracing the literary argument in a way that shows how each part of the text contributes to the author's main point. The argument diagram then provides the basis for an exegetical outline that allows one to preach a text, confident that one is teaching what the author intended. DeRouchie's book is a sure-footed guide to Old Testament interpretation and proclamation."

    —**John C. Beckman**, Assistant Professor of Old Testament, Bethlehem College & Seminary

"Not only is this the best road map to interpreting the Hebrew Bible that I know of, it also strengthens faith, motivates study, and exalts the Messiah. DeRouchie has carefully designed this book to serve both the reader who knows biblical Hebrew and the one who doesn't. DeRouchie models excellent scholarship propelled by a passion for the Lord, and this book will provide the reader with the tools to study, apply, and teach the Scriptures for the good of the church and the glory of God."

    —**Todd Bolen**, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, The Master's College

"*How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* is not just another introduction to Bible interpretation. This is hinted at by the subtitle, *Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology*. Readers—no, users—of this book will discover something of Jason DeRouchie's passion for the good news as it is in Jesus that all his classroom students regularly observe as he provides tested and proven step-by-step procedures on progressing from simply reading the Old Testament Scriptures to deepening and enriching belief in Jesus Christ. Yes, indeed, this book features the Old Testament, but it focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ because DeRouchie correctly argues that from its beginning to its climax, the whole Old Testament is about the coming Messiah. He is rightly convinced that the Old Testament is Christian Scripture because it finds its true and proper culmination and fulfillment only in Jesus of Nazareth. I heartily commend this book. May it be instrumental in the formation of belief in Christ Jesus for many."

    —**Ardel B. Caneday**, Professor of New Testament and Greek, University of Northwestern—St. Paul

"DeRouchie brings both scholarly expertise and mission experience into the service of helping us see the Old Testament as *Christian* Scripture. Here is faithful interpretation of the Word of God in accord with its own historical setting and in harmony with its redemptive context. Such a whole-Bible perspective will help enable Bible interpreters to identify the particular concerns of Old Testament writers and to celebrate the continuities of their words with New Testament revelations of our Redeemer. As a result, believers will be enriched in their ability to apply the Old Testament to their lives in ways that nurture hope in the gospel and that fuel zeal for the glory of Christ."

    —**Bryan Chapell**, Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church, Peoria, IL

"Just looking over the table of contents gave me an adrenaline surge. I wish I'd had this book when I was teaching Old Testament, and I now envy the professors and students who use the book. Its content does not disappoint. Every sentence conveys the result of careful thought. DeRouchie is a scholar who knows the theological discourse regarding biblical interpretation and is thus well equipped to introduce students to it. But his work does more than orient the student's head; DeRouchie also aims at producing the heart of a faithful interpreter of God's Word. I applaud his commitment to 'the distinct nature of Scripture as God's unique Word' against some (even evangelicals) who fail to distinguish the Bible as such. Thus he differentiates biblical narrative from 'myth.' As

he says, 'We cannot deny the reality of an event that the biblical authors believed to be historical and still say that we affirm Scripture's authority.' I also applaud DeRouchie's belief that Old Testament interpretation cannot end until we have discerned how each book points to Christ. The book is abundantly sprinkled with excellent instructive charts. In addition to being friendly to the reader (with chapter previews, reviews, and study questions), this book does not sidestep difficult issues but includes many footnotes pointing them out and suggesting helpful thoughts and resources. It is also full of insights regarding many biblical texts, such as Proverbs 22:6 (over three pages) and 1 Samuel 13:14 (four pages). Students who know Hebrew will be especially excited by many sections in the book that discuss issues arising in the study of the Hebrew Bible. I will be returning to this book often."

   —**E. Ray Clendenen**, Senior Editor of Bible and Reference Publishing, B&H Publishing Group

"In this monument of industry, Jason DeRouchie has appropriated insights from discourse linguistics to lay out for students the essential questions and methods for responsible study of the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture. And the overview of all the tools and resources—what a treasure trove! You don't have to agree with every exegetical decision he makes to be grateful to him for his tireless work and to use this as a tool for learning and teaching the art of exegesis. Thank you, Dr. DeRouchie!"

   —**C. John ("Jack") Collins**, Professor of Old Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary

"DeRouchie's *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* is a veritable treasure trove for anyone interested in academically rigorous, God-glorifying, Christ-savoring Old Testament interpretation. His book is not just a book on hermeneutics; it is a biblical theology of how we should read our Bibles. His volume runs the gamut from highly detailed work, on such topics as word studies and the relationship between clauses, to grander, big-picture ideas, encompassing the Bible's overall narrative. This book is must reading for anyone who is hungry to dig into the riches of the Old Testament."

   —**John C. Crutchfield**, Professor of Bible, Columbia International University

"DeRouchie writes with rigor, clarity, and passion. He details the extraordinary amount of work that is involved in seeking to understand the meaning of the biblical text—and yet at the same time the extraordinary importance of getting that meaning, for the exegetical payoff is out of this world. He moves us from the individual tree (exegesis) to the larger forest (theology) and then to the breathtaking, worship-inspiring view of the whole (doxology). He gives many examples and illustrations throughout the book that will help the student understand. I can sense that he wants us to 'get' the Bible so that the Bible can 'get' us."

   —**Stephen G. Dempster**, Professor of Religious Studies, Crandall University, Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada

"This book is an excellent resource with many strengths. It has tracks for those who do and do not know Hebrew and includes study questions, a glossary, and extensive bibliographical aids. As a textbook this work targets a specific theological audience, but its cutting-edge application of discourse analysis makes it a valuable reference work for all Hebrew-informed interpreters. It is set forth in a clear step-by-step format with helpful illustrations. Methodologically, it correctly works from the largest literary-linguistic unit to the smallest; then it progresses contextually from the smallest unit to larger spheres of literary, historical, cultural, and theological contexts; and most importantly, it continues on to guided reflection for the purposes of biblical theology, systematic theology, and practical application—all with a strong Christocentric focus."
   —**Rodney K. Duke**, Professor of Religion, Appalachian State University

"Once again DeRouchie has evidenced his special gift in combining the precision of a scholar, the organization of a teacher, and the heart of a pastor in his new textbook, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*. Writing in three concurrent tracks for beginning, intermediate, and advanced students, he develops a clear trajectory from exegesis to theology, providing discussion informed by recent scholarship, clear biblical examples, and abundant resources for further study. This, then, is a manual that invites rereading at increasing levels of insight and precision. For students of the Old Testament, DeRouchie's work will likely become the standard for the next generation."
   —**Daniel J. Estes**, Distinguished Professor of Old Testament, Cedarville University

"This book is a marriage of hermeneutical theory and practice, of doctrinal and ethical theology. Dr. Jason DeRouchie has done an outstanding job of writing a step-by-step guide to studying the Old Testament that is both comprehensive and balanced. Jason is a man of scholarship and godliness. In this work he shares his expertise and faith to help readers interpret God's Word accurately and apply it more appropriately. Each chapter offers options for reading depending on one's ability and interest in studying the text in the original language. This approach makes it ideal for many classroom settings. From students to experienced preachers and teachers, people who want to know God better through the Scriptures will gain much from this careful study."
   —**Lee M. Fields**, Professor of Bible, Mid-Atlantic Christian University

"Too many American Christians either have given up altogether on understanding the Old Testament or have accepted shallow, even unbiblical readings. But Jesus didn't! In *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, Dr. DeRouchie has given the church a great gift. These pages are packed with lucid, enlightening, and inspiring examples of exegesis done well—and done in ways that drive us to godly theology. Dr. DeRouchie's methods will bless you and, above all, lead you to see Christ more clearly and love him more dearly. Highly recommended!"
   —**William Fullilove**, Assistant Professor of Old Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary

"Students of God's Word from all walks of life will benefit from *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*. Reflecting on my travels and work overseas, I can't help but think of how much less doctrinal error and how much more peace in Christ we would enjoy if we took theology as seriously and cheerfully as DeRouchie. One of the key components of this volume's usefulness is its three tracks for target audiences. As a busy mom, I don't have time to read every page, but as a wannabe Hebrew student, I do want to grow in my understanding. The chapter-by-chapter 'trail guides' really helped me maximize my time in the book. Use and enjoy this volume in your personal studies, discipleship, and parenting."

  —**Gloria Furman**, Cross-Cultural Worker

"Textbooks on biblical hermeneutics generally come in two varieties: Either they are theoretical, describing the philosophical underpinnings of an interpretive method and meant primarily for the academy, or they are practical, giving instruction in how to go about interpretation and meant primarily for pastors, Bible teachers, and students. DeRouchie's text is of the second variety, and it fulfills its purposes admirably. But DeRouchie also fills a significant gap among textbooks: he gives a clear and informed presentation of how the tools provided by Hebrew linguistics and discourse analysis enable readers to better understand the Hebrew Scriptures. So this is not just another book on how to read the Bible; it is a major resource for all who seek to seriously engage with the biblical text."

  —**Duane A. Garrett**, John R. Sampey Professor of Old Testament Interpretation, Professor of Biblical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Magisterial in depth and scope, DeRouchie's guide to biblical interpretation (exegesis and theology) of the Old Testament is an excellent beginning to a new truly Christian *Literarkritik*, which moves us away from the dead ends of the Enlightenment's placing of critical human reason as the highest criterion for determining truth."

  —**Peter J. Gentry**, Donald L. Williams Professor of Old Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"DeRouchie's *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* is a guidebook for those who want to seriously pursue God in the Old Testament Scriptures. DeRouchie leads his readers through a twelve-stage interpretive process that takes them from the text of the Old Testament Scriptures to a Christ-centered application of those Scriptures to themselves, the church, and the world. This book is user-friendly, and its pages are filled with applications of Scripture that will draw the student into the deep and thorough study of the Old Testament that the book teaches and models. If you are serious about loving God with all your heart, mind, and strength, then this is the book for you. Its contents will feed and challenge your heart and mind. And if you are going to master everything in this book, it will require all the strength the Lord gives you."

  —**W. Edward Glenny**, Professor of New Testament and Greek, University of Northwestern—St. Paul

"Busy pastors and Bible teachers often see the various disciplines that structured their theological education recede into the distance because of the demands on their time. If only someone would provide them with a basic yet comprehensive handbook to serve as a reference resource and means of revision when needed! Jason DeRouchie has done exactly that. He sets out the logical stages in dealing with the exegesis of the biblical text in a way that can be negotiated even by readers who have no formal theological training. But for the student or pastor, this is a wonderful aid to teaching and preaching. The progression of the twelve steps from text to application highlights the care needed to arrive at a sound biblical theology and trustworthy doctrinal statements. The final stage of practical theology places the whole process into the pastoral ministry to God's people. I consider this the crowning achievement of the book. All the toil in language and exegesis, moving through biblical and systematic theology, brings its copious rewards in the way the text is applied so that we, the readers, as well as our hearers, can truly discern the very Word of God to us in the Bible."

> —**Graeme Goldsworthy**, Former Lecturer in Old Testament, Biblical Theology, and Hermeneutics, Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia

"As one who loves and teaches exegesis of Old Testament texts, I view Jason DeRouchie's volume *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* as nothing less than a gold mine! As with any other exegesis 'how-to' book, each of us will have this or that quibble. Regardless, DeRouchie has given professors, pastors, and students a treasure trove of solid procedure, great examples, and helpful insights. Besides providing a thorough explanation of his twelve steps, he provides clear examples, threading the same passages for the various steps (along with some new ones). On top of all that, his abundant provision of resources to aid the exegete for each step is a great asset. I look forward to using the book and recommending it to my students and alumni."

> —**Michael A. Grisanti**, Lead Professor of Old Testament and Director of the Th.M. Program, The Master's Seminary

"People often ask me how they can grow in understanding the Bible when seminary is not an option. *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* provides exactly what those of us who don't know Hebrew and Greek need to take a huge step forward in our learning. This book not only provides instruction on using the tools such as genre, grammar, and context, but also demonstrates clearly and effectively how to use these tools."

> —**Nancy Guthrie**, Bible Teacher; Author, *Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament* Bible study series

"This is the most thoughtful and well-developed guidebook on how to do exegesis that I have encountered. While it is designed for a student of the Old Testament who has or is acquiring Hebrew skills, it is organized so that anyone who desires to study the Old Testament seriously can use it. The steps are not only clearly defined but also

excellently modeled through the exegesis of several key passages. The result is a book that is packed with rich nuggets of expositional insight embedded in a matrix of solid exegetical 'how-to' and thus an invaluable reference tool."

—**Michael A. Harbin**, Professor of Biblical Studies and Chair of the Department of Biblical Studies, Christian Educational Ministries, and Philosophy, Taylor University

"DeRouchie has written a true gem—the many facets of a seminary education are encapsulated in this single volume! It will serve to encourage and guide serious Bible students seeking to understand the message of the Scriptures of Jesus and apply it to their contemporary settings. The book is plainly written with clear steps and adroit examples that model how one should study, do, and teach, following the ancient model of Ezra the scribe."

—**Chip Hardy**, Assistant Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

"DeRouchie's *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* is perhaps the most comprehensive and complete practical guide to Old Testament hermeneutics and exegesis available today. This is an outstanding work, and I heartily recommend it to all who teach Old Testament exegesis."

—**J. Daniel Hays**, Professor of Biblical Studies, Ouachita Baptist University

"DeRouchie offers a twelve-step process for Old Testament exegesis that goes beyond exegesis proper to include biblical, systematic, and practical theology. From the beginning, DeRouchie's confessional commitments are clear and central to the task. He provides an excellent ten-point argument for the importance of the Old Testament for Christians—not least of which is the fact that it was the only Scriptures of Jesus and the earliest church. DeRouchie presents an insightful introduction to the genres of the Old Testament (i.e., historical narrative, prophecy and law, psalms, and proverbs) with principles for interpreting each (chapter 1). His explanations of clause and text grammar (chapter 5) and argument diagramming (chapter 6)—with several examples—are particularly helpful. Notably, DeRouchie regularly discusses the New Testament authors' interpretation of the Old Testament. He begins each chapter with 'trail guides' and then carries images through the rest of the book to aid in faster navigation of the material for readers who feel less adroit with Old Testament Hebrew. One strength of this book, besides illustrating the exegetical steps with a variety of biblical examples, is that the reader can follow DeRouchie's treatment of one particular model passage—Exodus 19:4–6—through all twelve steps of the process. If you are looking for an integrative introduction to Old Testament exegesis that is aimed at worshipful application of God's Word, this volume is worthy of your consideration."

—**Douglas S. Huffman**, Professor and Associate Dean of Biblical and Theological Studies, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

"DeRouchie has provided an excellent resource in his *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology*. His explanations are clear and easy to follow, and they provide genuine helps in the process of preaching and teaching the Old Testament text. It encourages leaders to teach from the Old Testament in a day when such a practice of teaching is hard to find."

—**Walter C. Kaiser Jr.**, President Emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

"*How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* takes seriously the testimony of Scripture—that the Old Testament is *Christian Scripture*, and as such, it ought to be preached and taught in the church today. Anyone wanting to grapple with how to interpret and apply the Old Testament will find this volume immensely helpful. It is scholarly, rich in theological and exegetical insight, and attentive to Hebrew grammar and syntax, yet the step-by-step approach to the interpretive task means that it is accessible for pastors and Bible teachers alike. You will want to have this volume in your library!"

—**Carol M. Kaminski**, Professor of Old Testament, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

"This book is late. I wish I'd had it about fifteen years ago, because so much here would have helped me. This isn't just a book about the Old Testament. DeRouchie never acts as though the Old Testament were the only testament, for he celebrates the gospel event page after page. Because of this, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* will impact your understanding of the New Testament. It is clear that DeRouchie knows the mechanics of the Old Testament. But far more than that, it is clear that he knows the God of the Old Testament. And he wants his readers to join him in worship. I can't wait to get this into the hands of the people with whom I work."

—**Tom Kelby**, President, Hands to the Plow Ministries; President, Alliance for Renewal Churches

"There can often be confusion for Christians in seeing the relevance of the Old Testament for modern-day living. DeRouchie systematically overcomes these obstacles and demonstrates both the need to study 'Jesus' Bible' and the joy that awaits Christians who do. DeRouchie's work is a thorough and sure guide in how to understand and apply the truths contained in the Old Testament. It also serves as a great reminder that biblical interpretation is the necessary ground for sound doctrine and practical Christian living. May many take up this book and be exhorted to engage the text of Scripture so as to love our great God—the Sovereign, Savior, and Satisfier."

—**Jeremy M. Kimble**, Assistant Professor of Theological Studies, Cedarville University

"DeRouchie has produced a masterpiece of a guide to interpreting the Old Testament Scriptures. He has written it so that beginning, intermediate, and advanced students may grow in their understanding of the message of the divinely inspired text.

I enthusiastically recommend this book for everyone who desires to interpret the Old Testament faithfully."

—**Tremper Longman III**, Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies, Westmont College

"Here is a comprehensive handbook that I readily endorse as a remedy to the problem of widespread ignorance of the Old Testament. Pedagogically sensitive, DeRouchie provides well-outlined steps, numerous creative charts, and ample documentation, together with resources and a glossary. DeRouchie has admirable control of all sections of the Old Testament, and is clearly conversant with current scholarship. Sections in which the author leans hard on the Hebrew language (of great help to seminarians) need not be offputting for the average reader, given his many helps along the way. Definitely evangelical and conservative, DeRouchie writes with spiritual warmth. I salute his passion for sound Bible interpretation that will yield understanding and result in godly behavior to the praise of God, the Author of Scripture and of salvation."

—**Elmer A. Martens**, President Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Fresno Pacific University Biblical Seminary

"*How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* is rightly titled, for it is more than an ordinary introduction. It's a thorough, complete presentation of how Christian readers interpret the Old Testament correctly and effectively. DeRouchie's treatment recognizes that proper interpretation takes account of the whole-Bible canonical perspective and that interpretation is deficient without practical application for Christian life. It is must reading for anyone—with or without knowledge of Hebrew—who wants more out of his or her study of the Scriptures."

—**Kenneth A. Mathews**, Professor of Divinity—Old Testament, Beeson Divinity School

"When reading DeRouchie's *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, two words come to mind: *comprehensive* and *accessible* (think: Grant Osborne meets Fee and Stuart). DeRouchie's passion for the Old Testament and love for Christ come through on virtually every page. This book is a reliable guide for interpreting the Old Testament that is balanced with both light and heat."

—**Benjamin L. Merkle**, Professor of New Testament and Greek, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Conversationally engaging; literarily transparent; materially comprehensive; pedagogically superb; academically sound, precise, and informed—all this and more. In over fifty-two years of teaching in the classrooms of higher education, I have seen nothing comparable to this magnificent work by DeRouchie—destined to be the classic in its field."

—**Eugene H. Merrill**, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary

"This book (and its companion volume) does the church a great service. It is a rare and precious thing to combine the rigor of the academy with the passion of the preacher, but DeRouchie does just that. Rather than separate how to exegete and interpret the Old Testament from how to preach and apply it, this volume manages to bring both together in a way that is massively helpful and enormously enriching. I am confident that this handbook will prove to be a rich resource for generations of God's people who want to take studying the Bible seriously."

—**J. Gary Millar**, Principal and Lecturer in Old Testament, Biblical Theology, and Preaching, Queensland Theological College, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

"Jason DeRouchie has given us a comprehensive and readable orientation to reading, interpreting, and applying the Old Testament. He covers all the relevant issues and offers a sensible and balanced approach to controversial ones. Especially noteworthy is the way he illustrates key principles and issues through careful and detailed exegesis of texts."

—**Douglas J. Moo**, Wessner Chair of Biblical Studies, Wheaton College; Chair, NIV Committee on Bible Translation

"What sets DeRouchie's text apart is his intentional cultivation of a method of interpretation that aims at the heart. His clarity is surpassed only by his conviction that the Scripture is worthy of dedicated study because it testifies to the supremacy of Christ. DeRouchie guides the reader through a wise and skillful exegetical approach to the Old Testament and does not shy away from tackling some important questions of application in the life of the church. While some evangelical scholars might hold to a different point of view on a particular application, he surely succeeds in equipping students of the Bible to 'rightly handl[e] the word of truth' (2 Tim. 2:15)."

—**Christine Palmer**, Adjunct Professor of Old Testament, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

"In *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology*, Jason DeRouchie reveals his great love for God, Scripture, and the church. He combines a clear and inductive presentation with key insights developed over many years of teaching. His contagious enthusiasm for the text empowers Christians to study and appreciate the Old Testament. He invites us to see that the Old Testament reveals the character of God, anticipates Christ, and clarifies how love for God and neighbor can be lived and applied today."

—**David Palmer**, Adjunct Professor of New Testament, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; Senior Pastor, Kenwood Baptist Church, Cincinnati

"I think Jason DeRouchie would be happy if I said that this book is designed to move us from revelation through rigor to rapture—from the sacred Word of God, through the serious work of reading, to the satisfaction of knowing and enjoying God. There is no getting

around the hard work of reading for holy wonder of worship. So DeRouchie spares no effort to make the rigors of careful reading plain. For many folks, the Old Testament is a foreign land. Oh, how good it is to have a native with you when you travel to an unfamiliar place. With his help, dozens of strange things begin to make sense. You even start to feel at home. I recommend this book if you have a wanderlust for exploring ancient treasures. There are many, and they are great. DeRouchie will show you how to find them."

—**John Piper**, Founder and Teacher, Desiring God; Chancellor and Professor of Biblical Exegesis, Bethlehem College & Seminary

"When I think back to my own student days of learning to exegete the Hebrew Scriptures, how I wish this resource had existed! DeRouchie is a sure and clear guide to studying the Old Testament with faithfulness and rigor—all with the goal of thinking and preaching rightly about God. Highly recommended!"

—**Robert L. Plummer**, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"In *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, Dr. DeRouchie has produced a thorough, comprehensive, and erudite introduction to the principles and objectives of exegesis and to the essential steps and component disciplines that are involved in the process. His style of writing and organization of the material is inviting, engaging, clear, and easy to follow. The foundation for this study is the author's unwavering conviction that the biblical writings (Old and New Testaments) are the Word of God, that they are authoritative for Christian living (accurate, infallible, and inerrant), that they are relevant to life and living in today's world, and that they are altogether sufficient for living in the presence of God. Delightfully, this study is infused throughout with a manifest love, reverence, and deep appreciation for God's Word. There is also sustained emphasis on the glory of God and the good of his people as the ultimate objectives of the exegetical process, from establishing the text to proclaiming and applying its truths. This study is persuasive in making the case that proficiency with the biblical languages or even a measure of exposure to either of them will enhance the prospects for realizing these two main objectives of biblical exegesis. In my many years of teaching the various levels of Hebrew language and exegesis, I would have enthusiastically used Jason DeRouchie's text in the noble responsibility of training men and women for the ministry of God's precious Scriptures."

—**Gary D. Pratico**, Retired Senior Professor of Old Testament, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

"DeRouchie's book *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* is a wonderful resource for both pastors and teachers. The book takes readers through all the steps needed for interpretation and application, and it is beautifully clear in providing guidance for readers. Numerous examples keep the book from being too abstract. DeRouchie teaches a method that interpreters can actually use! Finally, the book stands out because of its

theological stance. In other words, here is a book on Old Testament interpretation that is deeply informed by both biblical and systematic theology. A most helpful resource. I commend it enthusiastically."

—**Thomas R. Schreiner**, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Associate Dean, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Cochair, CSB Translation Oversight Committee

"Jason DeRouchie has organized vast quantities of useful information into a comprehensive and practical handbook, covering the entire process of interpretation from textual criticism to systematic theology. Discussions of theory and principle are avoided in favor of copious worked examples, reams of sensible advice, and well-considered models for theological and Christological interpretation. Students with some Hebrew will derive the most benefit from this book, but it would make a valuable resource for any beginning theological student, as well as for preachers seeking to deepen and enrich their engagement with the biblical text."

—**Andrew Shead**, Head of Department of Old Testament and Hebrew and Lecturer in Hebrew and Old Testament, Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia

"This fascinating study teaches and demonstrates to readers (especially those who know Hebrew) how to systematically and accurately use the important exegetical tools available to us to comprehend and communicate the full theological message of the Old Testament. DeRouchie richly illustrates how this is possible by (1) taking into consideration the genre characteristics that influence the meaning and function of each different type of literature; (2) illustrating how to outline various Hebrew passages into a hierarchy of clausal dependency (using both a text hierarchy and arcing or bracketing) in order to bring out the persuasive contribution that each clause makes to support the central message; (3) securing the textual accuracy of a passage by critically evaluating various manuscript traditions; (4) preparing an outline based on the hierarchy of clauses in a passage in order to bring out the development of the theological purpose; (5) showing how to do word studies of key Hebrew terms; and (6) guiding the use of historical and literary context in order to ground the message in its original setting. But DeRouchie is not satisfied with just understanding the genre, words, structure, and context of a text! He cogently argues that it is necessary to press on for a wider synthetic biblical and theological examination that identifies the organic connections between passages throughout the Old and New Testaments, particularly those that relate to aspects of salvation history and the hope of a coming messianic King and his kingdom. Then, having thoroughly considered what God was communicating, DeRouchie addresses in the last section of this impressive study the challenge of setting forth principles for modern Christians that will provide appropriate and powerful applications, so that the lasting value of the Old Testament is preserved for our generation. I highly recommend this admirable approach, for it will greatly enhance the results of anyone's biblical study."

—**Gary V. Smith**, Retired Professor of Christian Studies, Union University

"If there is a deficiency in the contemporary evangelical pulpit, it is the absence of consistent expositional preaching of the Old Testament Scriptures. Many pastors either have lost touch with the biblical Hebrew they learned in seminary or are intimidated by the demands placed on those who would venture into the interpretation of complex Old Testament texts. If that is you, or perhaps someone you know, rejoice with me to see the publication of DeRouchie's excellent treatment of the twelve steps essential for movement from exegesis to sound and substantive pastoral theology. The church has long awaited and greatly needed this volume. I highly recommend it."

    —**Sam Storms**, Lead Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City; President, Enjoying God Ministries

"DeRouchie has put together a wonderfully comprehensive guide to the methodologies that allow us to see what the Old Testament is actually saying, so that we can rightly use the Old Testament for God's glory. His book teems with user-friendly explanations, smart charts, diagrams, lists, judicious bibliographical pointers, and patient, step-by-step guidance through even the toughest sorts of interpretational challenges. Anybody—from beginner to seasoned interpreter—can learn a lot from this book."

    —**Douglas Stuart**, Professor of Old Testament, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

"This volume faces the challenge of understanding and applying the Old Testament as Christian Scripture. This has been a tricky and (sometimes) contentious endeavor in the history of the church. DeRouchie faces the challenge head-on with clarity and provides a constructive and thoroughly Christian proposal. There is much to learn from his approach, and I suspect that many will embrace it."

    —**Heath A. Thomas**, Dean, Herschel H. Hobbs College of Theology & Ministry, Professor of Old Testament, and Associate Vice President for Church Relations, Oklahoma Baptist University

"This ain't your mama's inductive Bible study method! This book is a practical and scholarly outworking of Ezra 7:9–10: 'Ezra had set his heart to *study* the Law of the Lord, and to *do* it and to *teach* his statutes and rules in Israel.' With his *TOCMA* method (*Text*, *Observation*, *Context*, *Meaning*, *Application*), DeRouchie provides both Bible student and Bible teacher with a one-stop resource for engaging and grasping the Old Testament. It is unusual in its balance of depth of scholarship and practicality—of academic rigor and precision to details, concepts, and terminology—yet it is written in a winsome, passionate, even pious style. The book includes topics covered in other good resources (e.g., how to identify genre, how to do a word study, how to trace a text's argument, discussion of historical and literary contexts). But this book also incorporates advanced and specialized topics usually reserved for separate journals and books—such as Hebrew text linguistics and the interaction between exegesis and theological disciplines (biblical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology).

Throughout, DeRouchie expresses sensitivity to evangelical concerns (e.g., biblical authority, genre and historicity, Christological reading of the Old Testament). The book also includes all the practical items that make it a teacher's best friend: the inclusion of many examples of applying hermeneutical principles to specific texts; study questions in each section of the book; huge lists of resources; and a thorough glossary of technical terms. I will personally use this book in my own scholarship and adopt it as a required textbook in several introductory and advanced courses."

—**Kenneth J. Turner**, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Toccoa Falls College

"Like few others, DeRouchie understands that the path to orthodox theology and true worship is driven by one's encounter with the incarnate Word as presented in the written Word (Luke 24:44; John 5:39; Rom. 1:1–3). Thus, no amount of rigor is spared in leading students of the Bible from the science of analytical, exegetical analysis into the art of theological and practical application, which then culminates in the satisfaction of worship. Especially helpful are the sections on "Literary Units and Text Hierarchy" and then "Clause and Text Grammar." This volume not only will become a standard course textbook, but will also serve as a lifelong resource for those called to study and faithfully proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ from the Old Testament. If you are hungry to devour Scripture (Ezek. 3:1–3), then 'rise,' take this book, and 'eat' (Acts 10:13)."

—**Miles V. Van Pelt**, Alan Belcher Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages, Director of the Summer Institute for Biblical Languages, and Academic Dean, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson

"Jason DeRouchie has accomplished something unusual—a guide to interpreting the Old Testament that emphasizes reading the Old Testament as Christian Scripture while giving thorough attention to the original historical and literary context. He faithfully guides readers though the maze of interpretive issues beginning with the foundational aspects of genre and context, and then working all the way up to theology and application. Students often ask me for resources for digging into the Old Testament, and now I know what to recommend first. DeRouchie writes with a scholar's touch and a pastor's heart, and his love for God's Word fills every page. He doesn't just talk *about* the Bible; he shows us how to open its treasures for ourselves."

—**Brian J. Vickers**, Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Biblical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Assistant Editor, *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*

"DeRouchie is committed to reading the Old Testament as *Christian* Scripture, and in this volume he guides biblical interpreters in how best to grasp a passage's makeup, shape, placement, meaning, and application. His interpretive approach leaves few stones unturned, and he even gives helpful guidance to Christians in how to relate to Old Testament laws and promises and how to faithfully preach Christ and the gospel

from the Old Testament. *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* is an up-to-date, accessible, and theologically rich guide to faithful biblical interpretation, and I heartily recommend it."

—**Bruce K. Waltke**, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies, Regent College, Vancouver; Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Knox Theological Seminary

"This book lays out a clear and creative way to explain the steps in exegeting a passage. Its comprehensive twelve-step plan skillfully introduces readers to the basics of understanding an Old Testament passage—beginning with determining what the text says and going all the way to applying it. This volume is accessible and well organized, and will be helpful for students and laypeople alike."

—**Paul D. Wegner**, Professor of Old Testament Studies and Director of Academic Graduate Studies Program, Gateway Seminary

"It is rare to find in one book everything you need to learn how to rightly interpret and wisely apply God's Word to our lives, yet this is such a work! In addition, many Christians struggle with how to understand the Old Testament and apply it to their lives today, but this work removes the fog and makes the Old Testament come alive for Christians. Whether you have been studying God's Word for years or you are a novice, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* is a must-read. One will learn how to move rightly from the biblical texts in all their instruction, authority, and beauty to their proper theological application in our lives viewed in light of the glorious work of our Lord Jesus Christ. I know of no book that better puts all the pieces together and so wonderfully teaches the reader how to move from exegesis to theology, and that practically helps us become better readers of the Old Testament. Jason DeRouchie has given us a real gift, and I highly recommend this work for anyone who is serious about the study of Scripture and desirous of seeing God's Word proclaimed, taught, and obeyed in the church."

—**Stephen J. Wellum**, Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Editor, *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*

"Rather than being simply another 'how-to' manual for doing Old Testament exegesis well, this book delivers much more besides. It includes a penetrating analysis of several Old Testament books and key Old Testament texts, as well as detailed discussion of how biblical, systematic, and practical theology inform our understanding and application of the Old Testament in a Christian context. Reflecting a deep respect for the Old Testament as inspired Scripture, DeRouchie helpfully uncovers various pitfalls that must be avoided by the sure-footed interpreter, and consistently demonstrates how his proposed 'Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology' will help elucidate the divinely intended meaning and message. While the benefits of learning biblical Hebrew are clearly illustrated in a number of sections, this book is a must-read for everyone who

wants a better grasp of how the Old Testament should be read and taught as Christian Scripture."

—**Paul R. Williamson**, Senior Lecturer in Old Testament, Hebrew, and Aramaic, Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia

"This book is an outstanding accomplishment. It reflects years of careful and faithful investigation of that older half of our Bible that too often seems foreign to the rest of us. Every preacher will want to read this resource carefully and repeatedly because it is an invaluable guide toward a responsible, informed handling of the Old Testament Scriptures."

—**Fred G. Zaspel**, Pastor, Reformed Baptist Church, Franconia, Pennsylvania; Executive Editor, *Books at a Glance*; Associate Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

HOW TO

UNDERSTAND AND APPLY

THE OLD TESTAMENT

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THE OLD TESTAMENT

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TWELVE STEPS FROM EXEGESIS TO THEOLOGY

Jason S. DeRouchie

To my beloved children—
Janie, Ruthie, Isaac, Ezra, Joey, and Joy.
May the Scripture on which this book focuses
increasingly help you to set your hope in God
and not to forget his works
but to keep his commandments (Ps. 78:7),
all for the glory of Christ.

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ANALYTICAL OUTLINE

FOREWORD

I HAVE A confession to make: by default, I am suspicious of books with titles like *Ten Ways to Something-or-Other* and *Five Steps to Overcome This or That*. So what shall I make of a book titled *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology*? It sounds painfully mechanical, and good readers know full well that good reading cannot be broken down into a small number of "steps." Such titles may reflect robust marketing strategy, but hype should not be confused with subtlety and rigor. Right?

Well, *usually* right. This outstanding book is the exception. Jason DeRouchie tackles an amazing range of material, and does so in an orderly fashion that never feels boxy or merely theoretical. Partly this is because he provides many, many concrete examples of Old Testament exegesis; partly it is because his work, while rigorous, never fails to arouse wonder and worship. This book doubtless demands the hard work of intellectual discipline, but it is more than an intellectual exercise.

Part of the reason for the book's length turns on the fact that DeRouchie writes at a beginning level, an intermediate level, and an advanced level (the latter requiring a reasonable grasp of Hebrew), with all the sections of the book clearly marked. Many of the book's features make it an admirable textbook; its biblical indexes will be worth consulting by anyone preaching or teaching from the Old Testament, to check out whether DeRouchie has something to say on any particular passage. He provides penetrating structural analysis of several Old Testament books, and probing exegesis of many passages.

The heart of this textbook, however, is its competent and up-to-date treatment of the elements that go into faithful exegesis: competent comprehension of literary genres, accurate treatment of clausal dependence on which so much structural analysis depends, text-critical decisions that must be made, word studies (both how to do them and how not to do them), and careful study of the historical and literary contexts in which any particular passage is embedded. Most of these elements, of course, are nowadays grouped under discourse analysis. But DeRouchie is not satisfied to stop

there: he leads his readers to think through how to read Old Testament passages in a canonical context. Discourse analysis is wedded to biblical theology. Moving from Old Testament exegesis in an Old Testament matrix to an Old Testament exegesis in the context of the Christian Bible opens up a plethora of challenges. DeRouchie avoids the common mistakes and reductionisms, but still wants to remind his readers that the Old Testament books constituted the only Bible that Jesus had—and what he did with it has binding authority on those who confess him as Lord. And having gone so far, DeRouchie then reflects on what appropriate application looks like to contemporary Christians reading their Bibles.

All of this is packaged in twelve steps, complete with useful charts, symbols, thoughtful discussion questions, and other guides to make this an extraordinarily useful and reliable textbook. What this volume does *not* bother with is treatment of the so-called new (now aging) hermeneutic: the omission is a wise one.

It is a pleasure and a privilege to commend this book.

D. A. Carson
Research Professor of New Testament
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

PREFACE

An Overview of the Book

This year, 2017, marks the five hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's posting of his Ninety-five Theses (October 31, 1517)—the spark that enflamed a global Reformation that is still alive and advancing today. The book you are now reading falls within and builds on this great gospel tradition, celebrating *sola Scriptura*—that Scripture *alone* stands as our highest authority in all matters of doctrine and practice.

Jesus loved the Old Testament. Indeed, it was his only Bible, and he believed that it pointed to him. I wrote this book to help believers better study, practice, and teach the Old Testament as *Christian* Scripture. I view God's inerrant Word as bearing highest authority in our lives, and I want Christians everywhere to interpret all of the Bible with care, celebrating the continuities between the Testaments while recognizing that Christ changes so much. I want to help Christians understand and apply the Old Testament in a way that nurtures hope in the gospel and that magnifies our Messiah in faithful ways.

This book targets both laypeople who don't know Hebrew and students studying the Old Testament in the original languages. This book is for anyone who wants to learn how to observe carefully, understand accurately, evaluate fairly, feel appropriately, act rightly, and express faithfully God's revealed Word, especially as embodied in the Old Testament. Through this book you will:

- Learn a twelve-step process for doing exegesis and theology;
- See numerous illustrations from Scripture that model the various interpretive steps;
- Consider how new covenant believers are to appropriate the Old Testament as Christian Scripture; and
- Celebrate the centrality of Christ and the hope of the gospel from the initial three-fourths of our Bible.

Two of the distinctive contributions of this book are its focus on discourse analysis (tracking an author's flow of thought) and biblical theology (considering how Scripture fits together and points to Christ). Some of the practical questions that I will seek to answer include:

- What are Christians to do with Old Testament laws? Do any of Moses' requirements still serve as guides for our pursuit of Christ?
- How should Christians consider Old Testament promises, especially those related to physical provision and protection? Can we really sing, "Every promise in the Book is mine"?[1]
- How does the Old Testament point to Christ and the hope of the gospel? How could Paul, who preached from the Old Testament, say, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2)?

I originally drafted this book in preparation for a course titled Old Testament Exegesis that I taught for Logos Mobile Ed in a studio at the Faithlife headquarters in Bellingham, Washington, in summer 2015. My colleague Andy Naselli taught the companion New Testament Exegesis course, and both are available at https://www .logos.com/product/117883/mobile-ed-biblical-exegesis-bundle. At the end of that process, John Hughes and the P&R Publishing team invited Andy and me to publish counterpart volumes, which are fraternal twins in every way—conceptually, structurally, theologically, and pedagogically.

A Guide to Using the Book

Every level in the study of God's Word includes beauties to discover and challenges to overcome. Recognizing that not every interpreter is the same, I have written this book with three tracks.

Easy   Moderate   Challenging

Level 1—Easy makes up most of the book and is for all readers. For *beginning interpreters*, this track may be the only one you will take, since it includes no exposure to biblical Hebrew. It will, however, still contain numerous exegetical and theological paths and vistas that will instruct, awe, inspire, and motivate.

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1. The Sensational Nightingales, "Every Promise in the Book Is Mine," *Let Us Encourage You* (Malco Records, 2005; orig. 1957).

Level 2—Moderate is also for all readers and does not require a knowledge of biblical Hebrew. It does, however, interact with the original language where beneficial for *intermediate interpreters*. I always translate the Hebrew and try to instruct clearly. Here you will gain exposure to some of the benefits of Hebrew exegesis and will learn how even those without Hebrew can profit greatly from important interpretive tools.

Level 3—Challenging is specialized for more *advanced interpreters* who know or are learning biblical Hebrew. These sections likely include technical discussions that will substantially benefit only those with some awareness of the original language and who will use their Hebrew Bibles for study.

Throughout the book I use the three symbols above to identify the difficulty level of each section or subsection. Decide what path you want to travel, and follow my lead. At the head of every chapter I also include a "Trail Guide" that will remind you where you are in the journey from exegesis to theology and that will give you a quick overview of the paths you are about to tread.

Even if you don't know Hebrew, I encourage you to work through all Level 2—Moderate material, for the exegetical and theological payoff will be rich and the discussions should not be beyond your grasp. If you choose this path, just remember that all Level 1 material is also for you. For those who are studying or have studied Hebrew, *every part* of this book is for you, and my hope is that it will remind, clarify, and instruct, leading you into more focused, richer engagement with God and the biblical text.

At the end of every chapter I include "Key Words and Concepts," "Questions for Further Reflection," and "Resources for Further Study." I hope these additions will benefit personal study, small-group discussions, and classroom use. The back of the book also includes a full glossary of the key terms, along with The KINGDOM Bible Reading Plan, a selected bibliography, the Index of Scripture, and the Index of Subjects and Names.

As we set out on our journey into biblical interpretation, may God the Father, by his Spirit, stir your affections for Christ and awaken your mind to think deeply. May you increase your skill at handling the whole Bible for the glory of God and the good of his church among the nations.

Jason S. DeRouchie
Bethlehem College & Seminary
Minneapolis, Minnesota

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MANY INDIVIDUALS HAVE influenced the shaping of this book and my own journey in learning to understand, apply, and communicate the greatest Book. Though I may forget some folks, I will limit my thanks to seven groups:

First, I shaped the foundations of my interpretive approach during my B.A. and M.Div., the latter of which I completed nearly two decades ago. I took my initial two years of Greek study at Taylor University under the direction of Bill Heth. He modeled for me a zeal for God and his Word and gave me an initial framework for asking good questions and tracking an author's flow of thought. During my season at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, key figures such as Greg Beale, Scott Hafemann, Gordon Hugenberger, Gary Pratico, and Doug Stuart helped me hone my skill at original language exegesis and theology. Aware readers will see the distinctive influence of Beale and Stuart in my own exegetical and theological method.[1] I am deeply grateful for their faithful approach to Scripture as God's authoritative and inerrant Word.

Second, my doctoral studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary found me under the able care of both Dan Block and Peter Gentry. Their rigorous method of biblical interpretation matched by a deep-seated commitment to Christ and his church has forever shaped me. Block's entire ministry is dedicated to hearing the message of Scripture through careful literary analysis.[2] I hope the present book models this kind of attentiveness. Hours of dialogue with Gentry helped concretize my early approach

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1. See especially G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009); Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

2. See, for example, Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* and *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Block, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC 6 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999); Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

to Hebrew discourse analysis, and since then I have greatly benefited from his own wrestlings with whole-Bible theology from the bottom up.[3] To these I add a note of thanks to Tom Schreiner, whose discussion of tracing Paul's argument[4] served as an impetus in my choosing to devote my doctoral dissertation to tracing Moses' argument in Deuteronomy. Schreiner's own pastoral disposition and his approach to Paul and the Law have influenced me greatly.[5]

Third, during the summer of 2005, a brief lunch with John Piper and Justin Taylor set my life on a fresh trajectory of discovery and zeal, which has resulted in over a decade-long quest to learn how to faithfully make much of Christ and the gospel from the Old Testament. I feel as though I am only beginning, but being a part of both Bethlehem Baptist Church and, since 2009, the faculty of Bethlehem College & Seminary has helped to fuel this passion and has added to it a commitment to lead others in treasuring and proclaiming the glory of God in Christ by his Spirit among the nations. I thank my administration for empowering me to write and enabling me to teach in such a context and with such a goal. I love my school's theology, team, and strategy.

Fourth, my gratitude for Miles Van Pelt, Jason Meyer, and Andy Naselli deserves special comment. During my doctoral studies, numerous conversations with Van Pelt fanned my biblical-theological flames, especially with respect to how Scripture's frame is God's kingdom, form is covenantal, and fulcrum is Christ. Van Pelt's own thoughts are now captured in the introduction of *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*,[6] and the informed reader will see many parallels in our approaches. I am very thankful for our continued friendship and for the way his godliness pushes me closer to the Lord. Before taking on the role of Pastor for Preaching and Vision at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Meyer served full-time as New Testament professor at Bethlehem College & Seminary, spurring me to deeper levels of holiness and increasing my celebration of God's covenantal purposes throughout all of Scripture. My life and teaching are better because of my time with him.[7] Naselli and I get to commute for about three hours per week, and our families are deeply entwined. My time with him fuels both godliness and joy in my life. He is constantly helping me think theologically, and I especially love coteaching a fourth-year graduate course with him on biblical theology.

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3. See especially Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

4. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 97–124.

5. See, most recently, Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010); cf. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998).

6. Miles V. Van Pelt, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 23–42.

7. See Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*, NSBT 7 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009); Meyer, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

I am so grateful for our partnership in the gospel at Bethlehem. Be sure to check out his companion volume to this one titled *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*.[8]

Fifth, my thanks extend to many folks who made this particular volume possible. John Hughes and the P&R Publishing team accepted the project and have offered solid, Christ-honoring support from beginning to end. I am so grateful for Karen Magnuson's careful copyediting and Thomas Shumaker's painstaking typesetting! My thanks go out to Scott Jamison, Danny Francis, and Don Straka, all of whom offered solid suggestions on how to improve the manuscript. The latter two also helped prepare the "Key Words and Concepts" lists, the "Questions for Further Reflection," and the glossary. I also thank my colleague John Beckman for test-using the volume in his intermediate Hebrew course, and the thirty-five Bethlehem Seminary students from the 2016 spring semester who offered helpful feedback. I offer a special note of thanks to Andy Hubert of Biblearc (www.Biblearc.com) for his labors in finalizing the arcs and brackets and to my former student and freelance graphic designer Joel Dougherty, who generated most of the images and icons used in this volume. I believe his creativity and attention to detail have helped me communicate better. Finally, I say "thanks" to my student Ryan Eagy, who also stepped in to finalize some images.

Sixth, I thank the Lord for my faithful wife, Teresa, who stands on earth as my biggest advocate, best help, and truest friend. She is a model of wisdom, balance, and God-dependence. She treasures Christ, steadies and complements me, and enthusiastically supports the research-writing-teaching-shepherding ministry to which God has called me. She also delights in guiding our six children and in making our "Apple Tree Farm" a place of family rest and ministry fruitfulness. I am so grateful to her.

Seventh, I praise the Lord for my six children, to whom I dedicate this book. Each of them is a treasure, and each has encouraged and shaped this Daddy in various ways toward Christlikeness and careful Bible-reading. I love them all dearly, and I pray that the principles and guidelines I set forth in this book—many of which have been taught and modeled in our home—can help them to better see and savor the beauty of God in the face of Christ as disclosed in the pages of Scripture.

8. Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017).

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969)
ApOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
ASV	Authorized Standard Version
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BBE	Bible in Basic English
BBR	*Bulletin of Biblical Research*
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHQ	*Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, ed. Adrian Schenker et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004–)
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, ed. Karl Elliger et al., 5th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983)
Bib	*Biblica*
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

CDCH	*The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, ed. David J. A. Clines (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009)
CEB	Contemporary English Bible
CEBA	Contemporary English Bible with Apocrypha
COS	*The Context of Scripture*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., 3 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002)
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
CurBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
CurBS	*Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*
DBCI	*Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (London: Routledge, 2007)
DBSJ	*Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*
DCH	*The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, ed. David J. A. Clines, 9 vols. (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 1993–2014)
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DJG	*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992)
DLNT	*Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997)
DNTB	*Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000)
DOT:P	*Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003)
DOT:WPW	*Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008)
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
DTIB	*Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005)
EDBT	*Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996)
EDT	*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001)
EJ	*Evangelical Journal*
ESV	English Standard Version
ExpTim	*Expository Times*

GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar,* ed. E. Kautzch, trans. A. E. Cowley, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910)
GNB	Good News Bible
GTJ	*Grace Theological Journal*
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Study Edition,* ed. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001)
HBCE	The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
HS	*Hebrew Studies*
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IBHS	*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax,* by Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990)
Int	*Interpretation*
ISBE	*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,* ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979–88)
JAAS	*Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBLMS	Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
JBMW	*Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*
JDFM	*Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JMT	*Journal of Ministry and Theology*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSPHL	*Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters*
KJV	King James Version
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
LXX	Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament)

MCED	*Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, ed. William D. Mounce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006)
Ms(s)	Manuscript(s)
MSG	The Message
MSJ	*The Master's Seminary Journal*
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NASU	New American Standard Updated
NCE	*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Thomas Carson, 2nd ed., 15 vols. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003)
NDBT	*New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000)
NEB	New English Bible
NET Bible	New English Translation Bible
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDB	*The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, 5 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009)
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997)
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
RBén	*Revue bénédictine*
RBTR	*The Reformed Baptist Theological Review*

REB	Revised English Bible
RevQ	*Revue de Qumrân*
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBET	*Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*
SBJT	*Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SIL	Summer Institute for Linguistics, International
SOTBT	Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis et al., 15 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006)
TJ	*Trinity Journal*
TLB	The Living Bible
TLOT	*Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Clause Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997)
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TWOT	*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980)
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
UBS	United Bible Societies Greek New Testament
UCSD	University of California, San Diego
VTSup	Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum*
WEB	World English Bible
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
YLT	Young's Literal Translation
ZAH	*Zeitschrift für Althebräistik*
ZEB	*The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney and Moisés Silva, 2nd ed., 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009)
ZECOT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament

INTRODUCTION

A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY AND ENCOUNTER

"The good hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel." (Ezra 7:9–10)

Basic Overview

The Interpretive Task

Ten Reasons That the Old Testament Is Important for Christians

The Benefits of Hebrew Exegesis

Overview of the Interpretive Process: TOCMA

Fig. 0.1. Trail Guide to Introduction

WE ARE ABOUT to embark on a journey of discovery and divine encounter. Beauty abounds at every turn, and the goal is to worship the living God in the face of Jesus Christ. What we call the Old Testament was the only Bible that Jesus had. Books such as Genesis and Deuteronomy, Isaiah and Psalms guided his life and ministry as the Jewish Messiah. It was these "Scriptures" that Jesus identified as God's Word (Mark 7:13; 12:36), considered to be authoritative (Matt. 4:3–4, 7, 10; 23:1–3), and called people to know and believe in order to guard against doctrinal error and, even worse, hell (Mark 12:24; Luke 16:28–31; 24:25; John 5:46–47). Jesus was convinced that what is now the initial three-fourths of our Christian Bible "cannot be broken" (John 10:35).[1] He was also certain that the Old Testament bore witness about him (Luke 24:27, 46;

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1. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations within the *body* text of the book are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations *within examples* are the author's own.

John 5:39, 46), that it would be completely fulfilled (Matt. 5:17–18; Luke 24:44), and that it called for repentance and forgiveness of sins to be proclaimed in his name to all nations (Luke 24:47). I love the Old Testament because of the way it portrays God's character and actions and serves as a witness to the majesty of our Messiah. The Old Testament is the initial three-fourths of God's special revelation to us, and I want you to interpret the Old Testament rightly because there is no higher need for mankind than to see and celebrate the Sovereign, Savior, and Satisfier disclosed in its pages.

The Interpretive Task

This book is designed to guide Christians in interpreting the Old Testament. The process of *biblical interpretation* includes both exegesis and theology. The former focuses mostly on analysis, whereas the latter addresses synthesis and significance.[2]

Our English term *exegesis* is a transliteration of the Greek noun ἐξήγησις (ἐκ "from, out of" + ἄγω "to bring, move [something]"), meaning an "account, description, narration." Narrowly defined, exegesis of Scripture is the personal discovery of what the biblical authors intended their texts to mean.[3] Texts convey meaning; they do not produce it. Rather, following God's leading, the biblical authors purposely wrote the words they did with specific sense and purpose. "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). We have to carefully read what the Lord through his human servants gives us in Scripture. Exegesis is about discovering what is there, which includes both the specific meaning that the authors convey and its implications—those inferences in a text of which the authors may or may not have been unaware but that legitimately fall within the principle or pattern of meaning that they willed.[4]

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2. For these distinctions, see Andrew David Naselli, "D. A. Carson's Theological Method," *SBET* 29, 2 (2011): 256–72; cf. D. A. Carson, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 65–95, 368–75, repr. in D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, comp. Andrew David Naselli (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 111–49; Carson, "The Role of Exegesis in Systematic Theology," in *Doing Theology in Today's World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Kantzer*, ed. John D. Woodbridge and Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 39–76; Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," *NDBT* 89–104.

3. The term ἐξήγησις shows up in one Greek manuscript of Judges 7:15: "As soon as Gideon heard *the telling* [i.e., the *narration*, τὴν ἐξήγησιν] of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped." This context associates exegesis with the mere description of the dream, which stands distinct from the assessment of the dream's meaning. Today, exegesis of written material usually implies some level of interpretation, but the stress is still significant that exegesis is about carefully reading what is there in the biblical text.

4. For more on this, see Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 30–38; Stein, "The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics," *JETS* 44, 3 (2001): 451–66; G. K. Beale, "The Cognitive Peripheral Vision of the Biblical Authors," *WTJ* 76, 2 (2014):

The English term **theology** comes from the Latin *theologia*, which derives from a combination of the Greek nouns θεός ("God") and λόγος ("a formal accounting, reckoning"). In short, theology is a "reasoning or study of God." Because Scripture is *God's* Word for all time and because every biblical passage has a broader context (historical, literary, and biblical), exegesis (narrowly defined) naturally moves us into various theological disciplines:

- Biblical theology considers how God's Word connects together and climaxes in Christ.
- Systematic theology examines what the Bible teaches about certain theological topics.
- Practical theology details the proper Christian response to the Bible's truths.

Biblical interpretation is not complete until it gives rise to application through a life of worship. Exegesis moves to theology, and the whole process is to result in a personal encounter with the living God disclosed in Scripture. Doxology—the practice of glorifying or praising God—should color *all* biblical study.

In this book, chapters 1–9 cover the basics of exegesis, whereas chapters 10–12 address theology. Here are a number of foundational presuppositions that guide my approach to biblical interpretation.

1. Biblical interpretation necessitates that we view Scripture as God's Word.

The only way to truly arrive at what the biblical authors intended is to believe (as they did) that they were reading and writing God's very Word (Isa. 8:20; 1 Cor. 2:13; 14:37). This requires a submissive disposition to Scripture's authority. We must be willing to let our understanding and application of truth be conformed to the Bible's declarations, all in accordance with God's revealed intention. The Bible is **special revelation**—God's disclosure of himself and his will in a way that we can understand (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21). The very words, and not just the ideas, are God-inspired (Matt. 5:17–18; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16–17). And the "words of the LORD are pure" (Ps. 12:6); his "law is true" (Ps. 119:142); "every one of [his] righteous rules endures forever" (Ps. 119:160); and his "commandments are right" (Ps. 119:172). Jesus said, "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35), and Paul said that this is so because "all Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). Indeed, as Peter said, "No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

The implication of these truths is that Scripture is both authoritative and accurate in all it declares. In order to stress that the Bible's assertions are both reliable and unerring, the church has historically stated that (a) in matters of *faith* (doctrine) and *practice* (ethics), Scripture's teaching is **infallible**—a sure and safe guide, and that (b) in matters

263–93, esp. 266–70; cf. G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Divine Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 340–64, esp. 344–47.

of *fact* (whether history, chronology, geography, science, or the like), Scripture's claims are *inerrant*—entirely true and trustworthy.[5] Both terms mean something comparable but address different spheres, and both are rightly understood only in relation to what the authors, led by the Spirit, intended to convey by their texts (for more on this, see "History, Myth, and the Biblical Narratives" in chapter 1). The key for us is that the Bible will never lead us astray and should bear highest influence in our lives.

2. Biblical interpretation assumes that Scripture's truths are knowable.

Proper understanding of Scripture assumes that the Bible is, by nature, clear in what it teaches. In short, truth can be known. Peter recognized that "there are some things in [Paul's letters] that are hard to understand," but he went on to say that it is "the ignorant and unstable" who "twist" these words "to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16). The psalmists were convinced that God's Word enlightens our path and imparts understanding (Ps. 119:105, 130). Paul wrote his words plainly (2 Cor. 1:13) and called others to "think over" what he said, trusting that "the Lord will give you understanding in everything" (2 Tim. 2:7). I will comment further on Scripture's clarity in "Shared Assumptions and the Bible's Clarity" in chapter 8.

3. Biblical interpretation requires that we respond appropriately.

The process of biblical interpretation is not complete once we have discovered what God has spoken. We must then move on to recognize that his Word is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). We must grasp not only the biblical author's intended meaning (which is possible for nonbelievers) but also his intended effect (possible only for believers, Rom. 8:7–8; 1 Cor. 2:14). We thus pray **IOUS**: "*Incline* [our] heart[s] to your testimonies" (Ps. 119:36); "*Open* [our] eyes that [we] may behold wondrous things out of your law" (119:18); "*Unite* [our] heart[s] to fear your name" (86:11); and "*Satisfy* us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days" (90:14).[6]

John Piper has helpfully captured the sixfold process of education:[7]

- *Observe* carefully;
- *Understand* rightly;
- *Evaluate* fairly;
- *Feel* appropriately;

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5. The "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" (1978) states: "*Infallible* signifies the quality of neither misleading nor being misled and so safeguards in categorical terms the truth that Holy Scripture is a sure, safe, and reliable rule and guide in all matters. Similarly, *inerrant* signifies the quality of being free from falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its assertions. We affirm that canonical Scripture should always be interpreted on the basis that it is infallible and inerrant" (http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html).

6. John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 151.

7. John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 191–98. Piper actually applies the same process to both general revelation (God's world) and special revelation (God's Word).

- *Apply* wisely;
- *Express* articulately and boldly.

These are the necessary habits of the heart and mind needed for rightly grasping all truth in God's Book.

4. Biblical interpretation that culminates in application demands God-dependence.[8]

The process of moving from study to practice is something that only God can enable, and he does so only through Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul writes, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." By "understand" here, Paul means "embrace, affirm, align with, delight in, apply." Only in Christ is the veil of hardness toward God's Word taken away (2 Cor. 3:14), but in Christ, the Word becomes near us, in our mouth and in our heart (Rom. 10:8). The biblical authors' ultimate intent included a transformed life, the foundation of which is a personal encounter with the living God. This will not be experienced apart from the Lord's help.

This book describes a process of Old Testament interpretation that is intended for the glory of God and the good of his people. Putting the Bible under a microscope (careful study) should always result in finding ourselves under its microscope, as Scripture changes us more into Christ's likeness. We engage in exegesis and theology in order to encounter God. We approach humbly and dependently and never with manipulation or force. Biblical interpretation should create servants, not kings.

To this end, I invite you to pray the following words to the Lord:

> You have said, O Lord, "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (Isa. 66:2). I want you to look toward me, Father, so overcome my pride, arrest my affections, and move me to revere you rightly. May I approach the Bible with a heart ready to conform, a heart awed by the fact that you have spoken in a way that I can understand, and a heart hungry to receive. Enable this book to guide me well, and help me to learn how to study, how to live out, and how to proclaim your Word with care, humility, and confidence. In the name of King Jesus, I pray. Amen.

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8. For more on this theme, see John Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017).

Ten Reasons That the Old Testament Is Important for Christians

If Christians are part of the new covenant, why should we seek to understand and apply the Old Testament? While I will develop my response in chapter 12, I will give ten reasons here why the first word in the phrase *Old Testament* must not mean "unimportant or insignificant to Christians."

1. The Old Testament was Jesus' only Scripture and makes up three-fourths (75.55 percent) of our Bible.

If space says anything, the Old Testament matters to God, who gave us his Word in a Book. In fact, it was his first special revelation, which set a foundation for the fulfillment that we find in Jesus in the New Testament. The Old Testament was the only Bible of Jesus and the earliest church (e.g., Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:44; Acts 24:14; 2 Tim. 3:15), and it is a major part of our Scriptures.

2. The Old Testament substantially influences our understanding of key biblical teachings.

By the end of the Law (Genesis–Deuteronomy), the Bible has already described or alluded to all five of the major covenants that guide Scripture's plot structure (Adamic-Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new). The rest of the Old Testament then builds on this portrait in detail. Accordingly, the Old Testament narrative builds anticipation for a better king, a blessed people, and a broader land. The Old Testament creates the problem and includes promises that the New Testament answers and fulfills. We need the Old Testament to fully understand God's work in history.

Furthermore, some doctrines of Scripture are best understood only from the Old Testament. For example, is there a more worldview-shaping text than Genesis 1:1–2:3? Where else can we go other than the Old Testament to rightly understand sacred space and the temple? Is there a more explicit declaration of YHWH's incomparability than Isaiah 40,[9] or a more succinct expression of substitutionary atonement than Isaiah 53? Where should we go to know what Paul means by "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16)? All of these are principally derived from our understanding of the Old Testament.

9. *YHWH*, sometimes rendered with vowels as *Yahweh*, is the personal name by which the one true God identified himself and that the seers, sages, and songwriters employed in worship and preaching. YHWH is both the Creator of all things and Israel's covenant Lord. Most modern translations represent the name through large and small capitals: Lord. The name is related to the verb of being and likely means "he causes to be"; that is, the Lord alone is the only uncaused being from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things.

Finally, the New Testament worldview and teachings are built on the framework supplied in the Old Testament. In the New Testament we find literally hundreds of Old Testament quotations, allusions, and echoes, none of which we will fully grasp apart from saturating ourselves in Jesus' Bible.

3. We meet the same God in both Testaments.

Note how the book of Hebrews begins: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1–2). The very God who spoke through the Old Testament prophets speaks through Jesus!

Now, you may ask, "But isn't the Old Testament's God one of wrath and burden, whereas the God of the New Testament is about grace and freedom?" Let's consider some texts, first from the Old Testament and then from the New.

Perhaps the most foundational Old Testament statement of YHWH's character and action is Exodus 34:6: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." The Old Testament then reasserts this truth numerous times in order to clarify why it is that God continued to pardon and preserve a wayward people: "But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and he turned toward them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, nor has he cast them from his presence until now" (2 Kings 13:23). "For if you return to the Lord, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him" (2 Chron. 30:9). "Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God" (Neh. 9:30–31). Thus God's grace fills the Old Testament, just as it does the New.

Furthermore, in the New Testament, Jesus speaks about hell more than anyone else. He declares, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Similarly, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (18:6). Paul, quoting Deuteronomy 32:35, asserted, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Rom. 12:19). And the author of Hebrews said, "For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26–27). Thus God is just as wrathful in the New Testament as he is in the Old.

Certainly there are numerous expressions of YHWH's righteous anger in the Old Testament, just as there are massive manifestations of blood-bought mercy in the

New Testament. What is important is to recognize that *we meet the same God in the Old Testament as we do in the New.* In the whole Bible we meet a God who is faithful to his promises both to bless and to curse. He takes both sin and repentance seriously, and so should we!

4. The Old Testament announces the very "good news/gospel" we enjoy.

The gospel is this—that the reigning God saves and satisfies believing sinners through Christ Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The gospel is this—that the reigning God saves and satisfies believing sinners through Christ Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Paul states that "the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached *the gospel* beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'" (Gal. 3:8). Abraham was already aware of the message of global salvation that we now enjoy. Similarly, in the opening of Romans, Paul stresses that the Lord "promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures" (i.e., the Old Testament Prophets) the very powerful "gospel of God . . . concerning his Son" that the apostle preached and in which we now rest (Rom. 1:1–3, 16). Key among these prophets was Isaiah, who anticipated the day when YHWH's royal servant (the Messiah) and the many servants identified with him would herald comforting "good news" to the poor and broken—news that the saving God reigns through his anointed royal deliverer (Isa. 61:1; cf. 40:9–11; 52:7–10; Luke 4:16–21). Reading the Old Testament, therefore, is one of God's given ways for us to better grasp and delight in the gospel (see also Heb. 4:2).

5. Both the old and new covenants call for love, and we can learn much about love from the Old Testament.

Within the old covenant, love was *what* the Lord called Israel to do (Deut. 6:5; 10:19); all the other commandments simply clarified *how* to do it. This was part of Jesus' point when he stressed that all the Old Testament hangs on the call to love God and neighbor: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:37–40). Christ emphasized, "Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (7:12). Similarly, Paul noted, "The whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:14; cf. Rom. 13:8, 10). As with old covenant Israel, the Lord calls Christians to lives characterized by love. But he now gives *all* members of the new covenant the ability to do what he commands. As Moses himself asserted, the very reason why God promised to circumcise hearts in the new covenant age was "so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 30:6). Moses also said that those enjoying this divine work in this future day would "obey the voice of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today" (30:8). Moses' old covenant law called for life-encompassing love, and Christians today, looking through the lens of Christ, can gain clarity from the Old Testament on the wide-ranging impact of love in all of life.

6. Jesus came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them.

Far from setting aside the Old Testament, Jesus stressed that he had come to fulfill it, and in the process he highlighted the lasting relevance of the Old Testament's teaching for Christians: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17–19). In chapters 10 and 12 we'll further consider the significance of this text, but what is important to note here is that while the age of the old covenant has come to an end (Rom. 6:14–15; 1 Cor. 9:20–21; Gal. 5:18; cf. Luke 16:16), the Old Testament itself maintains lasting relevance for us in the way it displays the character of God (e.g., Rom. 7:12), points to the excellencies of Christ, and portrays for us the scope of love in all its facets (Matt. 22:37–40).

7. Jesus said that all the Old Testament points to him.

After his first encounter with Jesus, Philip announced to Nathanael, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophet wrote" (John 1:45). Do you want to see and savor Jesus as much as you can? We find him in the Old Testament. As Jesus himself said, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39; cf. 5:46–47). "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). After his resurrection, proclaiming the gospel of God's kingdom (Acts 1:3), Jesus opened the minds of his disciples "to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:45–47). A proper "understanding" of the Old Testament will lead one to hear in it a message of the Messiah and the mission that his life would generate. Similarly, Paul taught "nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22–23). As an Old Testament preacher, Paul could declare, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). If you want to know Jesus more fully, read the Old Testament!

8. Failing to declare "the whole counsel of God" can put us in danger before the Lord.

Paul was a herald of the good news of God's kingdom in Christ (e.g., Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:30–31), which he preached from the law of Moses and the Prophets—the Old Testament (28:23; cf. 26:22–23). In Acts 20:26–27 he testified to the Ephesian elders, "I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." The "***whole counsel of God***" refers to the entirety of God's purposes

in salvation history as revealed in Scripture. Had the apostle failed to make known the Lord's redemptive plan of blessing overcoming curse in the person of Jesus, he would have stood accountable before God for any future doctrinal or moral error that the Ephesian church carried out (cf. Ezek. 33:1–6; Acts 18:6). With the New Testament, Scripture is complete, and we now have in whole "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). This "faith," however, is rightly understood only within the framework of "the whole counsel of God." So may we be people who guard ourselves from bloodguilt by making much of the Old Testament in relation to Christ.

9. The New Testament authors stressed that God gave the Old Testament for Christians.

Paul was convinced that the divinely inspired Old Testament authors wrote *for* New Testament believers, living on this side of the death and resurrection of Christ: "For whatever was written in former days was written *for our instruction*, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4; cf. 4:23–24). "Now these things happened to [the Israelites] as an example, but they were written down *for our instruction*, on whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11).[10] Accordingly, the apostle emphasized to Timothy, who had been raised on the Old Testament by his Jewish mother and grandmother (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim. 1:5), that the "*sacred writings*" of his upbringing "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). People today can get saved from God's wrath and from the enslavement of sin by reading the Old Testament through the lens of Christ!

This is why Paul says in the very next verse, "All Scripture is . . . profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (3:16–17). New covenant believers can correct and reprove straying brothers and sisters *from the Old Testament* when read in relation to Christ, for in it we find many "profitable" things (Acts 20:20)—a "gospel of the grace of God" (20:24)—that call for "repentance toward God" and "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (20:21). Based on this fact, New Testament authors regularly used the Old Testament as the basis for Christian exhortation, assuming its relevance for Christians (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:8–12; Eph. 6:2–3; 1 Tim. 5:18; 1 Peter 1:14–16). Because we are now part of the new covenant and not the old, natural questions arise regarding how exactly the Christian should relate to specific old covenant instruction. We will address these matters in chapter 12. Nevertheless, the point stands that the Old Testament, while not written *to* Christians, was still written *for* us.

10. Paul commands church leaders to preach the Old Testament.

The last of my ten reasons why the Old Testament still matters for Christians builds on the fact that Paul was referring to the Old Testament when he spoke of the "sacred writings" that are able to make a person "wise for salvation" and the "Scripture" that is

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10. In chapter 12 under the section "God Gave the Old Testament to Instruct Christians," we'll see that the Old Testament prophets themselves anticipated that this would be the case.

"breathed out by God and profitable" (2 Tim. 3:15–16). Knowing this colors our understanding of his following charge to Timothy: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passion, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" (4:2–4). For the apostle, Christian preachers such as Timothy needed to preach the Old Testament in order to guard the church from apostasy. While we now have the New Testament, we can, and indeed must, appropriate the Old Testament as Jesus and his apostles did for the good of God's church.

The Benefits of Hebrew Exegesis

You do not have to know Hebrew to profit much from this book. Indeed, every chapter contains solid information for guiding English-only Old Testament interpretation. Nevertheless, God gave us most of the Old Testament in Hebrew, and because of this a lot of material in the first half of the book (chaps. 2–7) clarifies the process of *Hebrew* exegesis. If you do not know Hebrew, I encourage you to keep reading this section, for I believe that it can move you to appreciate and pray for those who do. If you are not interested in hearing some of the benefits of Hebrew exegesis, feel free to jump ahead to the next section.

For most of my academic ministry career, the priest-scribe Ezra's approach to Scripture has highly influenced my biblical interpretation. "The good hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had set his heart to *study* the Law of the Lᴏʀᴅ, and to *do* it and to *teach* his statutes and rules in Israel" (Ezra 7:9–10).

STUDY ▸ DO ▸ TEACH God's Word: This was the order of Ezra's resolve. Study shaped by careful observation, right understanding, and fair evaluation is to give rise to practice—feeling appropriately about the truth that is seen and then acting accordingly. Only after we have studied and practiced are we ready to teach. If we teach without having studied, we replace God's words with our own; we become the authority instead of the Lord. If we teach without having practiced, we are nothing more than hypocrites. I want to consider why we need men and women in every generation who can approach the Old Testament using biblical Hebrew, and I want to consider the answer in light of Ezra's resolve.[11]

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11. For more pastoral reflection on Ezra 7:10, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "A Life Centered on Torah (Ezra 7:10)," in *Basics of Biblical Hebrew: Grammar*, by Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 249–50.

While every believer must seek to know God, not everyone needs to know the biblical languages. Indeed, the Lord has graciously made his Word translatable so that those "from every tribe and language and people and nation" may hear of and believe in the Savior (Rev. 5:9; cf. Neh. 8:7–8; Acts 2:6). With this, grasping the fundamentals of Hebrew and Greek neither ensures correct interpretation of Scripture nor removes all interpretive challenges. It does not automatically make one a good exegete of texts or an articulate, winsome proclaimer of God's truth. Linguistic skill also does not necessarily result in deeper levels of holiness or in greater knowledge of God. Without question, *the most important skill for interpreting Scripture* is to read, read, and read the biblical text carefully and God-dependently and to consider what it says about God's character, actions, and purposes and how it points to Christ.

Nevertheless, we need some in the church in every generation who can skillfully use the biblical languages. Why? I have four reasons.[12] As I give an overview of these, if you don't know Hebrew (yet), keep in mind what I say in the previous paragraph and let any inkling of discouragement turn into gratefulness to God for raising up some who can study, practice, and teach from this framework.

1. The biblical languages give us direct access to God's written Word.

Original-language exegesis exalts Jesus by affirming God's decision to give us his Word in a Book, written first in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. In his wisdom and for the benefit of every generation of humankind, God chose to preserve and guard in a Book his authoritative, clear, necessary, and sufficient Word. Jesus highlights the significance of this fact when he declares that he prophetically fulfills all Old Testament hopes: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:17–18). The very details of the biblical text (every iota and every dot) bear lasting significance and point to the person and work of Christ. So we align ourselves with God's wisdom and participate in his passion to exalt his Son when we take the biblical languages seriously in the study of his Book. This is the first reason why we do *Hebrew* exegesis.

2. The biblical languages help us study God's Word.

Using Hebrew and Greek can give us greater certainty that we have grasped the meaning of God's Book. Knowing the biblical languages can also help us observe more accurately, understand more clearly, evaluate more fairly, and interpret more confidently the inspired details of the biblical text. Without Hebrew and Greek, ministers are:

- Required to trust someone else's translation (many of which are excellent, but which are translations/interpretations nonetheless);

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12. What follows is a condensed version of the main points in Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Profit of Employing the Biblical Languages: Scriptural and Historical Reflections," *Themelios* 37, 1 (2012): 32–50.

- Left without help when translations differ;
- Forced to rely heavily on what others say in commentaries and other tools without accurate comprehension or fair evaluation; and
- Compelled to miss numerous discourse features that are not easily conveyed through translation.

Knowing the languages neither makes an interpreter always right nor sets all interpretive challenges aside. Nevertheless, by using the biblical languages we remove hindrances to understanding and take away many occasions for mistakes. Furthermore, knowing Hebrew and Greek enables interpreters to more accurately track an author's flow of thought through which the Bible's message is revealed.

3. The biblical languages help us practice God's Word.

Employing Hebrew and Greek can assist in developing Christian maturity that validates our witness in the world. Scripture is clear that a true encounter with God's Word will alter the way we live, shaping servants instead of kings and nurturing Christ-exalting humility rather than pride. Sadly, practicing the Word is too often forgotten, thus hindering the spread of the gospel in the world.

Now, because our knowing the Lord and living for him develops only in the context of the Word and because Bible study is best done through the original languages, Hebrew and Greek can serve as God's instruments to develop holiness, which enhances the church's mission. Original-language exegesis can help clarify what feelings the Lord wants us to have and what actions he wants us to take. And along with opening fresh doors of discovery into the biblical text, the arduous task of learning, keeping, and using the languages itself provides many opportunities for growth in character, discipline, boldness, and joy. Hypocrisy hinders kingdom expansion, but biblically grounded study accompanied by a virtuous life substantiates the gospel and promotes mission, leading to worship.

4. The biblical languages help us teach God's Word.

Original-language exegesis fuels a fresh and bold expression and defense of the truth in preaching and teaching. Saturated study of Scripture through Hebrew and Greek provides a sustained opportunity for personal discovery, freshness, and insight, all of which can enhance our teaching. Moreover, the languages provide a powerful means for judging and defending biblical truth. The church needs earnest contenders for the faith, those who are "able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9). The biblical languages sharpen our teaching and preaching to make it as pointed, accurate, and penetrating as possible.

In summary, for the Christian minister who is charged to proclaim God's truth with accuracy and to preserve the gospel's purity with integrity, the biblical languages help in one's study, practice, and teaching of the Word. Properly using the languages opens doors of biblical discovery that would otherwise remain locked and provides

interpreters with accountability that they would otherwise not have. Ministers who know Hebrew and Greek not only can feed themselves but will also be able to gain a level of biblical discernment that will allow them to respond in an informed way to new translations, new theological perspectives, and other changing trends in church and culture.

In light of the above, I offer the following action steps to readers of all vocational callings:

- *Seminary professors and administrators*. Fight to make exegeting the Word in the original languages the core of every curriculum that is designed to train vocational ministers of God's Book.

- *Church shepherds and shepherds-in-training*. Seek to become God-dependent, rigorous thinkers who study, practice, and teach the Word—in that order!

- *Other congregational leaders*. Give your ministers who are called to preach and teach time to study, and help your congregations see this as a priority.

- *Young-adult leaders and college professors*. Encourage those sensing a call to vocational ministry of God's Word to become thoroughly equipped for the task.

- *Everyone*. Seek as much as possible to be a first-hander when interpreting God's Word, guard yourself from false teaching, hold your leaders accountable, and pray to our glorious God for the preservation of the gospel, for our leaders, and for the churches and schools training them.

Now let's discover how to understand and apply the Old Testament.

Overview of the Interpretive Process: TOCMA

This book employs a twelve-step process to guide the move from exegesis to theology and from personal study to practice and then instruction. While this guidebook considers each stage independently, the interpretive process is more like a spiral by which we continually revisit various interpretive stopping points in our up-road climb to biblical faithfulness.

For the sake of easy recollection, I have tagged the whole process *TOCMA*, which stands for *Text, Observation, Context, Meaning, Application*. Each of the twelve stages falls within one of these overarching categories.

Part 1: TEXT—"What is the makeup of the passage?"

1. **Genre:** Determine the literary form, subject matter, and function of the passage, compare it to similar genres, and consider the implications for interpretation.

2. **Literary units and text hierarchy:** Determine the limits and basic structure of the passage.

3. **Text criticism:** Establish the passage's original wording.

4. **Translation:** Translate the text and compare other translations.

Part 2: OBSERVATION—"How is the passage communicated?"

5. **Clause and text grammar:** Assess the makeup and relationship of words, phrases, clauses, and larger text units.

6. **Argument-tracing:** Finish tracing the literary argument and create a message-driven outline that is tied to the passage's main point.

7. **Word and concept studies:** Clarify the meaning of key words, phrases, and concepts.

Part 3: CONTEXT—"Where does the passage fit?"

8. **Historical context:** Understand the historical situation from which the author composed the text and identify any historical details that the author mentions or assumes.

9. **Literary context:** Comprehend the role that the passage plays in the whole book.

Part 4: MEANING—"What does the passage mean?"

10. **Biblical theology:** Consider how your passage connects to the Bible's overall flow and message and points to Christ.

11. **Systematic theology:** Discern how your passage theologically coheres with the whole Bible, assessing key doctrines especially in direct relation to the gospel.

Part 5: APPLICATION—"Why does the passage matter?"

12. **Practical theology:** Apply the text to yourself, the church, and the world, stressing the centrality of Christ and the hope of the gospel.

Come with me now on a journey of discovery and skill development. Chapters 1–9 focus especially on the process of exegesis, whereas chapters 10–12 address theology. God-honoring worship is both the fuel and the goal of every stage of biblical interpretation. So may your study result in practice and overflow in teaching that is filled with praise and proclamation—all for the glory of Christ and the good of his church among the nations.

Key Words and Concepts

Biblical interpretation
Exegesis
Theology
Special revelation
Infallible and inerrant
IOUS
Whole counsel of God
Study → do → teach!
TOCMA

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Describe the connection between exegesis and theology. What is the danger of doing theology apart from exegesis or exegesis apart from theology?
2. What are DeRouchie's four presuppositions that guide his study of the Bible?
3. What is the risk if you do not hold each of these presuppositions?
4. What is the ultimate goal of biblical interpretation?
5. Which of the ten reasons why the Old Testament is important for Christians most moved your soul? Which one most compels you to study the Old Testament?
6. In what ways does knowing Hebrew benefit and not benefit the process of biblical exegesis?

Resources for Further Study[13]

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13. In each chapter, I have included "Resources for Further Study" that I believe will serve the student of Scripture in various ways. Not all the books listed are unified in their theological perspectives or interpretive approaches, so the reader needs to carefully evaluate all claims up against the Bible, which supplies the highest authority for the Christian. I have preceded with a star those resources that I believe to be the most important or best. A plain black star (★) marks resources that are intended for all readers, whereas a white star within a black circle (✪) highlights those that are designed for more advanced readers and that may also contain Hebrew. I thank my friend and colleague Andy Naselli for his help in shaping these bibliographies.

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PART 1

TEXT—"WHAT IS THE MAKEUP
OF THE PASSAGE?"

1

GENRE

— • — • — • —

*Goal***:** Determine the literary form, subject matter, and function of the passage, compare it to similar genres, and consider the implications for interpretation.

Steps in the Journey
Part 1: Text—"What is the makeup of the passage?"
1. Genre
2. Literary Units and Text Hierarchy
3. Text Criticism
4. Translation
Part 2: Observation
Part 3: Context
Part 4: Meaning
Part 5: Application

Basic Overview
Defining Genre 🚶
Putting Genre within Its Biblical Context 🚶
Genre Analysis and the Old Testament's Polemical Theology 🚶
The Relationship of Genre to Historicity 🚶
An Exercise in Genre—Exodus 19:4–6 🚶
Historical Narrative 🚶
Prophecy and Law 🚶
Psalms 🚶
Proverbs 🚶 🧗

Fig. 1.1. Trail Guide to Chapter 1

Defining Genre

My oldest daughter is a master of "genre" analysis. I see it most after her daily trip to the mailbox, as she pushes aside the bills and advertisements to select the letters from friends or family. With every new piece of literary composition, we almost always identify genre. We decide (consciously or unconsciously, rightly or wrongly) whether a text is a research paper or poem, a factual history or a fairy tale. We look for clues in format, presentation, introductory or closing statements, and content. We seek the author's signals as to whether something is satire, fiction, or nonfiction.

These markers point to a document's genre. *Genre* refers to an identifiable category of literary composition that usually demands its own exegetical rules. Accordingly, a misunderstanding of a work's genre can lead to skewed interpretation. Our decisions at this point will color the rest of the exegetical process. This first chapter is the longest chapter of the book, and the overview will set trajectories for the remaining eleven steps of interpretation. Every reader will benefit from this material, despite your level of exposure to biblical Hebrew.

Genre analysis is concerned not only with grammatical makeup but also with the patterns, content, and function in context. It examines the shape, subject matter, and purpose of a particular unit. It asks whether these elements are defined enough and typical enough for us to classify and interpret a passage as belonging to a particular genre. If the form, content, and function are sufficiently comparable to other texts, and if we can establish definite criteria for identifying the pattern's occurrence, the unit may be said to belong to a given genre. Knowing the genre of a text helps us know what types of questions we should ask of the material. Assigning the wrong genre to a text can lead our biblical interpretation astray.

We discern a text's genre by carefully noting literary details and authorial comments that clarify how we should read it. Are we reading a blessing or curse, a court annal or exhortation, a doxology or genealogy, a proverb or prayerful petition, a love song or a lament, or any number of other possibilities?[1]

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1. Genre analysis came to the fore in Old Testament studies in the early nineteenth century after the increased discovery of ancient Near Eastern texts that bear similarity to the Bible. Extrabiblical materials such as Sumerian king lists, Egyptian proverbs, Babylonian creation accounts and law codes, Hittite and Assyrian treaties, and Assyrian prophecies helped clarify how the Old Testament was both at home within and an affront to its culture. Immediately people felt led to compare and, less often, contrast the forms, content, and function of these outside texts with the Scriptures. Genre analysis was important to the comparative enterprise because texts needed to be similar in genre in order to provide legitimate comparison—laws to laws, proverbs to proverbs, prophecies to prophecies.

The sages, seers, singers, and sovereigns that God used to produce our Bible sometimes sought to convey information and to stir thoughts. Laws and historical narratives are mostly of this type. Through other genres they intended to affect and effect certain behaviors , beliefs, and feelings—to awaken emotions and to arouse affections. Here we would place most of the psalms and books such as Song of Songs. Some genres served to blend both of these purposes, such as much prophecy and some proverbs.

Every genre has its own interpretive rules. Some allow for high use of hyperbole and figurative language, but others do not. Signals in the text distinguish parables from history writing. Each demands a very different reading, but both can come to us in a similar form. The biblical authors picked different genres in order to communicate their intended truths in the most effective way. They consciously submitted themselves to the rules of a given genre, and they expected their readers to do the same. Grasping how the various genres work will help us better interpret Scripture.

Putting Genre within Its Biblical Context

The Jewish Bible that Jesus and the apostles used appears to have been structured differently from our English Bible. While the Jewish Scriptures are limited to the same thirty-nine books found in our English Old Testament, they pair some of the books into single volumes (e.g., 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, the Twelve Minor Prophets, Ezra-Nehemiah, 1–2 Chronicles)[2] and arrange the whole in a different order and in three main divisions: the Law (תּוֹרָה, *tôrâ*), the Prophets (נְבִיאִים, *nĕbîʾîm*), and the Writings (or "the other Scriptures," כְּתוּבִים, *kĕtûbîm*).[3] Many refer to the Jewish arrangement as the *TaNaK*, which is an acronym derived from the first Hebrew letters of each of the three major section titles. We see potential evidence of this three-part structure in Luke 24:44, when Jesus declared after his resurrection, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." In most reckonings, Psalms is the first main book in the Writings (though prefaced by Ruth), and Jesus here seems to treat it as a title for the whole third division.

2. At least in the case of the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, the reason that these were later separated into two books appears to be merely pragmatic: the Hebrew Bible used only consonants, and when it was translated into Greek, which included vowels, the books got too long for single scrolls.

3. For examples of the threefold division outside the Bible, see the prologue to Ben Sira and 4QMMT C.10 in the DSS.

The biblical evidence also suggests that Jesus' Bible began with Genesis and ended with Chronicles. We see this in one of Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees, in which he spoke of the martyrdom of the Old Testament prophets "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah" (Luke 11:51; cf. Matt. 23:35). This is not a simple "A to Z" statement, for Zechariah's name does not begin with the last letter of any biblical-language alphabet. Also, it is not strictly a chronological statement, for while Abel was clearly the first martyr (Gen. 4:4, 8), the Old Testament's last martyr with respect to time was Uriah the son of Shemaiah, who died during the reign of Jehoiakim (609–598 B.C.; see Jer. 26:20–23). Instead, Jesus appears to have been speaking canonically, mentioning the first and last martyr in his Bible's literary structure. Specifically, just as Genesis records Abel's murder, the end of Chronicles highlights a certain Zechariah who was killed in the temple court during the reign of Joash (835–796 B.C.; see 2 Chron. 24:20–21).

Stephen Dempster has observed how the Hebrew Old Testament's three-part structure distinguishes the "narrative" of God's redemptive story from the "commentary" sections and does so in a way that the former frames the latter.[4] The canonical arrangement I am following here is not that of the standard critical edition of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, *BHS*) but is found in the most ancient listing of the Jewish canonical books in *Baba Bathra* 14b.[5] The guiding principles for the structure appear to be both literary and rational, in that the majority of the narrative books are chronological, whereas the commentary books are generally patterned longest to shortest.

As is evident in figure 1.2, the major prophets are out of chronological order (i.e., not Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), Ruth is totally separated from its temporal context after Judges, Daniel is not among the Prophets, and Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah are

4. Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 45–51.

5. *Baba Bathra* 14b is a baraita, which is an ancient tradition found in the Babylonian Talmud (ca. A.D. 500) that dates from around the time of the Mishnah but was not included in it. Beckwith provides a complete evaluation of the textual data and posits that the arrangement of biblical books in *Baba Bathra* 14b most likely originated from a list drawn up by Judas Maccabaeus around 164 B.C. (see 2 Macc. 2:14–15) (Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 121–27, 152–53, 198). For a popular-level, succinct summary of Beckwith's conclusions, see his "The Canon of Scripture," *NDBT* 27–34. For more on the historical and theological priority of this structure above others, see Stephen G. Dempster, "An 'Extraordinary Fact': Torah and Temple and the Contours of the Hebrew Canon, Part 1," *TynBul* 48, 1 (1997): 23–56; Dempster, "An 'Extraordinary Fact': Torah and Temple and the Contours of the Hebrew Canon, Part 2," *TynBul* 48, 2 (1997): 191–218; Dempster, "From Many Texts to One: The Formation of the Hebrew Bible," in *The World of the Aramaeans 1: Biblical Studies in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion*, ed. P. M. Michèle Daviau, John W. Wevers, and Michael Weigl (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 19–56; Dempster, "The Place of Nehemiah in the Canon of Scripture: Wise Builder," *SBJT* 9, 3 (2005): 38–51; Dempster, "Canons on the Right and Canons on the Left: Finding a Resolution in the Canon Debate," *JETS* 52, 1 (2009): 47–77; Dempster, "Canon and Old Testament Interpretation," in *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 154–179; Dempster, "Ecclesiastes and the Canon," in *The Words of the Wise Are like Goads: Engaging Qoheleth in the 21st Century*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Christian G. Rata (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 389–402; Dempster, "A Wandering Moabite: Ruth—A Book in Search of a Canonical Home," in *The Shape of the Writings*, ed. Julius Steinberg and Timothy J. Stone, Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 16 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 87–118.

placed in reverse chronological order. The narrative runs chronologically from Genesis to Kings, pauses from Jeremiah to Lamentations, and then resumes from Daniel to Ezra-Nehemiah. Chronicles then recalls the story from Adam to Cyrus's decree that Israel can return. As for the commentary, the Latter Prophets structure the four books largest to smallest, and the Former Writings follow the same pattern, except that Ruth prefaces the Psalter and the longer Lamentations follows Song of Songs. The former shift places the Psalter in the context of Davidic hope, and the latter switch (1) allows Jeremiah's writings to frame the whole commentary unit, (2) allows Solomon's three volumes (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs) to remain together, and (3) lets Lamentations reorient the reader to the exilic context where Kings left off and where the narrative in Daniel resumes.

Law	Former & Latter Prophets		Former & Latter Writings	
Genesis	Joshua	Jeremiah	Ruth	Daniel
Exodus	Judges	Ezekiel	Psalms	Esther
Leviticus	1–2 Samuel	Isaiah	Job	Ezra-Nehemiah
Numbers	1–2 Kings	The Twelve	Proverbs	1–2 Chronicles
Deuteronomy			Ecclesiastes	
			Song of Songs	
			Lamentations	
Narrative	**Narrative**	**Commentary**	**Commentary**	**Narrative**

Fig. 1.2. The Arrangement of the Hebrew Bible in *Baba Bathra* 14b

The *Law*, also called the *Pentateuch*, is the Bible's first five books, Genesis through Deuteronomy. This section is all narrative and is devoted to clarifying God's relationship with and purpose for Israel in the context of the world. Genesis provides a "kingdom prologue" that sets the stage for Israel's God-exalting task, which is then detailed in Exodus through Deuteronomy.

We then move to the *Prophets*, which contain two sections. The first in Joshua through Kings is a narrative history of Israel's covenant failure. The second in Jeremiah through the Twelve is a prophetic commentary on the people's rebellion that places their sin within the overall scope of God's redemptive plan. Whereas the Former Prophets focus on what happened in Israel's downward spiral from conquest through monarchy to exile, the Latter Prophets develop why the drama went the way it did.

Like the Prophets but in reverse order, the *Writings* include both commentary and narrative, but the Writings are dominated by a much more positive thrust. The commentary of the Former Writings in Ruth through Lamentations clarifies how those hoping in God's messianic kingdom were to live—that is, how they could maintain satisfaction in God amid life's pleasures and pains. Following Lamentations, which resituates us to the exilic context highlighted at the end of 2 Kings, the narrative

resumes in Daniel and continues through Chronicles, detailing God's preservation of a remnant in exile, the people's initial restoration to the land, and the promise of complete kingdom realization. Because the story is unfinished at the end of Chronicles, the reader is pushed into the New Testament for fulfillment, which is ultimately realized in the person of Christ and his church.

For now, there are two significant points to make. First, because the Old Testament is framed by historical *narrative*, it is both right and necessary to read the entire Old Testament through the lens of God's history of redemption. This (true) story of salvation clarifies God's perspective on how the peoples and events of space and time relate to his kingdom purposes, which move from original creation to new creation, from the old, cursed world in Adam to the new, blessed world in Christ. As will be made clear, the main character in the redemptive drama is God, who stands supreme over all things and who graciously set Israel apart to serve as the channel through which he would overcome the world's plague of sin and replace it with the blessing of salvation ultimately through Christ.

Second, Jesus' Bible was more than narrative, for not only do the *narrative* portions themselves contain various genres such as laws (e.g., Ex. 20:1–17; Deut. 12–26), oracles (Num. 23–24), blessings and curses (Lev. 26; Deut. 28), songs (e.g., Ex. 15; Deut. 32), riddles (e.g., Judg. 14:14), parables (e.g., 2 Sam. 12:1–4), and apocalyptic visions (e.g., Dan. 7), but also the Old Testament includes the Latter Prophets and the Former Writings, two large groupings of highly poetic books that provide *commentary* on the story line of the narrative books that surround them (i.e., the Former Prophets and Latter Writings). So we will grasp Scripture's overarching message most clearly only when the history of redemption is read alongside the additional material and placed within the three-part structure. It is through this lens that Jesus and the apostles preached the good news of God's kingdom, manifest in a message of the Messiah and mission (Luke 24:44–47; Acts 26:22–23; 28:23).

As we consider the diversity of the Bible's genres, we must see them as only adding flavor to an overarching biblical unity with respect to both message and purpose.[6] Like its thirty-nine individual books (twenty-four by Jewish numbering), the Old Testament as a whole shows signs of intentional shaping toward a common goal—a quality testifying to the guiding hand of the supreme author.

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6. For more on the overarching message and purpose of the Old Testament, see Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*; Jason S. DeRouchie, ed., *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013); and Miles V. Van Pelt, "Introduction," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 23–42. It is noteworthy that the Narrative → Narrative → Commentary → Commentary → Narrative pattern is maintained in the structure of the New Testament canon in the form of the Gospels (N) → Acts (N) → Paul's Epistles and Hebrews (C) → General Epistles (C) → Revelation (N). Even if, as Trobisch has argued, the most ancient canonical arrangement placed the General Epistles before Paul's letters, the generic pattern of the whole remains parallel to that of the Old Testament (see David Trobisch, *The First Edition of the New Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000]; cf. C. E. Hill, "The New Testament Canon: Deconstructio ad Absurdum?," *JETS* 52, 1 [2009]: 101–19).

Genre Analysis and the Old Testament's Polemical Theology

Spirit-inspired priests, prophets, poets, and princes produced our Bible. And the language, culture, and situations of the time conditioned every line of every book. Yet all the while, God was the one guiding the shaping, keeping it as pure, true, and lasting as his character, not only with respect to issues of faith (doctrine) and practice (ethics) but also with reference to the facts (history, geography, science, etc.). The Bible grew up within history, but it also shapes history. It arose in the midst of culture but was intentionally designed to confront culture. No other ancient literature is like the Christian Scripture, for no other writing is God's Word. While we can legitimately engage in genre comparison, we must never treat the Bible as if it were wholly like any other book.

Many scholars today, even some who claim to be evangelicals, assert that the Bible's use of forms or genres that are common to the ancient world supports the belief that the biblical worldview, while monotheistic, often parallels and at times borrows with minimal discrimination the pre-enlightened religious ideas and rituals of ancient Israel's neighbors. Because the Bible is ancient literature, these scholars claim, we must interpret it like all other ancient literature. So if we know that ancient kings outside the Bible often fabricated history for the purpose of propaganda, to build up their own names, we should be open to read Israel's history in this same way. They say that because all predictive prophecy outside the Bible was written after the fact, we should be open to the possibility and perhaps even expect that the Bible's prophets did the same thing. They say that all ancient creation accounts witness prescientific understandings of reality, and that we therefore expect too much of Scripture when we look for scientifically factual data. All these statements appear to assume that the Bible is not unique literature. They fail to account for the distinct nature of Scripture as God's unique Word.

I agree with Old Testament Professor John Currid that when we affirm the Old Testament's historical reliability and assess not only similarities but also differences with comparative ancient accounts, we see that the Bible sets itself apart within its ancient environment. Just because the Bible uses genres such as history and law and prophecy and lament that were common in the ancient world does not mean that it uses them in the same way. In his book *Against the Gods*, Currid persuasively argues that the Bible's tendency is not to appropriate but to dispute and repudiate pagan myths, ideas, identities, and customs.[7] It does this by:

7. John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

- Establishing the authentic, original historical event that had been vulgarized and distorted through polytheism, magic, violence, and paganism; and
- Showing that what was myth in the ancient world had real and factual substance in Israel's time and history.

Let's consider for the moment the ancient suzerain-vassal treaty pattern, which finds parallels in the biblical text. In his Deuteronomy commentary titled *Treaty of the Great King*, Meredith Kline was one of the first to identify the way in which the Hittite treaty pattern parallels the book of Deuteronomy.[8]

Preamble	Deut. 1:1–5
Historical Prologue: Covenant History	1:6–4:49
Stipulations: Covenant Life	5:1–26:19
Sanctions: Covenant Ratification	27:1–30:20
Dynastic Disposition: Covenant Continuity	31:1–34:12

Fig. 1.3. The Treaty Structure of Deuteronomy

Many have tweaked Kline's initial proposal, but most recognize treaty parallels and believe that God is approaching Israel as the Great King in Deuteronomy (Deut. 33:5). At one level we can view YHWH as intentionally adopting and adapting international treaty patterns for his own purposes. But we can also see geopolitical treaties on earth as only fruits and reflections of a more prototypical covenantal relationship that God initiated with mankind in the garden of Eden. Not only this, what God started with humanity at creation itself is an overflow of his own eternal intra-Trinitarian covenantal agreement and decree, which are worked out through salvation history (Eph. 1:4–14). In using the treaty pattern with Israel, the Lord is not simply borrowing from the ancient world but is actually returning to his original covenantal approach with humanity and modeling for the world what true kingship should look like. All the kingdoms of mankind are but warped reflections of God's ultimate kingdom.

Scripture arose in an ancient context that was filled with perspectives, powers, and practices sometimes like but often unlike those of our Western world. Into this

8. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King—The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012); cf. George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *BA* 17 (1954): 50–76; Mendenhall, "The Suzerainty Treaty Structure: Thirty Years Later," in *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Edwin B. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss, and John W. Welch (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 85–100.

environment the Old Testament stands as polemical theology, confronting false perceptions and activities.[9]

The Relationship of Genre to Historicity

Form alone does not clarify an account's historicity or factuality. For example, when King David heard the prophet Nathan's story of the robbed lamb, it appeared factual, but it shifted from a historical narrative of injustice to a narrative parable of injustice through the single statement "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:1–7). Narratives can express both history and fiction, and numerous other genres can supply the medium for history writing. Historical facts, for example, can appear both in narrative prose and in poetic song. While each genre has its own governing rules (e.g., poetry allows for more figurative language), the form itself has no bearing on the factuality of the account.

In order to get a sense for differences in genre and for how form does not influence historicity, let's consider a parallel historical account in Judges. In Judges 4 we read the great narrative record of the judgeship of Deborah and Barak, whom God raised up to confront the enemy Jabin, king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of Jabin's army was Sisera, and we are told in Judges 4:18–21 that as he fled from Deborah and Barak,

> [a woman named] Jael *came out* to meet Sisera *and said* to him, "Turn aside, my lord; turn aside to me; do not be afraid." *So he turned aside* to her into the tent, *and she covered him* with a rug. *And he said* to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." *So she opened* a skin of milk *and gave him a drink and covered him*. *And he said* to her, "Stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No.'" *But* Jael the wife of Heber *took* a tent peg, *and took* a hammer in her hand. *Then she went* softly to him *and drove* the peg into his temple *until it went down* into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. *So he died*.

The account is straight narrative, and all but one clause from the narrator's pen begins with the Hebrew storytelling *wayyiqtol* (*waw*-consecutive imperfect) verb (signaled by the italicized phrases).

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9. I encourage you to check out Currid's book *Against the Gods*. It's loaded with examples and clearly written commentary that respects the nature of God's Word and that helps us grasp how much of the Old Testament was written to confront improper worldviews of the day.

Now, in a way that draws attention to the main point of the story, Judges 5 contains a retelling of the same event through the song of Deborah and Barak, but now the historical account is delivered in full-blown Hebrew poetry. Jael's part comes in 5:24–27. Note how the episode is now cast in a different genre:

> 24   Most blessed of women be Jael,
>   the wife of Heber the Kenite,
>   of tent-dwelling women most blessed.
> 25   He asked for water and she gave him milk;
>   she brought him curds in a noble's bowl.
> 26   She sent her hand to the tent peg
>   and her right hand to the workmen's mallet;
>   she struck Sisera;
>   she crushed his head;
>   she shattered and pierced his temple.
> 27   Between her feet
>   he sank, he fell, he lay still;
>   between her feet
>   he sank, he fell;
>   where he sank,
>   there he fell—dead.

The ESV's paragraphing signals that the translator recognized this text as poetry. The entire flow has a different feel from the narrative. It's rhythmic and paced, and not one *wayyiqtol* verb occurs in the entire passage. The song awakens emotion, passion, and praise. The entire piece moves us to sing with Deborah and Barak the final line of the song, "So may all your enemies perish, O Lord! But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might" (Judg. 5:31).

We see a comparable contrast of genre in the story of the exodus in Exodus 14–15. In Exodus 14 we read the historical-narrative account in prose of YHWH's deliverance of Israel from Egypt; it is a detailed, step-by-step narration of the events as they played out in space and time. In Exodus 15, however, the same account is recast in song, filled with poetic images and figures of speech. Exodus 15:3–11 reads:

> 3   The Lord is a man of war;
>   the Lord is his name.
>
> 4   Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea,
>   and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea.
> 5   The floods covered them;
>   they went down into the depths like a stone.
> 6   Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power,
>   your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.
> 7   In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries;
>   you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble.

8   At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up;
       the floods stood up in a heap;
       the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.
9   The enemy said, "I will pursue, I will overtake,
       I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them.
       I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them."
10 You blew with your wind; the sea covered them;
       they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

11 Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?
       Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
       awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

In this poetic account we read things not seen in the narrative version. In the narrative we read only that "the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind" (Ex. 14:21), but in the song we read, "At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up" (15:8). The imagery is akin to the force of Aslan's roar in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and the repetition only adds to the emotive effect.

In the song we hear "likenings," similes: "They went down into the depths *like* a stone" (Ex. 15:5); "it consumes them *like* stubble" (15:7). In the narrative we read in 14:23, 28 that "the Egyptians pursued and went in after them. . . . The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained." In contrast, the poem declares in 15:10, "You blew with your wind; the sea covered them; they sank *like* lead in the mighty waters." One portrayal delivers the facts; the other captures the emotive force that we should feel as we read the story. The use of similes contributes to the feeling of the poem.

Significantly, the historical narrative does not refrain from stressing YHWH as the great mover in the exodus. In the narrative at Exodus 14:25, the Egyptians recognize YHWH's strong hand, for they assert, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians." But in addition to this the poem rings out, "The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name. . . . Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (15:3, 11).

The change from historical narrative to poetic song in Exodus 14 and 15 does not alter the historical truthfulness of the account, but each genre portrays the history in different ways. The narrative simply unpacks a progression of temporally successive events in space and time. The song uses much more concrete imagery, figurative language, and poetic parallelism, but through these means it still proclaims the same story. Similarly, the changes in form between Judges 4 and 5 have no bearing on the text's historicity or factuality. Both accounts tell how Jael killed Sisera, but the poem intentionally moves us in a fresh way to praise the one who controls history.

The biblical authors can cast both history and fiction in various genres. In the rest of this chapter, I will lay down some basic guidelines for interpreting different biblical genres.

An Exercise in Genre—Exodus 19:4–6

This book offers numerous biblical examples to illustrate whatever point I am trying to make. At times I reuse some texts, relooking at them from fresh angles as we walk through the interpretive process. But I will look at one text at every one of the twelve steps from exegesis to theology. It is Exodus 19:4–6, perhaps the clearest, simplest snapshot of the revealed makeup of the old covenant that we have in Scripture.

When we consider the genre of Exodus 19:4–6, we immediately recognize two things. First, it is a speech of God recorded by his prophet, and therefore we can rightfully call it a *prophetic oracle*. More specifically, it is a messenger speech from God through Moses to the people, and it includes instruction mixed with implied exhortation. Second, the speech itself falls within a grand narrative that begins in Genesis and continues unbroken through the end of 2 Kings, only to be picked up again in Daniel and carried on to the end of 2 Chronicles (see "Putting Genre within Its Biblical Context" earlier in this chapter). The narrative relays the history of salvation that ultimately climaxes in Christ and the New Testament.

Thus we can tag the genre of Exodus 19:4–6 as a prophetic-messenger speech made up of instruction and implied exhortation. It is part of the historical narrative of Exodus, the Pentateuch, and the greater Old Testament.

Historical Narrative

The Distinctive Nature of Biblical Narrative

The Bible's historical narratives chronicle connected events in story format, usually in past time. Around 65 percent of Scripture is narrative—Genesis through Kings, Daniel through Chronicles, the Gospels and Acts, and even parts of Revelation. These books recount the true story of God's workings in history to make a people and a name for himself, ultimately through Jesus.

On the surface, biblical historical narrative resembles the factual historical reporting that we read today in a news account or a history book. As in contemporary historical writing, the Old Testament records a chronology of key persons, ages, places, powers, and events from creation to Israel's initial restoration from Babylon. But the Bible does so much more than simply register facts. It intentionally selects which facts to include and then shapes them from God's perspective and for God's purposes. Biblical historical narrative stands distinct in at least four ways.

1. Old Testament narratives commonly contain various subgenres within them.

The Bible's stories are often peppered with numerous subgenres, such as genealogies (e.g., Gen. 5; 11:10–26), deathbed blessings (e.g., Gen. 49; Deut. 33), songs (Ex. 15:1–18; Deut. 32:1–43), predictive prophecies (Num. 23–24), sermons (Deut. 5–26), and covenants (Josh. 24:1–28). You can find this incorporation in other ancient texts, but it is very pronounced in the Bible.

2. Old Testament narratives focus on God and anticipate the Christ.

As with all history writing, the Bible's narratives are selective and purposeful in their presentation. But in biblical narrative God is the key character and the key mover—his words and his deeds guide each story. This is true even in the book of Esther, where the narrator never mentions the Lord's name or title explicitly but where God's providential purposes are evident at every turn. With this, the Old Testament stories themselves offer God's perspective on history and disclose that his redemptive program for the world climaxes in Christ Jesus and his church. The Old Testament story creates longing for a better king, a blessed people, and a broader land—all of which God promises as the answer to the world's problem detailed in the Old Testament.

3. Old Testament narratives teach.

Because Scripture is God's revelation, biblical historical narratives are designed not simply to inform but also to instruct—they are sermons in story form. Scripture's narratives seek to convince us of God's revelatory message and of the need to repent, believe, and obey. God's purposes guided what stories the narrators told and where they placed their focus. We must read not simply to gain the facts but to hear the message that the authors intended. Regularly the narrators detail sins and failures without clarifying whether they are good or bad. Not all decisions and actions of biblical characters are normative for us. The narrators expect us to know our Bibles well enough to read the history of the covenant in light of the covenant—both the covenant instruction and promises and the character of the covenant Lord. In Scripture, people are examples for us to follow only insofar as they point us to the supremacy and worth of God.

4. Old Testament narratives often have intentions other than our own.

Because the narrators were ultimately preaching as they crafted their stories, they at times were not as concerned with including certain details that concern us. They

spoke accurately, but matters such as strict chronology and sequencing were not always their interest. As much as we may want to know the name of the Pharaoh of the exodus, the Bible is silent, being intentionally more concerned with God's name—YHWH. It is the Chronicler's prerogative to pass quickly over Saul's reign to get us to David, to focus almost completely on the southern kingdom, and not to even mention David's affair with Bathsheba, all things that are approached differently in Samuel-Kings. Such selection does not call into question the accuracy of what is there. It simply guides us to see that the message of Samuel-Kings is different from that of Chronicles.

History, Myth, and the Biblical Narratives

Scripture is God's written Word, which means that the biblical text should stand as our highest authority. It also means that insofar as it aligns with the original wording, the Bible is an *infallible* rule and guide in its claims regarding faith (doctrine) and practice (ethics) and *inerrant* in its claims of fact (history, geology, chronology, science). With respect to Scripture's authority, in biblical narrative, as with every other genre, we must respect the biblical authors' intentions and the literary conventions under which they wrote. We must allow for partial reporting, paraphrasing, and summarizing and must not require the Bible to give definitive or exhaustive information on every topic. We must allow for phenomenological language, with which the authors describe a phenomenon as they observed it or experienced it, not necessarily how it scientifically occurred. And we must allow for the reporting of a speech without the endorsement of that speech's truthfulness; a biblical character may truly say something that is not true. These things stated, outside those passages that are explicitly treated as parables, the biblical narratives present themselves as accurate accounts of what happened in space and time, so we should approach them this way.

In contrast to this approach, in recent days there has been a resurgence of scholars—even among those claiming to be evangelicals—who prefer to call the biblical narratives "myths" or just "stories," by which they mean fictional accounts related to the supernatural that include profound truths but that do not supply us with actual facts of history. They assert that the biblical text alone is what is authoritative and what gives rise to our faith; faith grows out of the Bible's message, they say, and is not related to the historicity of the events addressed. I have eight responses.

1. As a genre, biblical narrative is not myth.

It is true that the biblical story line is thoroughly centered on the Lord—his deeds and his words overseeing and judging all events in space and time. But the inclusion of

God does not make the Bible myth. We have already noted that Old Testament narrative seeks to show that what was myth in the ancient world has real and factual substance in Israel's time and history. We must recognize that Scripture is focused on a very real world, with real persons, real places, and real times, and that the biblical authors believed God to be part of this real world. Mythical monsters and places are not part of the presentation. They are present in Scripture in other genres, such as apocalyptic (e.g., Dan. 7), but they are not found in biblical narrative. We do find a tree of life and a talking serpent (Gen. 3), even a talking donkey (Num. 22)! Yet these are no different from other intrusions of the miraculous in space and time that we can only describe as the intervention of God—things such as the angel of death passing through Egypt, forty years of daily manna in the wilderness, YHWH's fiery glory visibly settling in the temple, the widow's son being raised to life, and an ax head floating. The Bible presents itself as history, not myth, and indeed it calls us to guard ourselves from the latter (1 Tim. 1:3–4; 4:7; 2 Peter 1:16).

2. Priority lies with texts.

Far too often scholars assert, "Archaeology has proved such and such." But the social sciences (archaeology, anthropology, sociology, etc.) deal only with general features of societies and cultures, and pots don't talk. Texts alone clarify specific events and individuals, and this places a priority on Scripture as an ancient textual witness.

3. Historicity and authority go hand in hand.

Because the Bible is God's revelation (2 Tim. 3:16), its historicity and authority are intimately united. We cannot deny the reality of an event that the biblical authors believed to be historical and still say that we affirm Scripture's authority. Moreover, we must recognize that the Bible is *not* like any other book, for it alone is special revelation. Thus, the level to which we affirm its claims is the level to which we submit ourselves to God himself.

4. The mention of the divine or of supernatural events does not mean that they are unhistorical.

Since the late 1800s, historical criticism has asserted that a belief in God is unscientific and that any claims to the intrusion of the supernatural are unverifiable and therefore unhistorical. In their attempt to gain greater objectivity, however, historical critics have increased subjectivity, limiting the possibilities to only that which their worldviews allow. Rather than being initially skeptical about Scripture's truth claims (= *principle of criticism*), scholars should engage in a thoughtful appraisal of the evidence in keeping with its source. Rather than limiting what can qualify as "history" to present human experience (= *principle of analogy*), they should judge historical plausibility by the reasonableness of arguments made for belief in occurrences with which the historians may themselves have no personal connection. Rather than limiting potential historical causation to natural forces or human agency (= *principle of*

correlation), they should broaden causation to include all *personal* forces (such as God) and not limit it to just natural or material forces.[10]

With these, atheistic biblical historians should at least give the same level of credence to the biblical witness that historians working in areas other than Scripture give to their source data. When historians engage extrabiblical texts that mention the supernatural, even those who do not affirm such a possibility read the testimonies as religious encoding that in no way calls into question the viability of the other facts. For example, scholars do not question Sennacherib's firsthand account of his conquest of the Levant even though it is loaded with theological perspective and propagandistic bias.[11] Why, then, should scholars question the historical claims of the same events in 2 Kings 18:13–19:37? Similarly, as noted by ancient historian Edwin Yamauchi, Herodotus's belief in the "Delphic Oracles" does not disqualify him as an accurate source for Greek history, nor does Joan of Arc's unverifiable divine call to action move scholars to doubt that she roused her countrymen to push English forces out of France.[12]

5. Verifiability is not essential to make history.

We should not require extrabiblical confirmation in order to justify biblical claims, for there are just too many gaps in our knowledge of the past. For example, only in 1842 did we gain secondary attestation of the reign of Sargon II (Isa. 20:1).[13] Furthermore, as Yamauchi notes, it was not until 1932 that scholars identified the Babylonian exile of Jehoiachin on extrabiblical tablets (2 Kings 24:11–13), and only in 1961 and 1966, respectively, did archaeologists discover epigraphic attestation of Pontius Pilate (Luke 3:1; 23:1; Acts 4:27) and Felix the procurator (Acts 24).[14] The James Ossuary discovery in 2002 was the first extrabiblical source that directly mentioned the names of Jesus, his brother James, and their father Joseph.[15] No one can question that these findings accent the historicity of the biblical assertions, but the biblical figures did not all of a sudden become real when these texts were unearthed.

Furthermore, many of the events to which Scripture points are not the type to which we would expect material outside the Bible to refer. The patriarchs, for example, were relative "no-names" in the ancient world, so we should not anticipate finding "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" mentioned elsewhere. Nevertheless, the details of the

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10. For these three responses, see William J. Abraham, *Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); cf. Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

11. See *ANET* 287–88; *COS* 2:300–305.

12. Edwin Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*, ed. A. R. Millard, James K. Hoffmeier, and David W. Baker (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 27–28.

13. See *COS* 3:293.

14. Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," 26–27.

15. Some scholars do question the genuineness of the James Ossuary, but for a strong case for its authenticity, see Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington III, *The Brother of Jesus: The Dramatic Story and Meaning of the First Archaeological Link to Jesus and His Family*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2004).

patriarchal stories fit very nicely into the time period of which they propose to be a part.[16] Similarly, because so much ancient historiography was designed to make monarchs look good, we should not expect to find extrabiblical attestation of major imperial embarrassments such as YHWH's victory over Egypt at the exodus (Ex. 14–15) and his decimation of Sennacherib's army in the days of Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:35; Isa. 37:36). Still, there is substantial extrabiblical support for the veracity of both these biblical accounts.[17] Moreover, we should see the Bible's inclusion of both the victories and the failures/defeats of its key human characters as support for its own historical claims.

6. We should view the Bible's claims as innocent until proven guilty.

There is no evidence that Israel falsified or invented statements of fact, and this is highly unlikely due to the nature of the message and the judgment that the text itself places on false teachers (e.g., Deut. 13:1–5).[18] Furthermore, no other field of historical research practices a "guilty until proven innocent" approach, so why should this be done in biblical studies? As Craig Blomberg notes, historians should assume the factuality of the details in a work unless there is a good reason to believe otherwise.[19] K. A. Kitchen notes that in Egyptology, for example, the *Turin Papyrus of Kings*, dating to Egypt's Nineteenth Dynasty, lists seventy-six monarchs for the Fourteenth Dynasty, some five hundred years before, and although most of the rulers named are found only in this document, historians do not deny the existence of these kings.[20] Similarly, G. J. Renier notes that most of the works of Livy, the first books of Gregory of Tours's *A History of the Franks*, contain events known only from these sources, yet "since there is no other way of knowing the story they tell us, we must provisionally accept their version."[21]

7. God's revelation in history is the source, not the product, of biblical faith.

Biblical faith is grounded in God's revelation in history, and the significance of the biblical testimony stands or falls on whether or not the central events actually happened. If we view the central events as historical—creation, fall, flood, patriarchs, exodus, Sinai, wilderness, conquest, kingdoms, exile, initial restoration, Christ's death

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16. See K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 313–72.

17. On the exodus, see Charles F. Aling, *Egypt and Bible History: From Earliest Times to 1000 B.C.*, Baker Studies in Biblical Archaeology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); John Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*, 2nd ed., JSOT-Sup 5 (Sheffield, UK: Almond Press, 1981); James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 241–312; David Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History?* (St. Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2015); Timothy P. Mahoney with Steven Law, *Patterns of Evidence: Exodus* (St. Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2015). On Sennacherib's 701 B.C. siege of Jerusalem during the days of King Hezekiah, see William R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: New Studies*, Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 40–42, 50–51.

18. See Stuart Lasine, "Fiction, Falsehood, and Reality in Hebrew Scripture," *HS* 25 (1984): 25–40.

19. Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 304.

20. K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 30.

21. G. J. Renier, *History: Its Purpose and Method* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), 90–91. I was directed to this source in Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 304.

and resurrection, the growth of the early church—then we ought to consider the other noncentral events as factually accurate as well.

Most professing evangelicals will affirm the necessity of Jesus' resurrection for our faith to stand (1 Cor. 15:14). Nevertheless, some of these same persons discount many of the Old Testament's historical claims, viewing them more as parables than as testimonies to God's acts in history. Sternberg once noted that when interpreters view the Bible's historical narratives as fiction, they change YHWH from "the lord of history into a creature of imagination, with the most disastrous results."[22] Many dangerous teachings are being propounded today.

For example, many want to affirm Jesus' historicity yet deny a historical Adam and fall. But they should ask themselves, "In what *Jesus* do I believe?" Is he the one who said that not simply the ideas but the very letters and words of Scripture matter and point to him (Matt. 5:18)? Is he the Jesus who was the Word made flesh, who was "in the beginning with God" and through whom "all things were made" (John 1:2–3)? Is he the Jesus whose human lineage stretches back to Adam (Luke 3:38) and who affirmed the historical reality both of God's creating male and female in the beginning as a paradigm for marriage (Matt. 19:4) and of the global rebellion in the days of Noah (Luke 17:26–27)? Is he the Jesus who declared that Scripture "cannot be broken" (John 10:35) and who Paul emphasized answers the sin problem produced by a historical Adam (Rom. 5:12–19; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45)? If the *Jesus* we affirm is not *this Jesus*, then we are in peril of losing the historical grounding of our faith.[23]

8. Taking the Bible on its own terms requires a Christian theistic rather than a non-Christian or atheistic approach to interpretation.

The Spirit of the triune God guided every word of the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Peter 1:21). The whole of it is *Christian* Scripture, with all the Old Testament pointing to Christ and fully understood only in light of his coming (Luke 24:44–46; 2 Cor. 3:14) and all the New Testament built on his person and work (Eph. 2:20).[24] Every reader of Scripture has a worldview and approaches the Bible with certain assumptions about the nature of reality (i.e., faith claims). We take Scripture on its own terms, however, only when we approach it through the lens of Christian theism. When atheism or aberrant forms of theism guide one's hermeneutical system, one cannot expect to grasp Scripture's *intended* message.

In conclusion, I believe the biblical authors viewed their narratives as "history"— accurate accounts of what God was doing in space and time. A faithful interpretive approach to the biblical text requires us to take it on its own terms, affirming Scripture's claims in accordance with its revealed intentions.

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22. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 32.

23. For more on this, see Jason S. DeRouchie, review of *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither? Three Views on the Bible's Earliest Chapters*, ed. Charles Halton, *Themelios* 40, 3 (2015): 485–90; for an abridged version of this review, see http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/book-reviews-genesis-history-fiction-or-neither-three-views.

24. For more on the Old Testament as *Christian* Scripture, see chapters 10 and 12.

How to Interpret Old Testament Narrative

Narrative is one of the most difficult biblical genres to preach and teach well, because the message is usually more hidden and illustrated than explicit. Numerous named and unnamed characters, various levels of drama, and numerous speeches challenge the best of interpreters to discover a narrative's main point. Yet it can be found, and its clearest statement is usually located in a speech, which in turn provides the lens for understanding the rest of the story.

In this section I am going to highlight four guiding principles for interpreting biblical narrative. In the next section we will then apply these principles to a specific episode in the biblical story.

1. Distinguish the episode and its scenes.

Like many TV dramas, biblical narratives are made up of episodes shaped by scenes (for more on this, see "Basic Rules for Establishing Literary Units" in chapter 2). The sermonic message that stands behind a given story is bound up in the whole episode, and we can easily miss a story's main point if we make our focus too narrow, looking only at a scene. So after establishing that you are looking at a story, the next step in interpreting biblical narrative is to identify the narrative episode and its various scene divisions, remembering that verse and chapter divisions were not inspired. If we are preaching in 1 Samuel 17, we would want to preach the entire story of David's defeat of Goliath and not just cover David's encounter with his brother Eliab or his dialogue with Saul regarding armor and weapons. Only when we look at the whole story do we clearly recognize that it is ultimately *not* a story about David but that he is merely an instrument to point us to the true warrior in the episode. As David says to Goliath in the longest speech of the episode: "This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand" (1 Sam. 17:46–47).

2. Consider literary features and theological trajectories.

a. The Literary Context

As you focus in on your episode, you need to ask, "What leads up to the episode, and how does the episode itself begin and end?" You also need to look more broadly to consider whether the narrator elsewhere offers any clarity on how we are to read a given passage.

b. The Plot Development and Characterization

There are a number of questions to ask here: (i) What is the nature of the drama? What is the conflict or problem? How is it resolved? (ii) Is there repetition? If there is, it can often clarify issues of structure or draw attention to what is important. (iii) God is always the most important character, so what is he saying or doing, and how do his words or deeds relate to the covenant or give clarity to the various scenes of the episode? (iv) Who are the named and secondary human characters, and what relationship do they have with God? What are they saying and doing, and how do their words or actions relate to the covenant or give clarity to the various scenes of the episode? Remember that human characters are examples for us to follow only insofar as they point us to God.

c. Any Editorial Comments

At times the narrator himself will speak into a story, offering commentary and thus giving God's perspective on an event. Such comments are especially helpful to us in discerning the point of an episode, section, or book.

d. How the Narrative Anticipates the Work of Christ

Christ is the ultimate goal of all of the Bible's story, so it is fair and expected to ask of every narrative episode how it helps set the stage for Jesus' coming. It could come through a divine or human speech or action, human failure, or a related event or institution.

3. State in a single sentence the narrative episode's main idea.

Three features are noteworthy here: (a) The main idea will almost always tell us something about God and may also focus on how we are rightly to relate to him. (b) While at times modeled in the characters' actions, the main idea is usually stated explicitly in a speech (whether directly from God, his prophet, or another main human character). (c) The main idea should speak to any generation and should thus be worded to convey the timeless message of the narrative episode.

4. Draft an exegetical outline of the narrative episode.

We'll cover exegetical outlining in greater detail in chapter 6. Nevertheless, the central thrust of the task is to clarify in outline form how every scene and all the parts relate and contribute to the overarching main idea.

As with any other part of Scripture, the goal in working through biblical narrative is to grasp the author's intent for the account. Why did he include the details he did? What was he wanting to teach? Why did he write it that way? Robert Stein has proposed the following helpful exercise for getting at the "why" of biblical narrative. He suggests that we attempt to complete the following sentence:[25]

I, the author of X-biblical book, have narrated to you this account of X-scenario because _____.

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25. Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 157.

Through this simple exercise, we take good steps toward getting to God's sermon bound up in the story—his lasting message for us.

Note that the intention behind a story is different from the story itself. The subject matter is different from its purpose. In the next section we'll apply these principles to the story in 1 Kings 17 that introduces the ministry of the prophet Elijah and highlights his role as a validator of God's Word.

An Example of Interpreting Historical Narrative—1 Kings 17

I now want to apply the principles for interpreting historical narrative to the first account of Elijah the prophet in 1 Kings 17. The ESV opens chapter 17 this way: "Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.'" It's clear that the ESV translator thought chapter 17 marked a fresh beginning, for he translated the וֹ ("and") of the initial *wayyiqtol* (*waw*-consecutive imperfect) as "Now." There are at least two good reasons to affirm this approach and to see a new episode beginning here. First, 17:1 is the first time we have met Elijah the prophet, and his words to King Ahab point the reader forward to anticipate a new drama related to lack of rain. Therefore, 1 Kings 17:1 marks the beginning of a new topic and with that a new episode. Second, the previous chapter ends by using a series of marked clauses to signal the completion of a discourse unit, which suggests that the *wayyiqtol* verb at the head of 17:1 indeed begins something new. Even though it continues on the narrative of King Ahab's reign, it is still a fresh episode in the story.

As we move beyond 1 Kings 17:1, we see a handful of scene divisions that appear to be intentionally tied together. Verse 2 reads, "And the word of the LORD came to him . . . ." In this unit God calls Elijah to go to a brook near the Jordan River where he can drink and where he will be miraculously fed by ravens. "I have commanded the ravens to feed you there," God says (17:4). And the Lord is faithful to his word, meets Elijah, and supplies. But then we read in verse 7, "And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land."

First Kings 17:8 repeats, "Then the word of the LORD came to him . . . ." This repetition with verse 2 raises the possibility that the narrator is about to introduce a parallel account. God now calls Elijah to go outside the boundaries of Israel along the Mediterranean coast to Sidon, where we are told that God has now commanded a widow to feed him. The mention of a command and of food recalls the miraculous provision through the ravens and suggests that this new scene does indeed parallel the first.

Upon meeting the widow, Elijah requests both drink and food. This foreigner then vows before YHWH that she has but enough for herself and her son to have one more meal, and then they will die. At this we get the most extensive quotation in the episode and the only speech that includes a speech within a speech. These factors suggest that it likely has something to do with the main point of the text (1 Kings 17:13–14): "And Elijah said to her, 'Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth."'" Just as God purposed the ravens to meet Elijah's need at the brook, so he purposed this widow to be the instrument through which he would sustain his prophet. And as his word had proved true at the Jordan, so his word would again prove true here. We are told that the widow did as Elijah said and that she and her household ate for many days. Thus we read in verse 16, "The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah."

This seems like a natural break in the story, for we have had two parallel scenes of God's declared word and his faithful fulfillment of his promise. But at this point the story continues, for we read in 1 Kings 17:17, "After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him." God's word is powerful enough to supply bread, but is it powerful enough to awaken the dead? The woman asks Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!" (v. 18). At this Elijah took her son and pleaded with God for the boy's life, and the Lord listened to the prophet and revived the child. And when the woman saw her living son, she declared to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth" (v. 24). The miraculous awakening of the boy validated the words of God through his prophet.

All these various scenes work together to contribute to the episode's message. In contrast, 1 Kings 18:1 moves in a new direction, recalling the initial promise of a drought: "After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, 'Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.'" Chapter 18 shifts the temporal context from immediately following the initial prophecy to three years later, which suggests that we have likely moved to a new episode. The tightness of the introductory statement and three scenes in chapter 17 suggests that the various units are part of a single episode, focusing significantly on the truthfulness of God's word and his willingness and ability to care for the needy in miraculous ways.

In light of the flow of the story and the content of key speeches, in figure 1.4 I offer a main idea and exegetical outline for the episode:

Main idea: Because God has proved his willingness and ability to provide for even unlikely believers by raising a non-Israelite widow's son from the dead, we should affirm that God's word through his prophets is true and authoritative.

I. The Setting to Affirm the Truth and Authority of God's Word: Lack of Rain at God's Word (v. 1)

II. Affirmation of the Truth and Authority of God's Word for an Israelite Prophet (vv. 2–7)

III. Affirmation of the Truth and Authority of God's Word for a Foreign Widow (vv. 8–24)

    A. The experience of the truth and authority of God's word (vv. 8–16)

    B. The validation of the truth and authority of God's word: God's willingness and ability to raise the widow's son from the dead (vv. 17–24)

Fig. 1.4. Main Idea and Exegetical Outline for 1 Kings 17

Upon seeing her boy, the woman declared, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth" (1 Kings 17:24). Because God is both willing and able to care for even the least, we should affirm that his word through his prophets is true and authoritative.

This introductory truth then guides our reading of all the remaining episodes in the section, all of which are governed by the reality of no rain. You likely remember the story of the clash between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. That happens in 1 Kings 18, where the storm god Baal is called on to go head-to-head with YHWH: "If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. . . . You call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, he is God" (18:21, 24). Even with all the prophets ranting and raving, no fire came. Then Elijah prayed for God's miraculous intervention, that "it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word" (18:36). At this, YHWH's fire came, resulting in the people's turning back to the true God in worship (18:38–39). After this, God brought rain on the earth (18:41–46).

When someone is raised from the dead on our behalf, we should realize that God has the power and willingness to fulfill his promises. His Word is both true and authoritative. For the exiles first reading 1–2 Kings, this widow woman's final affirmation of YHWH's truth and authority would have given hope that their context of death could be overcome. What is more, for those of us who have identified by faith with the death and resurrection of Christ, our hope in God should be all the more realized. "Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:20–21). The story in 1 Kings 17 points to the truth of the gospel and should heighten our hope in God's faithfulness both today and forever.

Prophecy and Law

The Distinctive Nature of YHWH-Prophecy

The next several sections address biblical prophecy. The Bible presents YHWH's *prophets* as ambassadors of the heavenly court (2 Kings 17:13; Jer. 23:21–22), individuals whom God commissioned for two key purposes: to *preach* for God to the people and to *pray* for the people to God.

As chief prayer warriors, the prophets regularly interceded to God on behalf of those who were needy and rebellious. God said that Abraham was such a prophet who would pray for Abimelech's life after he claimed Sarah (Gen. 20:7). Moses is the chief example of a prophetic intercessor, for he "stood in the breach before [God], to turn away his wrath from destroying [Israel]" (Ps. 106:23). Even when YHWH commanded him to not intercede (Ex. 32:9–10), Moses was unrelenting in his prophetic role (32:11–14), and the result was God's mercy (32:14; cf. Num. 14:11–20).[26] Similarly, Samuel said that he would sin if he failed to pray for Israel, along with teaching the people God's ways (1 Sam. 12:23). Both Elijah and the prophets of Baal "call upon the name" of their respective gods (1 Kings 18:24, 26, 36–37), and Naaman the Aramean expected Elisha to intercede on his behalf (2 Kings 5:8). Amos pleaded with YHWH two times to forgive Israel and to withhold his punishment against the northern kingdom, and the Lord relented (Amos 7:1–6). God expected the true prophets who bore his word to pray for his people's needs: "If they are prophets, and if the word of the Lord is with them, then let them intercede with the Lord of hosts" (Jer. 27:18). As with Moses, the Lord charged Jeremiah to act opposite of his prophetic role (7:16; cf. 11:14; 14:11–12). Nevertheless, the prophet did pray, and he later implored God to protect him in return for his having done so (18:20). YHWH told Ezekiel that he was seeking a man to "build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it" (Ezek. 22:30), but none could be found.

26. Ironically, YHWH's command, "Let me alone, that I may destroy them" (Deut. 9:14; cf. Ex. 32:10), was actually the means that God used to call the prophet to pray. God gave instruction that would have been sin for Moses to obey, since prophets were supposed to stand in the breach on behalf of God's people. In the Deuteronomy recounting, Moses stresses how Israel's sin was a serious offense against God (Deut. 9:14, 16, 18). Nevertheless, God asks the prophet to do what he himself would promise never to do (4:30–31; 31:6). That Deuteronomy 9:14 uses the verb "leave alone" (Hiphil of רפה) instead of "cause rest" (Hiphil of נוח-1) as found in Exodus 32:10 suggests that Moses in Deuteronomy is intentionally echoing the divine promise in Deuteronomy 4:31 ("He will not leave you [Hiphil of רפה] or destroy you") and highlighting that he understood YHWH's intent in calling him to get out of the way to be that he actually wanted him to intercede as the means for preserving his people.

Along with kneeling as intercessors, the prophets were mouthpieces, God's preachers, who authoritatively presented the revelation of God to his people. Sometimes they did this by *foretelling* future realities, but more often, it was through *forthtelling* God's words in order to direct human action in the present and to reorient their audiences to reality from YHWH's perspective (2 Kings 17:13; 2 Chron. 36:15–16; Isa. 44:26; Jer. 23:21–22; Hos. 12:9–10; Hag. 1:13; Zech. 7:11–12; Mal. 3:1). At times the divine word came to a prophet through a dream or vision (e.g., Num. 12:6–7; Isa. 6:1–13; Jer. 31:26; Zech. 2:1; Amos 8:1–3), but normally we are not told the mode of inspiration. Sometimes we hear of the Holy Spirit's involvement in inspiration (e.g., 1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 1 Kings 22:24; Neh. 9:30; Ezek. 11:5; Joel 2:28–29; Mic. 3:8; Zech. 7:12), and oracles are frequently preceded with the formulaic expression: "The word of the Lord came to me, saying . . ." (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:4; 1 Kings 21:28; Jer. 1:2; Ezek. 36:16; Hag. 1:3; Zech. 4:8). The divine revelations were usually spoken as sermons, but at times they were framed as parables or allegories (e.g., 2 Sam. 12:1–7; Isa. 5:1–7; Ezek. 16, 23). Other times the prophets dramatically performed their oracles, symbolically working out God's message (e.g., 1 Sam. 15:27–28; 1 Kings 11:29–37; 2 Kings 13:14–20; Jer. 13:1–11; Ezek. 4).

With reference to content, some oracles provided a divine answer to human questions (e.g., Gen. 15:2–5; 2 Sam. 2:1; Hab. 1–2), but most were divinely initiated responses to Israel's covenant fidelity (or lack of it) at a particular time in history. That is, as covenant enforcers, the prophets confronted Israel's sin, called the people back to their commitment to YHWH, and reminded them of the covenant curses and blessings, the promises of death and life, that YHWH had sworn to honor (Lev. 26; Deut. 4:25–31; 28; 30:1–10). The prophets pronounced oracles of warning or imminent punishment against individuals (e.g., 1 Sam. 13:13–14; 1 Kings 11:11–13) and nations (e.g., Isa. 17; Jer. 8:4–12; Ezek. 15; Amos 4:1–3; Mic. 3:7–12) that failed to live loyally in the covenant or to treat God and his people with respect. They also declared salvation and restoration oracles that predicted a day when God would renew his relationship with his people (e.g., Isa. 10:5–12:6; Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:16–32; Amos 9:13–15; Zech. 8:1–8).

Both Scripture (e.g., Num. 22–24; 1 Kings 18:20–40) and numerous extrabiblical texts uncovered throughout the ancient world tell us that many pagans were speaking oracles and that words from the gods were not restricted to biblical prophecy. Like YHWH, these pagan false deities demanded homage and declared judgments. They warned of danger and offered assurance in the face of peril. They foretold national destruction and promised kingdom renewal. But YHWH's prophecy was nevertheless distinct in at least three ways:

1. Among the gods of the ancient world, YHWH alone spoke in order to establish, maintain, and enforce a covenant relationship with a people.

As Moses testifies in Deuteronomy 4:7–8, "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?" True prophecy promotes sustained loyalty to YHWH alone, exposing iniquity and calling for repentance that leads to blessing (Deut. 13:2–3; Lam. 2:14).

2. Whereas many pagan oracles were ambiguous as to their intent and fulfillment, YHWH's charges and predictions were intentionally clear and accurate.

Moses asserts in Deuteronomy 18:22, "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken" (cf. 1 Kings 22:28; Isa. 44:7–8; Jer. 28:8–9; Lam. 2:14; Ezek. 33:33). All of YHWH's predictions come true.

3. YHWH's prophecy includes no sign of pagan practices and finds its confirmation in God's Word alone.

Isaiah 8:19–20 declares: "And when they say to you, 'Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,' should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn." In YHWH-oracles a staunch monotheism confronts polytheistic idolatry. "You shall have no other gods before me" (Deut. 5:7; cf. vv. 8–10; 6:4–5; Ps. 115; Isa. 40:18–31). YHWH is a jealous God who demands total allegiance. His voice will be heard, and his Word must be heeded.

The Categories of Prophetic Speech

An *oracle* is any divine pronouncement through a prophet that directs human action in the present or foretells future events. Prophetic oracles in Scripture are usually made up of one or more of the following speech types: *indictment*, *instruction*, *warning/punishment*, and *hope/salvation*.

1. Indictment	Statement of the offense *(Specification of covenant stipulations violated)*
2. Instruction	Clarification of the expected response *(Call to heed covenant stipulations)*
3. Warning/Punishment	Declaration of the punishment to be carried out *(Warning or promise of covenant curse)*
4. Hope/Salvation	Affirmation of future hope or deliverance *(Promise of covenant-restoration blessings)*

Fig. 1.5. Categories of Prophetic Speech

1. Indictment

A chief role of the prophet was to confront the covenantal violations of God's people. "I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (Mic. 3:8 ; cf. Isa. 58:1). Often, the prophets identified the people's specific covenant violations. Micah, for example, declared: "Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the Lord and say, 'Is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us'" (3:9–11). Similarly, Zephaniah proclaimed, "Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the oppressing city! She listens to no voice; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the Lord; she does not draw near to her God. Her officials within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave nothing till the morning. Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men; her priests profane what is holy; they do violence to the law" (Zeph. 3:1–4).

2. Instruction

Instruction appears when the prophet guides the people in the way they should go, often recalling Moses' specific commands in the Law: "The Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers" (2 Kings 17:13). Thus, Micah wrote, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic. 6:8). And Zephaniah pleaded, "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord" (Zeph. 2:3).

3. Warning/Punishment

When it comes to declarations of punishment and salvation, it is very important to recognize the close tie between Moses and the later prophets such as Isaiah, Obadiah, and Haggai. When the Latter Prophets spoke words of warning and words of hope, they were directly building on the covenant curses and restoration blessings that Moses spoke in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–32. A close look at these texts reveals at least ten original blessings, twenty-seven different curses, and ten restoration blessings that would be enjoyed after the curse was overcome. Figure 1.6 gives an overview of all of these.

Blessings	

1. YHWH's presence / favor / loyalty (Lev. 26:11–12)
2. Confirmation of the covenant (Lev. 26:9)
3. Be a holy people to YHWH (Deut. 28:9)
4. Rains in season (Lev. 26:4; Deut. 28:12)
5. Abounding prosperity and productivity:
  a. General (Deut. 28:12);
  b. Fruit of the womb (Lev. 26:9; Deut. 28:4, 11);
  c. Fruit of the livestock (Deut. 28:4, 11);
  d. Fruit of the ground (Lev. 26:4–5, 10; Deut. 28:4, 8, 11)
	6. General and unspecified (Deut. 28:2, 6, 8, 12–13)
	7. Peace and security in the land with no fear:
	  a. General (Lev. 26:5–6);
	  b. From harmful animals (Lev. 26:6);
	  c. From enemies (Lev. 26:6)
	8. Victory over enemies (Lev. 26:7–8; Deut. 28:7)
	9. Freedom from slavery (Lev. 26:13)
	10. Global influence and witness (Deut. 28:1, 10, 12)

Curses	

1. Anger and rejection from YHWH (Lev. 26:17, 24, 28, 41; Deut. 4:24–25; 29:20, 24, 27–28; 31:17–18, 29; 32:16, 19–22, 30)
2. Rejection and destruction of the cult (Lev. 26:31)
3. War and its ravages:
  a. General (Lev. 26:17, 25, 33, 37; Deut. 28:25, 49, 52; 32:23–24, 30, 41–42);
  b. Siege (Lev. 26:25–26, 29; Deut. 28:52–53, 55, 57)
4. Fear, terror, and horror (Lev. 26:16–17, 36–37; Deut. 28:66–67; 32:25)
5. Occupation and oppression by enemies and aliens (Lev. 26:16–17, 32; Deut. 28:31, 33, 43–44, 48, 68; 32:21)
6. Agricultural disaster and nonproductivity:
  a. General (Lev. 26:20; Deut. 28:17–18, 22, 40; 29:23);
  b. Drought (Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:22–24);
  c. Crop pests (Deut. 28:38–42)
7. Starvation / famine (Lev. 26:26, 29, 45; Deut. 28:53–56; 32:24)
	8. Illness, pestilence, and contamination (Lev. 26:16; Deut. 28:21–22, 27–28, 35, 59–61; 29:22; 32:24, 39)
	9. Desolation:
	  a. Of holy places (Lev. 26:31);
	  b. Of cities and towns (Lev. 26:31, 33);
	  c. Of the land (Lev. 26:32–35, 43; Deut. 28:51; 29:23)
	10. Destruction by fire (Deut. 28:24; 32:22)
	11. Harm from wild animals (Lev. 26:22; Deut. 32:24)
	12. Decimation and infertility:
	  a. Of family (Lev. 26:22; Deut. 28:18, 59);
	  b. Of cattle (Lev. 26:22; Deut. 28:18, 51);
	  c. Of population generally (Lev. 26:22, 36; Deut. 4:27; 28:62; 32:36)
	13. Exile and captivity:
	  a. Of the people (Lev. 26:33–34, 36, 38–39, 41, 44; Deut. 4:27; 28:36–37, 41, 63–64, 68; 29:28; 30:4; 32:26);
	  b. Of the king (Deut. 28:36)

Fig. 1.6. Mosaic Covenant Blessings, Curses, and Restoration Blessings

Curses	
14. Forced idolatry in exile (Deut. 4:28; 28:36, 64)	22. Denial of burial (Deut. 28:26)
15. Futility (Lev. 26:16, 20; Deut. 28:20, 29–31, 33, 38–41)	23. Becoming like the cities of the plain (Deut. 29:23)
16. Dishonor and degradation (Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:20, 25, 37, 43–44, 68)	24. Death and destruction (Lev. 26:36, 39; Deut. 4:26; 28:20–22, 44, 48, 51, 61; 29:20; 30:15, 18–19; 31:17; 32:25–26, 35, 39, 42)
17. Loss of possessions and impoverishment (Deut. 28:31)	25. General and unspecified (Deut. 4:30; 28:20, 24, 45, 59, 61, 63; 29:19, 21–22; 31:17, 21, 29; 32:23, 35)
18. Loss of family (Deut. 28:30, 32, 41; 32:25)	
19. Helplessness and stumbling (Lev. 26:36–37; Deut. 28:29, 32; 32:35–36; 38–39)	26. General punishment, curse, and vengeance (Lev. 26:41, 43; Deut. 28:16, 20–21, 27; 30:19; 32:35, 41, 43)
20. Psychological afflictions (Deut. 28:20, 28, 34, 65–67)	27. Multiple punishments (Lev. 26:18, 21, 24, 28)
21. Lack of peace and rest (Deut. 28:65)	

Restoration Blessings	
1. Renewal of YHWH's presence, favor, and loyalty (Lev. 26:42, 45; Deut. 4:29, 31; 30:3, 9)	6. Restoration of general prosperity, well-being, and wealth (Deut. 30:3, 5, 9; 32:39)
2. Renewal of the covenant (Lev. 26:42, 44–45; Deut. 4:31)	7. Return from exile and repossession of the land (Deut. 30:3–5)
3. Restoration of true worship and ability to be faithful (Deut. 4:30; 30:6, 8)	8. Reunification (Deut. 30:3–4)
4. Population increase (Deut. 30:5, 9)	9. Power over enemies and aliens (Deut. 30:7)
5. Agricultural bounty (Lev. 26:42; Deut. 30:9)	10. Freedom and restoration from death and destruction (Lev. 26:44; Deut. 30:6; 32:39)

All references are from Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 4; 28–32. No single prophetic book, except perhaps Isaiah, mentions all categories. The lists of "Curses" and "Restoration Blessings" are adapted from pp. 1259–60 in "Malachi" by Douglas Stuart in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, edited by Thomas Edward McComiskey, copyright ©1998 by Thomas Edward McComiskey. Used by permission of Baker. www.bakerpublishinggroup.com.

Fig. 1.6. Mosaic Covenant Blessings, Curses, and Restoration Blessings (cont.)

With respect to oracles of punishment, Daniel prays, "All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him" (Dan. 9:11). Prophetic oracles of warning/punishment are words of warning or of imminent punishment against those who have failed to live loyally to the covenant or who have failed to treat God and his people with respect—whether individuals (e.g., 1 Sam. 13:13–14; 1 Kings 11:11–13) or nations (e.g., Isa. 17; Jer. 8:4–12; Ezek. 15; Amos 4:1–3; Mic. 3:7–12). These oracles specify the

outworking of the covenant curses detailed in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 4, 27–28. One example comes in Ezekiel 21:14–17:

> As for you, son of man, prophesy. Clap your hands and let the sword come down twice, yes, three times, the sword for those to be slain. It is the sword for the great slaughter, which surrounds them, that their hearts may melt, and many stumble. At all their gates I have given the glittering sword. Ah, it is made like lightning; it is taken up for slaughter. Cut sharply to the right; set yourself to the left, wherever your face is directed. I also will clap my hands, and I will satisfy my fury; I the LORD have spoken.

Echoed here is the Mosaic curse of exile and captivity, listed as curse #13 in figure 1.6. As YHWH warned through Moses: "And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste" (Lev. 26:33).

4. Hope/Salvation

Statements of hope/salvation unpack the restoration blessings that YHWH promises in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 4, 30, along with the more specific dynastic promises to David (2 Sam. 7:12–16). The words of comfort predict a day when God, after punishing his people with exile and death, would renew his relationship with his people (e.g., Isa. 10:5–12:6; Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:16–32; Amos 9:13–15). Consider, for example, Zechariah 8:2–3, 7–8:

> Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath. Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain. . . . Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.

In the backdrop here are a number of Mosaic restoration blessings listed in figure 1.6: #1, renewal of YHWH's presence, favor, and loyalty; #2, renewal of the covenant; #7, return from exile and repossession of the land. The Lord first proclaimed these promises through Moses, and now he is reasserting their coming fulfillment through his postexilic prophet.

As you work your way through the oracles in books such as Deuteronomy and the Latter Prophets, consider what kind of prophetic speech you are reading. If you are in one of the Latter Prophets and read pronouncements of indictment or instruction, consider which if any of Moses' commands may be on the mind of the preacher. If you read declarations of punishment or salvation, look back at Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 4, 27–30 to consider which of the blessings, curses, or restoration blessings the

prophet is anticipating. Also, always keep in mind the Davidic covenant promises that made more specific the kingdom hopes of a royal deliverer and new covenant Mediator that Moses initially proclaimed (e.g., Gen. 3:15; 22:17b–18; 49:8–10; Num. 24:17–19; Deut. 18:15–18 with 34:10–12). God's prophets were covenant enforcers, and we have to read their words in light of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants, among others. They had their Bibles open when they were preaching, and so should we.

Law as Covenant Stipulation

Before laying out some principles for interpreting Old Testament prophecy, I want to detail further the specific shape of biblical law, which controlled the context for prophetic preaching. God gave his law in the framework of covenant relationship, with the various statutes and judgments supplying the stipulations of the covenant. I noted how the classical prophets such as Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Malachi were covenant enforcers, speaking with their Bibles open to Moses' words. Moses himself was the greatest of all Old Testament prophets, supplying both the content and pattern for most Old Testament proclamation.

Moses' laws come to us in two forms, which scholars have tagged as *apodictic* and *casuistic*. **Apodictic laws** are those that are base principles stated in such a way that there is no qualification or exception. In contrast, **casuistic laws** are always situational, related to specific circumstances. Casuistic laws are often applications of apodictic laws.

Apodictic	Casuistic
Ex. 20:3. You shall have no other gods before me. Ex. 20:16. You shall never bear false witness against your neighbor.	Ex. 21:28. If a bull gores a man or a woman to death, the bull must be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible. Ex. 22:26–27. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.
Unconditional and imperative, usually beginning with a volitional verb	Conditional and declarative, usually beginning with "if" or "when"
Second person	Usually third person
General: without qualification or exception	Specific: based on actual situations, often with motive or exception clauses
Often in negative form	Usually in positive form
Adapted from Daniel I. Block, "Reading the Decalogue from Right to Left: The Ten Principles of Covenant Relationship in the Hebrew Bible," in *How I Love Your Torah, O LORD! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 31.	

Fig. 1.7. Formal Distinctions in Old Testament Law

Along with identifying these formal distinctions, it is helpful to recognize the different types of laws based on their variations in content. Figure 1.8 provides an overview of five different types of laws found in the Old Testament: *criminal*, *civil*, *family*, *cultic/ceremonial*, and *compassion*.

Criminal Laws
Laws governing crimes or offenses that put the welfare of the whole community at risk; the offended party is the state or national community, and therefore the punishment is on behalf of the whole community in the name of the highest state authority, which in Israel meant YHWH.

Kidnapping (Ex. 21:16; Deut. 24:7)

Sustained insubordination to parents (Ex. 21:15, 17; Deut. 21:18–21)

Homicide/premeditated or avoidable murder (Ex. 21:14; Num. 35:16–21, 30–31; Deut. 19:11–13)

Religious malpractice:

    a. Sabbath-breaking (Ex. 31:14–15; 35:2; cf. Num. 15:32–36)

    b. False prophecy (Deut. 13:1–5; 18:20)

    c. Idolatry (Ex. 22:20; Lev. 19:4; Deut. 13:1–18; 17:2–7)

    d. Child sacrifice (Lev. 20:1–5)

    e. Witchcraft (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:27)

    f. Blasphemy (Lev. 24:14–23)

Sexual offenses:

    a. Adultery when married or engaged (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22–24; cf. Gen. 38:24)

    b. Concealed premarital unchastity (Deut. 22:20–21)

    c. Rape of an engaged girl (Deut. 22:25)

    d. Prostitution of a priest's daughter (Lev. 21:9)

    e. Incest (Lev. 20:11–12, 14)

    f. Homosexuality (Lev. 20:13)

    g. Bestiality (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 20:15–16)

False witness in a capital case (Deut. 19:16–21)

Note: Nearly all the commands and prohibitions in the Decalogue are considered criminal offenses.

Civil Laws
Laws governing private disputes between citizens or organizations in which the public authorities are appealed to for judgment or called on to intervene; the offended party is not the state or national community.

Non-premeditated killing:

    a. Accidental death (Ex. 21:13; Num. 35:9–15; Deut. 19:1–13)

    b. Death due to self-defense (Ex. 22:2–3)

Fig. 1.8. Types of Old Testament Laws by Content

Civil Laws
Assault:
a. Human against human (Ex. 21:18–19, 22)
b. Animal against human (Ex. 21:28–32)
c. Animal against animal (Ex. 21:33–36)
Breaches of trust:
a. Theft (Ex. 22:1–4, 7–9, 12; Lev. 19:11, 13)
b. Destruction of property (Ex. 22:5–6, 14)
Falsehood as a witness:
a. In noncapital case (Ex. 23:1–3)
b. In commerce/trade (Lev. 19:35–36)
Limited family issues:
a. Premarital unchastity between consenting adults, whether real (Ex. 22:16–17; Lev. 19:20–22; Deut. 22:28–29) or potential (Deut. 22:13–21)
b. Postdivorce situations (Deut. 24:1–3)
c. The mistreatment of slaves (Ex. 21:20–21, 26–27)
d. The handling of runaway slaves (Deut. 23:15–16)
e. Failure to accept levirate marriage duties (Deut. 25:7–10)

Family Laws
Noncivil, domestic laws governing the Israelite household.

Levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5–6)
Inheritance (Deut. 21:15–16)
Jubilee and the redemption of land and persons (Lev. 25)
Family discipleship (Deut. 6:6–9, 20–25; 11:18–21)
Respect of and obedience to parents (Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3; Deut. 5:16)
Turning a daughter into a prostitute (Lev. 19:29)
Slavery, including limits of service, inheritance, and protection (Ex. 21:2–11; Deut. 15:1–23)
Maintaining gender distinctions (Deut. 22:5)

Fig. 1.8. Types of Old Testament Laws by Content (cont.)

Cultic/Ceremonial Laws
Laws governing the visible forms and rituals of Israel's religious life.

Sacrifice:

    a. Altar and sacrifices (Ex. 20:24–26)

    b. Offering of firstfruits (Ex. 22:29–30; 23:19)

    c. Sacrifices:

        • General guidelines (Ex. 23:18; 29:38–46; Lev. 1–7; 19:5–8)

        • Day of Atonement (Lev. 16)

        • Location (Lev. 17:1–9; Deut. 12)

Sacred calendar:

    a. Weekly Sabbaths (Ex. 20:8–11; 23:12; 31:12–17; 35:1–3; Lev. 19:3, 30; Deut. 5:12–15)

    b. Sabbatical year (Ex. 23:10–11; Lev. 25:3–7; Deut. 15:1–6)

    c. Feasts and sacred days (Ex. 23:14–19; 34:22–23; Lev. 23:9–22; Deut. 16:1–17)

    d. Jubilee (Lev. 25:8–55)

Sacred symbolism and distinction:

    a. Tabernacle (Ex. 25–30)

    b. Priesthood:

        • Garments (Ex. 28)

        • Consecration (Ex. 29:1–37; Lev. 8)

        • Administration of sacrifices (Ex. 29:38–46; Lev. 6–7)

    c. Ritual purity (clean/unclean):

        • Food laws (Lev. 11:2–47; 20:24–26; Deut. 14:4–20) and the eating of blood (Lev. 17:10–16; 19:26)

        • Childbirth (Lev. 12)

        • Leprosy (Lev. 13–14)

        • Bodily discharges (Lev. 15)

    d. Distinction from the pagan nations:

        • Interbreeding/mixing of cattle, seeds, garments (Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9–11)

        • Trimming of sideburns, cutting of body, tattoos (Lev. 19:27–28; Deut. 14:1)

Fig. 1.8. Types of Old Testament Laws by Content (cont.)

Compassion Laws
"Laws" dealing with charity, justice, and mercy toward others. These are not exactly the kinds of laws that can be enforced in court, but God knows the heart.

Protection and care of others:

    a. The sojourner (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:9–10, 33–34; Deut. 14:28–29; 24:19–22)

    b. The widow and orphan (Ex. 22:22–24; Deut. 14:28–29; 24:19–22)

    c. The poor (Ex. 22:25–27; 23:6; Lev. 19:9–10; Deut. 15:7–11; 24:10–13, 19–22)

    d. One's neighbor (Deut. 19:13, 16–18)

    e. The disabled (Lev. 19:14; Deut. 27:18)

    f. The Levite (Deut. 14:28–29)

    g. The released slave (Deut. 15:12–15)

    h. The hired servant (Deut. 24:14–15)

Justice and impartiality (Ex. 23:7–8; Lev. 19:15; Deut. 24:17–18;

    27:19, 25)

Honor of the elderly (Lev. 19:32)

Return of an enemy or brother's lost goods (Ex. 22:4; Deut. 22:1–3)

Help of an enemy or brother in need (Ex. 23:5; Deut. 22:4)

Excusal from war:

    a. For a new homeowner (Deut. 20:5)

    b. For a new business owner (Deut. 20:6)

    c. For a newly married man (Deut. 20:7; 24:5)

Marriage to foreign widows of war (Deut. 20:10–14)

Preservation of means for food for future generations (Deut. 20:6–7; 25:4)

Building safe homes (Deut. 20:8)

Respect for others' means of sustenance (Deut. 23:24–25; 24:6)

Prepared by both Jason S. DeRouchie and Kenneth J. Turner. Originally published in DeRouchie, ed., *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About*, 466–67. Used by permission. The examples are only illustrative. The five main categories are taken from Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 288–301, which he adapted from Anthony Phillips, *Ancient Israel's Criminal Law: A New Approach to the Decalogue* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 2, 13.

Fig. 1.8. Types of Old Testament Laws by Content (cont.)

As you read through books such as Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, keep your eyes open to the different forms and types of laws, and as you work through the Old Testament's narratives, prophecies, and wisdom sayings, consider how they relate to Moses' original covenantal instruction. We'll consider how Christians are to relate to old covenant laws in chapter 12, which focuses on practical theology.

Guidelines for Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy

As you work your way through biblical prophecy, keep in mind the following five principles.[27]

1. Guard against interpretive fallacies. So many people approach Old Testament prophecy in the wrong way.

a. Ancient-Modern Nation Confusion: Attempting to link Old Testament prophecy with particular current political regimes. Not only is the modern, secular state of Israel different from the Israel of the Bible, the linking of unspecified Old Testament prophecies with particular contemporary events or peoples is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Even when the prophets foretell future events, they are still preaching sermons, and their purpose is to awaken fresh levels of covenant loyalty in the present in the light of God's supremacy over all. Even if we can't yet identify all images exactly, the prophets are clear enough in telling us that YHWH is in charge of history and will make all things right.

b. Genre Confusion: Assuming that the interpretational rules for one genre apply to another. Because literature varies so much, the interpreter must be guided by the dual authors' intent, distinguishing literal statements from figures of speech, symbolism, and metaphor, all of which are frequent in the Prophets.

c. Spiritualizing: Removing a statement from the historical truth to which it speaks in order to make a "deeper" or "spiritual" application that is absent from the context.

d. Personalizing: Assuming that a text could apply to you or your group in a way that it does not apply to anyone else.

e. Allegorizing: Assuming that components of a passage have meaning only as symbols of Christian truths. Usually this approach does not consider at all the intent of the biblical author.

f. Universalizing: Treating something unique or uncommon as though it applied to everyone equally.

g. Moralizing: Assuming that principles for living can be derived from every biblical passage. Some texts tell us not how to live but whom we should live for.

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27. The first four were adapted from a course handout from Douglas Stuart, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1999.

   h. *Exemplarizing*: Assuming that because the Bible records an action, it is always an example for us to follow. For example, we would be wrong to conclude from the fact that David committed sexual immorality with Bathsheba that we are justified in doing the same.

   i. *Superficial Christologizing or Typologizing*: Asserting that some person, event, or institution points to Christ without exegetical or theological warrant. We want to find Christ, but only where God intends him to be found.

2. Think in terms of oracles.

Nearly all prophetic teaching is in the form of oracles, self-contained verbal revelations from God, often beginning, "Thus says the Lord." The prophets appear to have spoken or sung the oracles publicly in order to call people to loyalty or to explain what God was doing in history and why.

We must carefully identify the beginning and end of an oracle and be sure that we understand its characteristic terminology, structure, and speech types. We must patiently analyze the oracle's historical, literary, and biblical context, grasping its place in history, the book, and the canon. We must also diligently scrutinize its form, structure and flow, and important words.

Most prophetic oracles fall between strict prose and poetry, and all employ multiple figures of speech. Some are visionary, and therefore we must carefully identify their symbolism for modern audiences unused to such imagery. We must faithfully interpret all oracles within the biblical-theological matrix of all of Scripture. People need to know the "big picture" if they are to orient their lives properly. They need to hear us teach the Prophets accurately.

3. Pay attention to history.

All fifteen Old Testament classical prophets preached during a monumental 340-year period (770–433 B.C.) during which Israel and Judah were reduced from independent nations to a single, pitiful, remnant state (Judah), one tiny district in the huge Persian Empire. Why? It was because their long history of disobedience to God's Mosaic covenant required the unleashing of its curses.

This was an era of dramatic change, and God's prophets clarified for Israel and the world why history was playing out the way it was and how this history fit within God's overall kingdom-building plan culminating in Christ. Were God's ancient promises of Israel's greatness void? Was there any hope for the promised future kingdom? Would the era of curse be supplanted by restoration blessing? Prophetic preaching is significantly about historical developments, and no interpretation of its message that ignores historical context can hope to be accurate.

Figure 1.9 gives an overview of the main world powers and the three main periods for the classical prophets. Note how the arrangement of the Prophets in the Bible is not chronological. This suggests that theology rather than chronology played the decisive factor in ordering the biblical Prophets.

Power & Prophetic Period	Israel	Judah	Canonical Order
Assyria (870–626 b.c.) _____ *8th–early 7th century*	Jonah (ca. 770) Amos (ca. 760) Hosea (ca. 760–730)	Isaiah (ca. 740–700) Micah (ca. 737–690) Nahum (ca. 650)	Jeremiah Ezekiel Isaiah The Twelve Hosea

Babylon (626–539 b.c.) _____ *Late 7th–early 6th century*		Habakkuk (ca. 630) Jeremiah (ca. 627–580) Zephaniah (ca. 622) Joel (ca. 600?) Obadiah (ca. 586?) Ezekiel (ca. 593–570) [*in Babylon*]	Joel
			    Amos
			    Obadiah
			    Jonah
			    Micah
			    Nahum
			    Habakkuk
			    Zephaniah

Persia (539–323 b.c.) _____ *Late 6th–5th century*		Haggai (ca. 520) Zechariah (ca. 520–518) Malachi (ca. 433)	Haggai
			    Zechariah
			    Malachi

The canonical order is taken from Baba Bathra 14b (see "Putting Genre within Its Biblical Context" above). Most of the dates for the prophets are taken from John H. Walton, Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 52.			

Fig. 1.9. The Chronology of the Classical Prophets

4. Remember the covenants and the canon.

YHWH's prophets were enforcers and ambassadors of the various covenants that God had made with those on earth. They also predicted the coming new covenant, which would fulfill in different ways all previous divine-human covenants.

Without question, the Mosaic covenant bore the greatest influence on prophetic preaching (Ex. 19–Deut. 33). It guided the prophets' indictments and instructions toward Israel and also supplied a framework for the blessings, curses, and restoration blessings they pronounced (see Lev. 26; Deut. 4, 27–32).

The first era of temporary blessing was prosperous life in the Promised Land, which culminated in the reigns of David and Solomon. Then, as a result of covenant-breaking, YHWH divided the monarchy and brought the curse of foreign oppression and exile, first against the northern kingdom of Israel and then against the southern kingdom of Judah. Reflecting on the Assyrian conquest of Samaria and the north in

723 B.C., the author of Kings asserted, "This occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God . . . . They would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them" (2 Kings 17:7, 14–15). The devastation of the north was then followed by Babylon's progressive oppression and exile of the southern kingdom of Judah (605, 597, 586 B.C.), climaxing in the destruction of Jerusalem with its temple in 586 B.C.

While YHWH promised through Moses this future desolation (Deut. 4:25–28; 31:16–17, 26–29), curse would not be his final word: "When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. For the LORD your God is a merciful God" (4:30–31). The era of restoration blessing is the new creational age of the new covenant inaugurated in Christ's first coming. God would bring it about by *his* mercy alone and in order to restore honor to *his* name: "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came" (Ezek. 36:22).

YHWH's vow to supply David with an eternal kingdom and throne (2 Sam. 7:12–16) gives focus to the Mosaic restoration promises by identifying that the promised seed of the woman and of Abraham (Gen. 3:15; 22:17b–18) would not only be in the line of Judah (Gen. 49:8–10) but also be in the line of David. The Major and Minor Prophets regularly build on these promises, fusing the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenant hopes into one (e.g., Isa. 9:7; 55:3; Jer. 23:5; 30:9; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24–25; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11; Zech. 13:1).

Because the Mosaic and new covenants operate as stage 1 and stage 2 of the Abrahamic covenant (see "An Example of Text Grammar—Genesis 12:1–3" in chapter 5 and the discussion of "Covenant" under "The Historical Context of Exodus 19:4–6" in chapter 8), the Prophets also put hope in the promises that God had made to the patriarchs (e.g., Isa. 29:22; 41:8; 51:2; Jer. 33:25–26; Mic. 7:20). These included both the assertion that "him who dishonors you I will curse" and the promise that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). Such statements, along with the fact that all the world stands as part of the Adamic-Noahic covenants (see Gen. 9:9–11; Isa. 24:4–6; Zech. 11:10; cf. Isa. 43:27; Hos. 6:7), supply the backdrop for the numerous oracles toward the foreign nations (e.g., Isa. 13–23; Jer. 46–51; Ezek. 25–32; Obad. 1–21; Zeph. 2:5–3:7). In these, YHWH, the covenant Lord of creation, declares that he will both punish and reconcile on a global scale (Zeph. 3:8–10).

In anticipating the days of worldwide kingdom restoration, the Prophets in part predict the present age of the church, our own "last days," initiated by Christ's death and resurrection (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:1–2). They also anticipate a consummated fulfillment in the age to come in which the blessings are not only greater than those of the first era but eternal for those who know God's redemption (Eph. 1:3, 13–14; 1 Peter 1:3–5) (see "The Christian and Old Testament Promises" in chapter 12).

The prophets were *not* first and foremost innovators; they were reminders and

enforcers. They preached from their Scriptures, and we will understand them properly only by reading their books in this light.

We must be ever questioning how their message fits within the whole of the Christian canon. The Major and Minor Prophets make up the Latter Prophets, which occur after the Former Prophets. This structure allows Joshua-Kings to tell us *what* happened in the covenant history and Jeremiah-Malachi to describe *why* it happened the way it did. We must also consider the significance of the fact that the arrangement of the Latter Prophets in Scripture appears substantially driven by theological rather than chronological purposes. For example, even though Jonah is likely the earliest of the first-millennial writing prophets, the book of Jonah is placed fifth in the Book of the Twelve. We should ask, therefore, whether Obadiah's preceding Jonah is to influence our reading of Jonah.[28] Furthermore, we should always be asking how later prophetic voices in the Old and New Testaments pick up or relate to the message we are reading. We must read the Prophets within their canonical placement and in light of the Adamic-Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new covenants.

5. See and savor Christ and the gospel.

The New Testament is clear that the Old Testament prophets looked with anticipation for the days of the promised Messiah. For example, Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad" (John 8:56; cf. Matt. 13:17). Furthermore, the prophets "searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1 Peter 1:10–11).

Following his resurrection, Jesus asserted, "'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the *prophets* have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and *all the Prophets*, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25–27). We also read, "He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem'" (24:45–47).

Many other New Testament voices stress that *every prophet* anticipated both Christ's tribulations and the triumph that would follow. In Peter's words, "But what God foretold by the mouth of *all the prophets*, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. . . . Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. . . .' And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days" (Acts 3:18, 22, 24). And again, "to him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (10:43). Later Paul also asserts, "I stand here testifying both to small

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28. It is likely that the one who stitched the Twelve together believed that the pride of Edom against Israel that God condemns in Obadiah stood as a mirror of the pride of Jonah against Nineveh. Jonah represents the nation of Israel, and just as YHWH confronted Edom's pride, he will confront Israel's.

and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles" (26:22–23).

The Old Testament prophets anticipated the Messiah's suffering and the mission it would spark. Because all the prophets point to Jesus, our interpretation of the prophetic books cannot end until we have discerned how each announces the Christ. This does not mean that every passage will point to the Messiah in the same way, but Jesus' gospel work can and should be magnified from every prophetic text. Only in this way do the Prophets take their place as Christian Scripture. As you read the Prophets, seek to see and savor Christ and the gospel (see the section with a similar title in chapter 12).

Psalms

A Christian Approach to the Psalms

The book of Psalms contains some of the most familiar and well-loved parts of the Bible. By seeing only the initial words of the following verses, many readers can probably recite the entire passages by heart: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:1–2). "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth" (8:1[H2]).[29] "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul" (23:1–3).

Jesus loved the Psalter and often used it to defend his messiahship or to give voice to his pain. For example, in his dialogue with the chief priests and elders, Jesus identified himself as the suffering king of Psalm 118:22–23 when he questioned, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" (Matt. 21:42). Similarly, when engaging the Pharisees about the predicted Messiah and pushing them on their assertion that the Messiah was *David's* son, Jesus referred to Psalm 110:1, asking, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls [the Christ] Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'?" (Matt. 22:43–44). Jesus saw Judas's betrayal predicted in the Psalter (Ps. 41:9[H10]; John 13:18), and in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus appeared to allude to the words of the troubled king from Psalm 42:5–6[H6–7] (Matt. 26:38). At the cross he cried out,

29. The "H + number" in brackets refers to Hebrew verse numbers that differ from the English.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?," identifying the cries of the king in Psalm 22:1[H2] with his own (Matt. 27:46). His last words before his death, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46), declared as fulfilled the words of the king in Psalm 31:5[H6]. Jesus believed that the Psalms were about him, and it is from this context that he stressed after his resurrection that "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and *the Psalms* must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44).

The apostles and New Testament authors, too, read the Psalms as supplying the laments, thanksgivings, and praises first of the Christ and then of all finding refuge in him (Ps. 2:12). They saw Jesus' substitutionary death at the cross as the culmination of the nations' and peoples' rage against YHWH and his anointed king (Ps. 2:1–2; Acts 4:25–28). They believed that the Psalter predicted the cross's graphic horror (Pss. 22:7[H8]; 109:25; Matt. 27:39), the taunting of the crowds (Ps. 22:8[H9]; Matt. 27:43), the dryness of Christ's mouth (Ps. 22:15[H16]; John 19:28; cf. Ps. 69:21[H22]), the preservation of his bones (Ps. 34:20[H21]; John 19:36), Judas's death (Pss. 69:25[H26]; 109:8; Acts 1:16, 20), and Jesus' greeting of his "brothers" after his resurrection (Ps. 22:22[H23]; Heb. 2:12; cf. Matt. 28:10; Rom. 8:29). They also believed that Jesus' bodily resurrection fulfilled the prophetic predictions that YHWH would preserve the anointed king's body through death (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:24–32; 13:35–37) and would exalt him as his royal "begotten Son" (Ps. 2:7; see Acts 13:32–33; cf. Rom. 1:4). In the end, Jesus (Rev. 12:5; 19:15) and those identified with him (2:26–27) will use "a rod of iron" to break the rebellious, plotting peoples (Ps. 2:9).

As Bruce Waltke has noted, "The writers of the New Testament are not attempting to identify and limit the psalms that prefigure Christ but rather are assuming that the Psalter as a whole has Jesus Christ in view and that this should be the normative way of interpreting the psalms."[30] A Christian approach to the Psalms demands that we read the whole as messianic music, whether as songs "by Christ" or "about Christ."[31] And insofar as we identify ourselves with this Anointed One, his prayers become our prayers and his music our music.

Reading the Psalms as Messianic Music

It is important to recognize that the New Testament authors are not approaching the Psalms in a new way; they are simply following the pattern we see among the

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30. Bruce K. Waltke, "A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 7.

31. So Mark D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook*, Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 174.

Prophets. For example, the prophet Zechariah alludes to Psalm 72 in a context saturated with messianic hope. Writing in a day when there was no Davidic king on the throne, Zechariah asserts in 9:9–10, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall *be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth*." John saw Jesus as fulfilling this text in his triumphal entry (John 12:14–16). The italicized portion parallels word for word Psalm 72:8, suggesting that Zechariah was reading this psalm as a prediction of the coming messianic king.

While the superscription of Psalm 72 attributes the prayer to Solomon, the body of the song has Israel's ruler praying in hope for someone greater than himself, whose kingship far exceeds that of any Old Testament king.[32] Psalm 72 is one of a host of *royal psalms* that display a portrait of an unparalleled coming deliverer (see Pss. 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144). Figure 1.10 summarizes the overall vision of this ruler in the Psalter's royal psalms.[33]

1.	He is not simply God's "son" (89:27[H28]) but his "begotten" son (2:7), who belongs to YHWH (89:18[H19]) and remains ever devoted to him (18:20–24[H21–25]; 21:1, 7[H2, 8]; cf. 63:1–8, 11[H2–9, 12]); he is seated at God's right hand (110:1) and is himself tagged both as "God" (45:6[H7]) and as David's "Lord" (110:1); he will experience joy in God's presence forever (21:6[H7]; cf. 16:11).
2.	He will receive YHWH's everlasting blessing (21:6[H7]; 45:2[H3]; cf. 72:17), fulfill the Davidic covenant promises (89:28–37[H29–38]; 132:11–12, 17–18), and be the heir of both the nations (2:8) and the Melchizedekian priesthood (110:1–4).
3.	The nations and peoples of the earth stand against him (2:1–3; 110:2), but he will overcome all of them (45:3–5[H4–6]; 89:22–23[H23–24]; 110:1, 5–7; 132:18) through tribulation unto triumph (18:37–50[H38–51]; 20:1–9[H2–10]; 21:1, 4[H2, 5]; 144:7–8, 11), and he will declare God's praises among them (18:49[H50]).

Fig. 1.10. The Portrait of the Messianic King in the Royal Psalms

32. We see the same pattern in Psalms 20–21, where the psalmist David prays on behalf of another—that YHWH would deliver his anointed king from his suffering (Ps. 20) and that God would be exalted for saving this king from death and establishing him with eternal days and blessing (Ps. 21). I suggest that the king for whom David prays is the one he later identifies as his "Lord" in Psalm 110:1 (cf. Matt. 22:41–46), whose personal pleas for God's help are then disclosed in laments such as Psalm 22 and whose personal deliverance is celebrated in Psalm 23. For the view that the preposition לְ ("to") + proper name (e.g., לְדָוִד "to David") designates authorship, see *GKC* § 129c; for an overview of the various proposals, see Uriel Simon, *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms: From Saadiah Gaon to Abraham Ibn Izra*, trans. Lenn J. Schramm (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 179–82.

33. Some of this synthesis is adapted from J. Alec Motyer, *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to Our Understanding of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 23–38.

4.	By YHWH's act (2:6, 8; 18:31–36, 43, 46–50[H32–37, 44, 47–51]; 21:1–13[H2–14]; 110:1–2; 132:17–18), he will establish global rule (2:8–12; 45:17[H18]; 72:8–11; 89:25[H26]; 110:5–6; 132:18) based in Zion (2:6; 110:2; 132:13, 17).
5.	He will reign forever (21:4[H5]; 45:6[H7]; 72:5) in peace (72:7) and fruitfulness (72:3, 16), and he will rule in righteousness and justice (45:4, 6–7[H5, 7–8]; 72:2–3; 101:1–8), which will include befriending the poor and defeating the oppressor (72:2, 4, 12–14).
6.	Those finding refuge in him will be blessed (2:12; 72:17; 144:15), and under his rule, they will flourish (72:7) and enjoy abundance (72:3; 144:13–15), being both prosperous (72:3) and fruitful (72:16; 144:12).
7.	He will possess an everlasting name (72:17), be preeminent among men (45:2, 7[H3, 8]), and stand as the object of unending thanks (72:15).

Fig. 1.10. The Portrait of the Messianic King in the Royal Psalms (cont.)

Zechariah's messianic reading of Psalm 72 most likely aligns with its human author's original intent, for clearly these royal psalms speak of no normal, fleshly king. Looking beyond himself, the speaker in Psalm 72 envisioned the fulfillment of YHWH's royal ideal (Deut. 17:14–20) and his kingdom pledge to David (2 Sam. 7:12–16), which was itself built on the Lord's promises in the Law to raise up an evil-overcoming, blessing-securing, royal deliverer, whose reign would last forever (Gen. 3:14–15; 22:17b–18; 49:8–10; Num. 24:7–9, 17–19). With every new generation there was hope that the next monarch would be the chosen one, but each Judaean king proved that he was *not* the hoped-for Savior. Nevertheless, the community of faith continued to sing these psalms as a testament to his coming, and then the New Testament saints celebrated his arrival.

Zechariah does not appear to have been the first prophet to treat the Psalms messianically. Jeremiah, for example, seems to draw on Psalm 89 when he stresses in chapter 33 that the Davidic covenant is as firmly established as the day and night. In the psalm YHWH declares, "Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies" (Ps. 89:35–37[H36–38]). And Jeremiah states, "If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne" (Jer. 33:20–21; cf. 31:36–37).[34] Similarly, potentially

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34. Along with 1–2 Samuel, Jeremiah witnesses major differences between the Masoretic Text (MT) and other texts and versions. In this instance, the LXX completely lacks Jeremiah 33:14–26, which does raise the possibility that the promises in this unit are not original to Jeremiah but arose later in the history of interpretation (so Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011], 286–88). The Dead Sea Scroll 4QJerc does not preserve verses 16–20, and the size of the gap is too small to fit the entire text of the MT, so the scroll either included a shorter text at this point or had one or two words written above the line (so

declaring the fulfillment of YHWH's promise in Psalm 89:28[H29], "My steadfast love I will keep for [David] forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him," God declares to the faithful remnant through Isaiah, "I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David" (Isa. 55:3).[35] While YHWH's temporary punishment against the house of Judah made it appear that YHWH had forsaken his Davidic covenant promises (Ps. 89:38–46[H39–47]),[36] Psalm 89 testifies with later prophets that God would "not violate [his] covenant or alter the word that went forth from [his] lips" (89:34[H35]).[37]

Not only Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, but David himself, at least in certain instances, was consciously looking beyond himself, predicting the work of the Christ when he wrote his poetry. While not evident in the ESV, an alternative reading of 2 Samuel 23:1 finds David's last words standing as a prophetic oracle *"concerning the Messiah of the God of Jacob."*[38] This is the reading retained in the Septuagint, and it was followed by early English translations such as Douay-Rheims (1610) and the YLT (1898). Regardless of how one renders this statement, the only other occurrences of the phrase "the utterance of the mighty man" (נְאֻם הַגֶּבֶר) are in Numbers 24:3, 15 and Proverbs 30:1, all of which introduce messianic oracles (see Num. 24:7, 17–19; Prov. 30:4).[39] Moreover, the content of David's "last words" clearly points beyond himself, speaking of one whose rule will bring forth light and new creation (2 Sam. 23:4) and who will overcome the man of worthlessness with an iron and wood spear (23:6–7), likely

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Martin G. Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999], 401). Significantly, the MT of Jeremiah speaks many times of the writing down of Jeremiah's words (e.g., Jer. 25:13; 30:2; 36:2, 28, 32; 45:1; 51:60, 63), and the book itself suggests multiple versions of various lengths coming from the prophet's own hand (see the shorter Babylonian edition in Jeremiah 51:59–64 versus Baruch's longer Egyptian edition in Jeremiah 36:32; 45:1–5 with 43:5–7). This may help explain the book's distinctive textual tradition, and it could mean that all known versions came from the prophet himself.

35. On these texts, see especially William C. Pohl IV, "A Messianic Reading of Psalm 89: A Canonical and Intertextual Study," *JETS* 58, 3 (2015): 522–25; cf. Knut M. Heim, "The (God-)forsaken King of Psalm 89: A Historical and Intertextual Enquiry," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 296–322. For a provocative alternative reading of Isaiah 55:3, see Peter J. Gentry, "Rethinking the 'Sure Mercies of David' in Isaiah 55:3," *WTJ* 62, 2 (2007): 279–304; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 406–21. While less clear, two other texts from Isaiah and an additional one from Micah may be reading Psalm 72 as an eschatological text related to the end-times reign of God, which in context is recognized to come ultimately through his messianic figure (cf. Ps. 72:1–2 with Isa. 32:1; Ps. 72:9 with Mic. 7:17; Ps. 72:10 with Isa. 60:9, 11). For these and other potential links between the Psalms and the Latter Prophets, see Sue Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism," *CBQ* 64, 3 (2002): 471–76.

36. The dating of Psalm 89 is difficult, for (1) it is clearly written during a time when the Davidic kingdom promises appear to be in jeopardy (see Ps. 89:38–46[H39–47]), but (2) the attribution to "Ethan the Ezrahite" next to a similar attribution to "Heman the Ezrahite" in Psalm 88 seems to link Psalm 89 to the time of David and Solomon. Perhaps Ethan penned the text at an old age, soon after Solomon's death and just after the division of the empire in the days of Rehoboam (see esp. 1 Kings 4:31[H5:11]; cf. 1 Chron. 15:16–17, 19).

37. For this reading, see Pohl, "A Messianic Reading of Psalm 89," 507–25.

38. See Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology 9 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 39–41.

39. For a discussion of the Numbers texts as messianic, see ibid., 38–39, 52–55.

echoing the imagery of Psalm 2:9, where God's royal Son will overcome the raging nations "with a rod of iron" (cf. Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:17; Rev. 12:5; 19:15).

More explicit are Peter's exegetical conclusions in Acts 2:30–31, where, in reflecting on the meaning of Psalm 16:8–11, the apostle asserts of David, "Being therefore a *prophet*, and *knowing* that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, *he foresaw and spoke* about the resurrection of the Christ." I will say more about this verse below, but what should be clear by now is that the New Testament authors, the Old Testament prophets, and David himself believed that the Psalms pointed ahead, portraying the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories (1 Peter 1:10–12). Insofar as we identify ourselves with this anointed king, his prayers become our prayers and his music our music.

The Variety of Psalm Subgenres

Psalms was the first book that Old Testament scholars assessed through the lens of genre, and this approach still dominates much Old Testament interpretation.[40] Eight of the most well-recognized psalm subgenres are:

- Lament psalms (including penitential and imprecatory psalms)
- Trust or confidence psalms
- Thanksgiving psalms
- Praise psalms or hymns (including enthronement psalms)
- Royal psalms
- Wisdom/Torah psalms
- Liturgy psalms
- Historical psalms

These categories are relatively self-explanatory and distinguished by their content. Knowing which psalms fit each category allows us to easily find words to express the prayers of our hearts. Figure 1.11 supplies one categorization of the Psalms by subgenre.

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40. Two well-known, very helpful books that approach the Psalter by focusing on genre categories are Bernhard W. Anderson and Steven Bishop, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000); and Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 212–15.

Lament	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14 (= 53), 17, 22, 26, 27, 28, 35, 38, 39, 41, 42/43, 44, 51, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 74, 77, 79, 80, 82, 83, 85, 86, 88, 90, 94, 102, 106, 108, 109, 120, 123, 126, 130, 137, 140, 141, 142, 143 (Penitential Psalms = 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143; Imprecatory Psalms = 35, 55, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137)
Trust	11, 16, 23, 91, 121, 125, 129, 131
Thanksgiving	30, 66, 92, 107, 116, 118, 124, 138
Praise/Hymn	8, 29, 33, 46, 47, 48, 76, 84, 87, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 103, 104, 105, 111, 113, 114, 117, 122, 134, 135, 136, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150 (Songs of Zion = 46, 48, 76, 84, 87; Enthronement of YHWH Psalms = 47, 93, 96, 97, 98, 99)
Royal	2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 132, 144
Wisdom/Torah	1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128
Liturgy	15, 24 (cf. also 136)
Historical	78 (cf. also 105, 106, 107, 114)
Mixed	9/10, 19, 25, 31, 32, 34, 36, 40, 65, 89, 119
Unclear	50, 52, 62, 67, 68, 75, 81, 115, 133, 139

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Fig. 1.11. The Psalms by Subgenre

When David moved the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem, his delight in music matched by his passion for God moved him to commission the Levites as music ministers. He appointed leaders over harps and lyres, cymbals and trumpets, and he even appointed a vocal ensemble. Overall, he called these worship leaders "to invoke [i.e., appeal for help], to thank, and to praise the Lord" (1 Chron. 16:4). As we will see below, invocation is the essence of the psalms of *lament*, gratitude of the psalms of *thanksgiving*, and adoration of the psalms of *praise*. Furthermore, while most of the psalm genres listed above distinguish themselves by subject matter alone, the psalms of lament, thanksgiving, and praise are also marked by structural patterns. In light of David's directive, we may have biblical warrant for viewing all other psalm subgenres simply as types of these three main categories.

With this, the Chronicler asserted that the Levitical music leaders that David

appointed (i.e., Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun) were "seers" (1 Chron. 25:5; 2 Chron. 29:30; 35:15) who "prophesied under the direction of the king" "with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals . . . in thanksgiving and praise to the Lᴏʀᴅ" (1 Chron. 25:1–3). It was with their words and those of the "prophet" David (Acts 2:30; cf. 2 Sam. 23:2) that the faithful in Israel "sang praises with gladness" to the Lord (2 Chron. 29:30). Both the nature of the royal psalms and the fact that these leaders "prophesied under the direction of the king," whose life was shaped by the Davidic covenant kingdom promises (2 Sam. 7:12–16; 1 Chron. 17:11–14; 25:2), strongly suggest that we should understand this prophetic role to include foretelling (i.e., prediction) as well as forth-telling. We will now see that the New Testament authors read the various psalms in just this way.

Psalms of Lament, Trust, Thanksgiving, and Praise

By far the two most common psalm subgenres are laments and praises, and fitted between them in logical progression are trust psalms and thanksgivings. *Psalms of lament* are cries for help to God out of the midst of pain. *Psalms of trust* declare confidence in the Lord, yet still out of the midst of pain. *Psalms of thanksgiving* express gratitude for deliverance or provision after the pain. *Psalms of praise* are hymns that celebrate who YHWH is and what he has done, especially in relation to creation and redemption. Most psalm subgenres are distinguished only by their general subject matter, but psalms of lament, thanksgiving, and praise are also marked by structural patterns.

1. Psalms of Lament (APTRAP)
  a. Address to God
  b. Petitions, usually for being heard
  c. Trouble described
  d. Reason for why God should answer
  e. Assurance declared (confidence or trust)
  f. Praise or promise of sacrifice

One of the features highlighted in the royal psalms was that the Messiah's victory over evil and global reign would come only through great suffering (Pss. 18:37–50[H38–51]; 20:1–9[H2–10]; 144:7–8, 11). Similarly, Isaiah foretold that the royal servant's path to being "high and lifted up" (Isa. 52:13) would be as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (53:3). Out of this perspective, the writer of Hebrews states, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death" (Heb. 5:7). The Gospel writers detail Christ's

journey through tribulation unto triumph, and they note that Christ's prayers were often drawn directly from the psalms of lament.

As noted above, laments in ancient Israel often took on a specific form, often including six elements. For example, most of the pattern is evident in this lament from Psalm 6, in which the anointed king cries out as an innocent sufferer under the hand of God's punishment.

1	O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger	*Address to God*
2–4	Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled. . . . Turn, O Lord, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love.	*Petitions and reasons for why God should answer*
6–7	I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears. . . . [My eye] grows weak because of all my foes.	*Trouble described*
8–10	Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord accepts my prayer. All my enemies shall be ashamed	*Assurance declared*
NOTE: The missing element here is "praise or promise of sacrifice," but this feature is evident at the end of the lament in Psalm 7:17[H18] or in the midst of the lament in Psalm 27:6.		

Fig. 1.12. Psalm 6—A Psalm of Lament

Jesus prayed this psalm to God directly after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as his gaze became increasingly fixed on the path to death that he was about to tread. Drawing on Psalm 6:3–4[H4–5], he exclaimed, "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour" (John 12:27). The anguish we hear reminds us of similar groanings he expressed in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:38–39, 44), associated with the lament in Psalm 42:5[H6]), and of his climactic cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46), which quotes from the lament in Psalm 22:1[H2]. Earlier in his ministry, Jesus drew from Psalm 6:8[H9] to describe what he will say to the wicked at the final judgment (Matt. 7:23). He also asserts that the world's hating him without cause was fulfilling exactly what had been predicted in the lament of Psalm 35:19 (John 15:25). In the first temple cleansing, he explains the distress of his soul by declaring, "Zeal for your house will consume me" (John 2:17), quoting from the lament in Psalm 69:9[H10].

Significantly, as "a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master" (Matt. 10:24), anyone who wants to follow Christ must "deny himself and take up his

cross and follow" him (16:24). "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Thus, just as the king's journey through suffering becomes the journey of all finding refuge in him (Ps. 2:12), so, too, his prayers can become ours. Right after stressing that Christ suffered for God's sake and quoting the king's lament in Psalm 69:9[H10], "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me," Paul declares that "whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:3–4). While broadly speaking he means that all the Old Testament matters for Christians, most directly he means that the psalms of lament become the supplications of all who find refuge in Jesus. That is, the psalms that initially stood as the prayers of the Christ now become the songs of the saved. May we sing the laments in hope, confident that "those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29; cf. Pss. 2:7; 22:22[H23]).

2. Psalms of Trust

Whereas laments focus on the problem, psalms of trust focus on the answer, but both are prayers grown out of a context of suffering. No special pattern is present in trust psalms, but all of them express confidence that God is both faithful and in charge.

The beloved Psalm 23 falls into this category. Placed after the lament of Psalm 22, which is loaded with predictions of Christ's suffering and exaltation (see "The Nature of Text Criticism and Psalm 22:16[H17]" in chapter 3) and which includes a vow to praise YHWH before his brothers for the divine rescue (22:22–24[H23–25]), we can read Psalm 23 first as Christ's testimony that YHWH is *his* Shepherd.[41] Then those of us who find refuge in him (2:12) can sing the same song of hope ourselves.

1–3	The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.	*Certainty and rest in God's provision*

Fig. 1.13. Psalm 23—A Psalm of Trust

41. Douglas J. Green argues for the legitimacy of a messianic interpretation in "'The Lᴏʀᴅ Is Christ's Shepherd': Psalm 23 as Messianic Prophecy," in *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: Essays in Memory of Alan Groves*, ed. Peter Enns, Douglas J. Green, and Michael B. Kelly (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 33–46. Disappointingly, Green's approach separates the messianic reading of this psalm from its original historical context, claiming that David did not originally intend a messianic interpretation but that it is still legitimate in light of the way in which New Testament authors read the Psalms. In contrast, I want to stress that the messianic reading was indeed part of David's original historical intent, which also included the view that all finding refuge in the anointed king could in turn make his prayers their own; his words of trust become our words of trust. For an argument that Psalms 22–24 form a unit within the Psalter, see Nancy L. Declaissé-Walford, "An Intertextual Reading of Psalms 22, 23, and 24," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, VTSup 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 139–52.

| 4–6 | Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. | *Certainty and rest in God's protection* |

Fig. 1.13. Psalm 23—A Psalm of Trust (cont.)

The New Testament draws on psalms of trust many times. One example is found in the account of Christ's death. Just before his final breath, Jesus drew verbatim from the declaration of trust in Psalm 31:5[H6], changing only the Greek future tense to present in order to stress that he was at that very moment fulfilling the king's vow from the psalm: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Similarly, Luke notes that both Peter and Paul interpreted the testimony of trust in Psalm 16:8–11 as a direct prediction of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 2:25–32; 13:35–37). In order to clarify why "it was not possible" for the pangs of death to hold Jesus (Acts 2:24), Peter drew on the Greek version of Psalm 16:8–11 (= Ps. 15 LXX), saying, "David says *concerning him*, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence'" (Acts 2:25–28). At this, Peter then declares: "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption" (2:29–31). Peter says that David was a "prophet" who both "knew" of God's promise for an eternal kingdom and "foresaw" the resurrection of Christ (2:30–31; cf. 3:18, 24; 10:43). From 2 Samuel 7:12 we learn that David knew he would die, and the apostles stress that he "both died and was buried" (Acts 2:29) and that his body "saw corruption" (13:36). Thus, we cannot see the words of the king in Psalm 16 as referring to anything in David's life that perhaps in turn foreshadowed Christ's resurrection.[42] Rather, the apostles' exegesis of Psalm 16 led them to see it as a direct prediction.

42. A number of scholars hold this view, which we can tag as a *typological* reading of Psalm 16 (e.g., M. Rese, "Die Funktion der alttestamentlichen Zitate und Anspielungen in den Reden der Apostelgeschichte," in *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, rédaction, théologie*, ed. J. Kremer et al., BETL 48 [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979], 76; Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 122–23; James M. Hamilton Jr., personal correspondence). Yet we must ask with I. Howard Marshall, "Is it appropriate to use the term 'typological' of a statement that was not true of

3. Psalms of Thanksgiving (IMART)

    a. <u>I</u>ntroduction of praise, addressed to God

    b. <u>M</u>isery or trouble reported

    c. <u>A</u>ppeal for others to praise God

    d. <u>R</u>escue announced

    e. <u>T</u>estimony of vow or praise

Gratitude to God should abound in the hearts of those he has saved, and we should often express our thanks in words. As figure 1.14 shows, the words of the king in Psalm 30 provide a good example of the pattern found in many thanksgiving psalms.

1	I will extol you, O LORD,	Introduction of praise, addressed to God
	for you have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me.	Misery or trouble reported
4	Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name.	Appeal for others to praise God
11–12	You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.	Rescue announced
	O LORD, I will give thanks to you forever!	Testimony of vow or praise

Fig. 1.14. Psalm 30—A Psalm of Thanksgiving

The New Testament includes multiple links to psalms of thanksgiving. One of the favorites is Psalm 34. In 34:8[H9] the king appeals for his listeners to "taste and see that the LORD is good," and Peter says that if his readers have heeded this command, they should mature in godliness (1 Peter 2:2–3). Later, in order to motivate his audience to pursue obtaining blessing from God and to call them not to repay evil for evil, Peter draws on Psalm 34:12–16[H13–17]: "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on

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the 'type' himself?" (I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 538). As we will develop in chapter 10, *typology* refers to correspondences that God intended between earlier and later persons, events, or institutions, by which the earlier types are, at least in hindsight, recognized to predict the later antitypes. See especially Richard Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical TUPOS Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1981).

the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Peter 3:9–12). Finally, in Psalm 34:20[H21] the king declares God to be his deliverer who has kept all his bones so that not one was broken—a prophecy that John declares is fulfilled in the way Jesus was crucified (John 19:36).

Another thanksgiving psalm that the New Testament authors frequently quote is Psalm 118, which shows up in many different contexts. For example, in order to clarify why Christians should be content, and as an inference from God's promise in Joshua 1:5 that the Lord will never leave or forsake us, the author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 118:6, declaring, "So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'" (Heb. 13:6). What was true for the psalmist continues to be true for all finding refuge in God. Drawing on Psalm 118:22–23, Jesus identified himself as "the stone that the builders rejected" who in turn would "become the cornerstone," and he said that all who spurned him would be crushed (Matt. 21:42–44). Peter stressed the same idea from Psalm 118 and added that the church is built on Christ, the cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4–8). In Psalm 118:25–26 the psalmist pleads for God to "save" and then declares blessed the one through whom YHWH will bring deliverance. These are the verses that the crowd drew from at Christ's triumphal entry, singing, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21:9). Jesus also quoted them when he declared before his death that Jerusalem would not see him again until the city declared, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (23:39).

4. Psalms of Praise (SRS)

    a. Summons to praise
    b. Reason for praise
    c. Summons to praise repeated

The shortest of all psalms, Psalm 117, provides a helpful overview of the basic parts of a hymn of praise.

1	Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!	Summons to praise
2	For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.	Reason for praise
	Praise the LORD!	Summons to praise repeated

Fig. 1.15. Psalm 117—A Psalm of Praise

The Lord is worthy of highest praise "from the heavens" (Ps. 148:1) unto "the earth" (148:7)—from the angels to the luminaries (148:2–3), from the mountaintops to the cedar

trees (148:9), from "everything that has breath" (150:6). His anointed king (103:1–2), his people (118:2), and indeed all the nations of the earth (117:1; 148:11–12) must "praise him for his mighty deeds" and "according to his excellent greatness" (150:2).

The Psalter witnesses a progressive movement from shadow to sunlight, from tribulation to triumph, and from lament to praise (fig. 1.16). Psalms 144 and 145 end the book's main body by celebrating YHWH as the steadfast love and fortress of his king (144:1–2, 9–11) and as the one who graciously and mercifully reigns over all (145:1, 8–9). Each of the initial four books ends with a doxology, calling people to look Godward (41:13[H14]; 72:18–19; 89:52[H53]; 106:48). And then the fifth book concludes the whole Psalter with five psalms that begin and end with the declaration, "Praise the Lord!" (146:1, 10; 147:1, 20; 148:1, 14; 149:1, 9; 150:1, 6).

Psalms of Praise				
				13
			9	
9	9	0		
Book I	Book II	Book III	Book IV	Book V
			5	4
	7	7		
19				Psalms of Lament
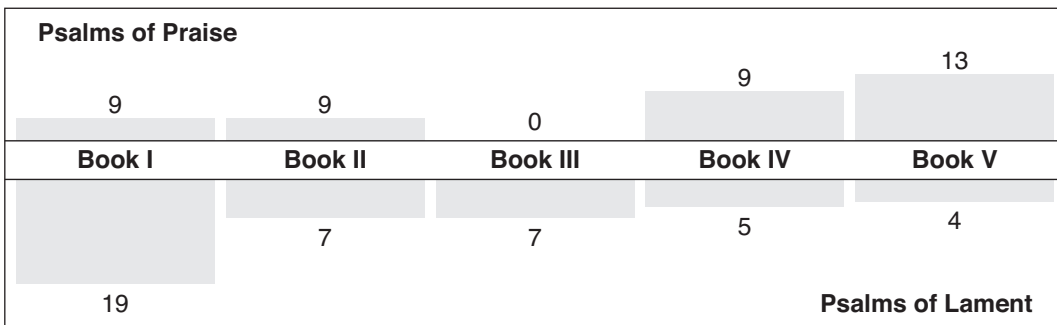
Fig. 1.16. From Lament to Praise in the Psalter[43]

Building on the praises in Psalm 8, we recognize that the Christ to whom children cried for deliverance at the triumphal entry (Matt. 21:16; cf. Ps. 8:2[H3]), the Son of Man who became human, is the one under whom God has subjected all things (Eph. 1:22; cf. Ps. 8:4–6[H5–7]). Still, we wait for this subjection to become fully visible (1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:6–8). With the early church (Acts 4:24), we put our hope in the one "who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Ps. 146:6). Today we sing and kneel to the Lord (95:1, 6), nurturing believing hearts that treasure God's promises in order that we might enter the rest that will never end (95:7–11; Heb. 3:7–11; 4:3, 5–10). We trust not simply the giver of bread but the very one who is the Bread of Life (Ps. 105:40; John 6:31–33).

The ultimate goal of the Psalms was to generate praise to YHWH for his saving and satisfying reign through his anointed king. The Psalms supplied messianic music to the saints of old—music designed to nurture hope for the coming kingdom. As the church of Jesus Christ, living in the days of fulfillment (Luke 24:44), may we "let the word of Christ" dwell in our hearts as we sing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness . . . to God" (Col. 3:16; cf. Eph. 5:19). In doing so, we will engage in the task for which we were designed—to glorify the one from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (Rom. 11:36). "Praise the Lord!"

43. Prepared by Jason S. DeRouchie and John C. Crutchfield. Taken from Jason S. DeRouchie, ed., *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About*, 348. Used with permission.

Guidelines for Interpreting the Psalms

The move from exegesis to theology is ultimately to result in doxology, and the book of Psalms provides us a perfect springboard to praising God. What are some principles to help guide proper interpretation of the Psalms?

1. Recall the problems and promises of salvation history and the placement of the Psalms within the flow of Jesus' Bible.

The book of Psalms marks a significant shift in the flow of Jesus' Bible. Unlike the Prophets, which focus on Israel's sin and the covenant curses and give only minor (though always evident) attention to the promise of restoration blessing, each book of the Writings is dominated by a message of kingdom hope in an all-wise, all-sovereign God, who is faithful to his own, even in the midst of pain. Jeremiah-Malachi recalled the new covenant promises and clearly anticipated the new creational kingdom for which Israel longed. The final three Prophets of the Twelve were also part of the initial restoration (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). Nevertheless, none of the Prophets claimed that the new creational kingdom had yet arrived in history. Instead, even after the initial return to the land, the Jews continued in rebellion (Hag. 1:9; Zech. 1:2–6; Mal. 1:6) and did not experience either the inner transformation or the messianic king or kingdom that God had promised (see Ezek. 36:22–36; 37:21–28). Into this darkness, the prelude of Ruth affirms the kingdom of YHWH's redeeming grace through the line of David, and then Psalms proclaims hope for all who celebrate God's reign and find refuge in his Anointed Son. Psalms pushes the reader's hope forward, calling him to follow the anointed king on his journey from dirge to doxology and through tribulation unto triumph. The Lord's promises to David remained, and the eternal king and kingdom would come.

2. Remember the Psalter's overall structure, message, and flow.

The Psalter is made up of five books that move from lament to praise and nurture hope in the future fulfillment of God's kingdom promises, ultimately through his Christ.[44] *Book I* (Pss. 1–41) and *Book II* (Pss. 42–72) form a unit that begins (Ps. 2) and ends (Ps. 72) with a glorious vision of the coming king.[45] The two books together introduce in recurring cycles this king's journey through tribulation unto triumph. *Book III* (Pss. 73–89) then laments the disgraceful, broken state of the Davidic dynasty,

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44. John C. Crutchfield, "The Redactional Agenda of the Book of Psalms," *HUCA* 74 (2003): 21–47.

45. So too David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*, JSOTSup 252 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 243–53.

but Psalm 89 supplies hope "that YHWH's covenant loyalty will reverse this deplorable condition."[46]

Book IV (Pss. 90–106) opens by stressing YHWH's sovereign reign and by recalling his past forgiveness in order to heighten hope that he can do it again. In contrast to some contemporary perspectives,[47] the focus on YHWH's kingship in Book IV does not stand as a rejection of the human, Davidic line, but rather aligns with the original vision of Psalm 2, in which YHWH and his anointed king reign together, the latter standing as the former's earthly representative.[48]

Book V (Pss. 107–150) then builds on this vision of sovereignty and includes a heightened number of Davidic psalms (Pss. 138–145) in order to give hope that God's kingdom promises will indeed come to pass through his Messiah.[49] With imagery akin to 1 Samuel 2:10, 35 and Zechariah 6:13, Psalm 110 finds YHWH vowing to David's "Lord" that he is "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (110:1, 4). If God here promises to keep his less-prominent oath regarding the priesthood of Melchizedek, we must believe that he will also keep his well-known oath regarding the Davidic throne—an oath that Psalm 89 highlights three times (89:3–4, 35–36, 49[H4–5, 36–37, 50]). This fact is then reaffirmed in Psalm 132:11–18 and celebrated in the reaffirmation of both Davidic kingship and YHWH's kingship in Psalms 144–145.[50] While those finalizing the Psalter recognized the failure of the Davidic house to meet the complete vision of kingship that YHWH had promised, they did not lose hope in God's commitment to raise up a deliverer who would establish God's worldwide kingdom on earth.

From beginning to end, the Psalter focuses heavily on the hostility of mankind against YHWH and his anointed and on YHWH's final triumph through his righteous king for all finding refuge in him. The general perspective of the righteous and the wicked is laid out in Book I, where there is only one true "righteous one," the anointed of God (e.g., Pss. 5:12[H13]; 7:9[H10]; 14:5; 34:19, 21[H20, 22]; 37:12, 16, 25, 32). He is the "blessed man" (1:1), against whom stand various enemies both near and far

46. Michael K. Snearly, "The Return of the King: Book V as a Witness to Messianic Hope in the Psalter," in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard (Chicago: Moody Press, 2014), 210.

47. See especially Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 209–28, esp. 212–14; Wilson, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *JSOT* 11, 35 (1986): 85–94; Wilson, "The Shape of the Book of Psalms," *Int* 46, 1 (1992): 129–42; Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann, JSOTSup 159 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1997), 72–82; Wilson, "King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, VTSup 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 391–406.

48. David M. Howard Jr., *The Structure of Psalms 93–100*, UCSD Biblical and Judaic Studies 5 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 200–207; Howard, "Divine and Human Kingship as Organizing Motifs in the Psalter," in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard (Chicago: Moody Press, 2014), 205–6; Snearly, "The Return of the King," 210.

49. See especially Snearly, "The Return of the King," 207–15; cf. John C. Crutchfield, *Psalms in Their Context: An Interpretation of Psalms 107–118*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

50. So Howard, "Divine and Human Kingship as Organizing Motifs in the Psalter," 206.

(e.g., 2:1–2; 3:1; 5:8[H9]; 6:8[H9]; 7:1, 6, 9[H2, 7, 10]). Others are tagged as "blessed" and "righteous" (e.g., 1:5–6; 32:11; 33:1; 34:15[H16]; 37:17, 29, 39), but they are only so because they find refuge in the righteous *one* (2:12).[51] Apart from this anointed king, "there is none who does good, not even one" (14:3; 53:3[H4]; cf. Rom. 3:12). In the end, "affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous [one] will be condemned" (Ps. 34:21[H22]). YHWH's royal Son (2:7) will "break them with a rod of iron" (2:9). Therefore, the evildoers "are in great terror," knowing that "God is with the generation of the righteous [one]," who himself finds refuge in the Lord (14:5–6). A proper reading of the Psalms requires that we keep in mind the progressive movement through tribulation unto triumph and that we seek to find deeper refuge in the king, whom we now know today as Jesus.

3. Keep the Christ central.

The words of the Psalter are either about Christ or by Christ.[52] In it we hear the prayers of the Christ and the songs of the saved. I say "Christ" for two reasons: (a) The Greek term Χριστός ("Christ") is the translation of the Hebrew term מָשִׁיחַ ("Messiah/Anointed One") in texts such as Psalm 2:2. This monarch is the principal human figure in the Psalms—both in suffering and in triumph.[53] (b) The Psalms portray this hoped-for royal figure as the ideal king and human who embodies the hopes of the world (see "Reading the Psalms as Messianic Music" above). Accordingly, salvation history identifies this Savior-deliverer as Jesus of Nazareth, and the New Testament tags him as "the Christ" in light of the way in which books such as the Psalms spoke of him (e.g., Acts 4:26 [ESV footnote]; cf. Matt. 1:1; 16:16). The various laments, thanksgivings, and praises in the Psalter are either about the anointed king or by the anointed king, and they also become the music of all finding refuge in him (Ps. 2:12).

The Old Testament explicitly tags many of its psalm writers as "seers" (1 Chron. 25:5; 2 Chron. 29:30; 35:15) who "prophesied" and whose words became the praises of Israel (1 Chron. 25:1–3). Accordingly, Jesus, the New Testament authors, and the Old Testament prophets all read the Psalms as predictions of the Messiah (see "Reading the Psalms as Messianic Music" and "The Variety of Psalm Subgenres" above). Also, David, the author of about half the psalms, was himself a "prophet" (Acts 2:30; cf. 2 Sam. 23:2) and was mindful both of his desperate state and that his hopes were in the one he called his "Lord" (Ps. 110:1; cf. Matt. 22:41–46).[54] Building on God's kingdom promise

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51. To see the distinction between the "righteous [one]" and "righteous [ones]," track the shifts between the singular and plural forms of צַדִּיק ("righteous") in Psalms 34 and 37.

52. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 174.

53. For more on this idea, see Waltke, "A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms," 11–12; Patrick D. Miller, "The Beginning of the Psalter," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, ed. J. Clinton McCann Jr., Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 83–92.

54. In Psalm 14:7, David pleads for God to let salvation come out of Zion, the abode of the anointed king (cf. 2:6), and he does so by alluding to Moses' promise of second exodus from exile associated with the latter days' new covenant: "When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice" (cf. Deut. 30:3). We see a similar perspective in David's song of thanks from 1 Chronicles 16:35: "Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather and

to David in 2 Samuel 7:12–14, Peter stressed how David himself consciously predicted Christ's victory over death: "Being . . . a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ" (Acts 2:30–31; cf. 2 Sam. 23:1–7). In these words we see in action what Peter elsewhere identified—that the Old Testament prophets "searched and inquired carefully" regarding "what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1 Peter 1:10–11). Where would they search but in their Scriptures? Peter also stressed that *all* the prophets from Moses forward—which would include David—spoke of the sufferings of the Christ and the mission that they would generate (Acts 3:18–24; 10:43; cf. Luke 24:44–47; Acts 26:22–23). Keep Christ in mind as you interpret the Psalms.

4. Read the Psalms as poetry.

Even a casual reader of Scripture can identify that the Psalter reads differently from historical narrative, such as Judges. The distinction is that psalms are poetry, and our English Bibles usually identify the difference by using poetic lines, which results in more white space on the page (compare the shape of Judges 4 and 5 in the ESV).

Traditionally, scholars have distinguished prose from poetry by identifying poetic "indicators." Wilfred Watson supplies nineteen such features, differentiating "broad indicators" and "structural indicators":[55]

a. *Broad indicators*: presence of established line forms,[56] ellipsis (gapping), unusual vocabulary, conciseness (terseness), unusual word order,[57] archaisms, use of meter, regularity and symmetry.
b. *Structural indicators*: parallelism, word pairs, chiastic patterns, envelope figure (inclusio), breakup of stereotyped phrases, repetition, gender-matched parallelism, tricolon, rhyme and other sound patterns, absence or rarity of prose elements.[58]

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deliver us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name, and glory in your praise" (= Ps. 106:47–48). While David brought the nation of Israel to the height of its glory, he himself viewed the nation as already being under curse in desperate need of the future salvation that Moses promised.

55. Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Technique*, JSOTSup 26 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1984), 46–54.

56. Michael Patrick O'Connor argues that the principle to identify Hebrew poetry is in neither meter nor parallelism but by seeing whether a text follows the constraints of a poetic line, having from 0 to 3 predicators (e.g., a finite verb), from 1 to 4 constituents (i.e., a grammatical phrase such as a verb, a noun, a prepositional phrase, a construct chain), and from 2 to 5 units (i.e., a word, though not including small particles such as כִּי ["since, because, that, when"] or אִם ["if"] or prepositions such as אֶל ["to"]) (*Hebrew Verse Structure*, 2nd ed. [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997]). For a brief summary and critique of his work, see Duane A. Garrett and Jason S. DeRouchie, *A Modern Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 340–42.

57. Poetic texts employ verb-initial clauses at a rate equal to non-verb-initial clauses, in which the linear as opposed to segmented nature of prose gives rise to its being dominated by verb-initial, default clauses. Furthermore, poetry regularly precedes a verb by two or more constituents, whereas prose rarely does. For more on this, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Deuteronomy as Didactic Poetry? A Critique of D. L. Christensen's View," *JAAS* 10, 1 (2007): 1–13.

58. Comparatively infrequent in poetry, the definite article (הַ), the definite direct object marker (אֶת), and the relative particle אֲשֶׁר occur in high concentrations in prose. See Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes,

Recognizably, all these elements show up with less frequency in prose,[59] so most scholars today treat the distinction between prose and poetry as "more one of degree than kind."[60] Framing the relationship this way allows for various literary and linguistic features to occur in prose while emphasizing that a predominance of them signals poetry.

Naturally, reading literature that is on a higher register of style requires careful reading to identify the various levels of artistry that the author used to convey his message and to effect response. The songwriters sought to move their audiences to worship, to draw their readers into the prayers and praises in personal ways. They use concrete words, vivid images, wordplay, and rhythm in order to help us feel lament, truth, thanksgiving, and praise. Read the Psalms as poetry.

5. Account for the psalm titles.

Of the 150 psalms, all but 34 of them have some form of title (i.e., superscription) that includes notes about their performance, type, author, purpose, or historical origin.[61] The only title with all these parts is Psalm 60, which opens: "To the choirmaster: according to Shushan Eduth. A miktam of David; for instruction; when he strove with Aram-Naharaim and with Aram-Zobah, and when Joab on his return struck down twelve thousand of Edom in the Valley of Salt." We can distinguish the various parts of the title as follows:

a. *Expanded performance instructions* (P): "To the choirmaster: according to Shushan Eduth"
b. *Type of psalm* (T): "A miktam"
c. *Author* (A): "Of David"
d. *Purpose* (Pu): "For instruction"
e. *Historical origin* (H): "When he strove with Aram-Naharaim and with Aram-Zobah, and when Joab on his return struck down twelve thousand of Edom in the Valley of Salt"

Figure 1.17 (on page 81) provides an overview of the patterns and attributed authorship of titles throughout the Psalms, with shifts between white and gray signaling movement

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"'Prose Particle' Counts of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Festschrift for David Noel Freedman*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and Michael Patrick O'Connor, ASOR Special Volume Series 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 165–83.

59. So James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 59–95, esp. 85–87, 94–95.

60. Sue E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 36. For a helpful overview of the scholarly discussion on distinguishing prose and poetry, see J. Kenneth Kuntz, "Biblical Hebrew Poetry in Recent Research, Part I," *CurBS* 6 (1998): 55–57; Kuntz, "Biblical Hebrew Poetry in Recent Research, Part II," *CurBS* 7 (1999): 44–47.

61. Following comparative data from the ancient Near East, the pattern in Habakkuk 3, and internal clues within the book of Psalms itself, Bruce Waltke argues that we should actually divide the present psalm superscripts into superscripts and subscripts, with the fifty-five musical notations including "to the musical director/choirmaster" going with the psalms that precede. He believes the superscripts relate to a psalm's composition and the subscripts to its performance. See Bruce K. Waltke, "Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both," *JBL* 110, 4 (1991): 583–96.

#	SG	Title	Author	#	SG	Title	Author	#	SG	Title	Author
1	W		Anonymous	51	L	PTAH	**David**	101	R	TA	**David**
2	R		Anonymous	52	U	PTAH	**David**	102	L	TPu	Anonymous
3	L	TAH	**David**	53	L	PTA	**David**	103	P	A	**David**
4	L	PTA	**David**	54	L	PTAH	**David**	104	P		Anonymous
5	L	PTA	**David**	55	L	PTA	**David**	105	P		Anonymous
6	L	PTA	**David**	56	L	PTAH	**David**	106	L		Anonymous
7	L	TAH	**David**	57	L	PTAH	**David**	107	Th		Anonymous
8	P	PA	**David**	58	L	PTA	**David**	108	L	TTA	**David**
9	M	PTA	**David**	59	L	PTAH	**David**	109	L	PTA	**David**
10	M		Anonymous	60	L	PTAPuH	**David**	110	R	TA	**David**
11	T	PA	**David**	61	L	PA	**David**	111	P		Anonymous
12	L	PTA	**David**	62	U	PTA	**David**	112	W		Anonymous
13	L	PTA	**David**	63	L	TAH	**David**	113	P		Anonymous
14	L	PA	**David**	64	L	PTA	**David**	114	P		Anonymous
15	Lit	TA	**David**	65	M	PTAT	**David**	115	U		Anonymous
16	T	TA	**David**	66	Th	PTT	Anonymous	116	Th		Anonymous
17	L	TA	**David**	67	U	PTT	Anonymous	117	P		Anonymous
18	R	PTAH	**David**	68	U	PTAT	**David**	118	Th		Anonymous
19	M	PTA	**David**	69	L	PA	**David**	119	M		Anonymous
20	R	PTA	**David**	70	L	PAPu	**David**	120	L	TPu	Anonymous
21	R	PTA	**David**	71	L		Anonymous	121	T	TPu	Anonymous
22	L	PTA	**David**	72	R	A	Solomon	122	P	TPuA	**David**
23	T	TA	**David**	73	W	TA	Asaph	123	L	TPu	Anonymous
24	Lit	TA	**David**	74	L	TA	Asaph	124	Th	TPuA	**David**
25	M	A	**David**	75	U	PTAT	Asaph	125	T	TPu	Anonymous
26	L	A	**David**	76	P	PTAT	Asaph	126	L	TPu	Anonymous
27	L	A	**David**	77	L	PTA	Asaph	127	W	TPuA	Solomon
28	L	A	**David**	78	H	TA	Asaph	128	W	TPu	Anonymous
29	P	TA	**David**	79	L	TA	Asaph	129	T	TPu	Anonymous
30	Th	TATH	**David**	80	L	PTAT	Asaph	130	L	TPu	Anonymous
31	M	PTA	**David**	81	U	PA	Asaph	131	T	TPuA	**David**
32	M	TA	**David**	82	L	TA	Asaph	132	R	TPu	Anonymous
33	P		Anonymous	83	L	TTA	Asaph	133	U	TPuA	**David**
34	M	AH	David	84	P	PTA	Sons of Korah	134	P	TPu	Anonymous
35	L	A	David	85	L	PTA	Sons of Korah	135	P		Anonymous
36	M	PA	David	86	L	TA	**David**	136	P		Anonymous
37	W	A	David	87	P	TAT	Sons of Korah	137	L		Anonymous
38	L	TAPu	David	88	L	TTAPTA	Sons of Korah*	138	Th	A	**David**
39	L	PTA	David	89	M	TA	Ethan the Ezrahite	139	U	PTA	**David**
40	M	PTA	David	90	L	TA	Moses	140	L	PTA	**David**
41	L	PTA	David	91	T		Anonymous	141	L	TA	**David**
42	L	PTA	Sons of Korah	92	Th	TTPu	Anonymous	142	L	TAHT	**David**
43	L		Anonymous	93	P		Anonymous	143	L	TA	**David**
44	L	PTA	Sons of Korah	94	L		Anonymous	144	R	A	**David**
45	R	PTAT	Sons of Korah	95	P		Anonymous	145	P	TPuA	**David**
46	P	PAPT	Sons of Korah	96	P		Anonymous	146	P		Anonymous
47	P	PTA	Sons of Korah	97	P		Anonymous	147	P		Anonymous
48	P	TTA	Sons of Korah	98	P	T	Anonymous	148	P		Anonymous
49	W	PTA	Sons of Korah	99	P		Anonymous	149	P		Anonymous
50	U	TA	Asaph	100	P	TPu	Anonymous	150	P		Anonymous

*Psalm 88 is also attributed to Heman the Ezrahite.

KEY for Subgenre (SG): "L" Lament; "T" Trust; "Th" Thanksgiving; "P" Praise; "R" Royal; "W" Wisdom; "Lit" Liturgy; "H" Historical; "M" Mixed; "U" Unclear.

Key for Title: "P" Performance: "To the choirmaster"; "T" Type: "A Psalm"; "A" Author: "of X [Proper Name]"; "Pu" Purpose; "H" Historical Context; **Bold**: Something distinct or expanded.

Fig. 1.17. Patterns and Authorship in Psalm Titles

from one book to the next. Also included is a list of subgenres (SG) associated with each psalm. In the title pattern, elements marked in **bold** signal that there is something distinct or expanded from the most basic pattern of "To the choirmaster. A psalm of X [proper name]."

Nearly all scholars affirm the antiquity of the psalm titles. We know that the musical terms in the titles were ancient enough to have already fallen out of disuse by the third century B.C., for those who translated the Old Testament into Greek (i.e., the Septuagint) were already struggling to understand their meaning (a problem that we still have today). With this, we should not be surprised by David's explicit connection with nearly half the psalms, for the Old Testament regularly points to him as Israel's foremost music leader (e.g., 1 Sam. 16:14–23; 2 Sam. 22; Ps. 18; 2 Sam. 23:1–7; 1 Chron. 6:31; 15:16; 16:7; 25:1; 2 Chron. 29:30; Ezra 3:10; Neh. 12:24–47), and we know that the nation was singing music associated with him at a very early time (2 Chron. 29:30; Ps. 72:20; cf. 1 Chron. 16:7–37). Those in the New Testament period were clearly aware of the psalm titles, and both Jesus and Peter built arguments that hinged on Davidic authorship of certain psalms (Matt. 22:41–46 with Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:25–29 with Ps. 16:8–11).[62] In light of the above, we have good reason to trust the authenticity of the titles as part of Scripture, believing that they are accurate in their claims to both authorship and history.[63]

According to the titles, David authored each of the fourteen psalms that include a historical note. Of these, most show signs of lament (except Pss. 18, 30, 34), and all but Psalm 30 are either expressions of thanks or praise after deliverance (Pss. 18, 34) or cries of distress while running from enemies, experiencing betrayal, engaging in battle, or confessing sin (Pss. 3, 7, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142). God thus led David on his own journey of suffering in order to create a typological context from which to predict the ultimate sufferings of the Christ and the subsequent glories (1 Peter 1:11). The titles ground David's messianic predictions in history and help us to see David's life as pointing to the Christ's.

The psalm titles place the seventy-three Davidic psalms mostly in Books I, II, and V.[64] The higher frequency of Davidic psalms at the beginning and end allows the whole Psalter to bear a Davidic-messianic stamp. While the sins of the Davidic line called the kingdom hope into question, the editor(s) of the Psalter stressed from beginning to end that God would deliver Israel's king and those associated with him and that he would preserve both the king and his kingdom forever.

6. Use the Psalms' subgenres to enhance personal and corporate worship.

In the two previous sections, I gave overviews of a number of subgenres in the Psalms (e.g., psalms of lament, thanksgiving, praise). This kind of analysis has a number of benefits.

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62. In two instances the New Testament authors tag as Davidic psalms those that are not signaled as such in the Hebrew text (Acts 4:25–26 with Ps. 2:1–2; Heb. 4:7 with Ps. 95:7–8), though the LXX marks both as psalms of David.

63. For an overview of the question with an argument for the superscriptions' authenticity and accuracy, see D. A. Brueggemann, "Psalms 4: Titles," *DOT:WPW* 614–15; Gordon J. Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 86–90.

64. The Septuagint (LXX) expands the list of Davidic psalms by fourteen; see Brueggemann, "Psalms 4: Titles," 614.

a. Knowing the patterns of the subgenres helps our interpretive expectations.

Knowing the general patterns of the various categories of psalms can help us have proper expectations in our interpretation. It can also signal important departures from the norm, which can mark something significant.

b. Considering the subgenres helps us recognize Christ's humanness and helps motivate our perseverance in holiness.

The Psalms portray the anointed king as expressing every emotion that we ourselves feel and as finding vindication from God: anger and rage, fear and sorrow, faith amid danger, peace, gratitude, praise. The New Testament discloses that the Christ was "made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God" (Heb. 2:17). He was "in every respect . . . tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15; cf. Phil. 2:6–8). In the Psalms we get a unique taste of the inner passions and prayers of the anointed king. We hear the anguish of his laments, the joys of his thanksgivings, and the pleasures of his praise. And through these various expressions, we find help for our own journey through tribulation unto triumph. The different types of psalms help us in various ways to look "to Jesus" and to "consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted" (Heb. 12:2–3).

c. The different categories of psalms give words to our prayers for every season of life.

Sometimes we don't know how to pray. Knowing which psalms are laments, thanksgivings, or praises can help us in seasons of pain and pleasure to find words to express our hearts to God, whether individually or corporately. May the church increasingly become a people who sings the psalms as a means of identifying with Christ in his sufferings and victory.

While the benefits of subgenre analysis are real, I offer two important cautions. First, subgenre analysis tends to isolate the psalms from one another, losing any sense of canonical continuity within the Psalter as a whole. As noted above, the book of Psalms evidences intentionality in its structure and flow, and we can miss the beauty of this forest if we look only at the trees in isolation. Second, some psalms do not fit into single subgenre categories but appear to be more fluid mixtures of different subgenres. Heartfelt words to God so often combine praise and petition, thanksgiving and plea that we must be careful not to force a given psalm into a preconceived mold.

Proverbs

General Characteristics of Biblical Proverbs

The nature of this book allows me to touch on only a sample of the various Old Testament genres. The last that we are going to consider are the proverbs. A **proverb** is a succinct, memorable saying in common use that states a general truth or piece of advice. Cover over the right-hand column in figure 1.18, and go through each English proverb one by one to see how many you can complete. Tally your total on a piece of paper.

Lightning never strikes twice . . .	in the same place.
A chain is no stronger . . .	than its weakest link.
A leopard cannot . . .	change its spots.
A penny saved . . .	is a penny earned.
The bigger they are . . .	the harder they fall.
Actions speak . . .	louder than words.
No news . . .	is good news.
Don't bite off more . . .	than you can chew.
Don't change horses . . .	midstream.
Don't count your chickens . . .	before they're hatched.
Don't cry . . .	over spilled milk.
Don't judge a book . . .	by its cover.
Don't put all your eggs . . .	in one basket.
Don't put the cart . . .	before the horse.
Don't throw the baby . . .	out with the bathwater.

Fig. 1.18. Some English Proverbs

Every cloud has . . .	a silver lining.
Give someone an inch . . .	and they'll take a mile.
If a thing is worth doing . . .	it's worth doing well.
If at first you don't succeed . . .	try, try again.
People who live in glass houses . . .	shouldn't throw stones.

Fig. 1.18. Some English Proverbs (cont.)

How many of the proverbs did you know? If you got 16–20 correct, we will call you a "proverbial genius." If 11–15, you are "proverbially bright." If 6–10, you are struggling, and we will call you "proverbially dull." If you got only 0–5 right, you are definitely "proverbially challenged."

A number of features are common to all the proverbs listed in figure 1.18, and many of these features are also present in Hebrew proverbs, such as those found in Proverbs 10–31.

1. Proverbs are memorable.

In order to remember well, we need information that is (a) *understandable* in our language, (b) *manageable* enough to grasp, and (c) *rehearsable* enough to restate. Most proverbs are pithy, memorable, and poetic. Douglas Stuart uses the following helpful examples to draw attention to the unforgettable nature of proverbs:[65]

   a. *"Look before you leap"* versus "In advance of committing yourself to a course of action, consider your circumstances and options."
   b. *"A stitch in time saves nine"* versus "There are certain corrective measures for minor problems that, when taken early on in a course of action, forestall major problems from arising."

The point here is clear. Proverbs are powerful because they are memorable.

2. Many proverbs are designed for specific occasions.

Proverbs are regularly situation-specific. They often present contradictory perspectives, with each proverb being correct in certain circumstances. Note the pairs of proverbs in figure 1.19 on the next page.

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65. Fee, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 241.

1a. "Birds of a feather flock together."	1b. "Opposites attract."
2a. "Too many cooks spoil the broth."	2b. "Two heads are better than one."
3a. "He who hesitates is lost."	3b. "Look before you leap."
4a. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."	4b. "A man's reach should exceed his grasp."
Prov. 26:4. Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.	Prov. 26:5. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

Fig. 1.19. Contradictory Proverbs

Proverbs supply the right word for the right time. Proverbs 25:11 declares, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver." Yet we read in Proverbs 26:9, "Like a thorn that goes up into the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of fools." As seen in figure 1.19, proverbs can contradict each other, but this is only because some are limited in their use and designed for particular occasions. When we neglect the intended situation for a proverb, we might use it in hurtful, unhelpful ways. But when we use a proverb rightly and wisely, we will give life to those around us. So it is that "death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits" (Prov. 18:21).

3. Many proverbs address ultimate and not immediate truths.

Growing out of Israel's personal relationship with the living God (Gen. 18:24–25; Job 28:28; Prov. 11:20; 15:33) and the covenantal context of blessing and curse (Lev. 26; Deut. 28), one of the principles that guides Israel's wisdom thinking is retribution theology—what some have termed the *act-consequence nexus*. Notice the examples in figure 1.20.

1.	Job 4:8	As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.
2.	Prov. 22:8–9	Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of his fury will fail. Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.
3.	Prov. 26:27	Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling.

Fig. 1.20. Retribution Theology in Israel's Wisdom Tradition

| 4. | Prov. 28:10 | Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance. |
| 5. | Prov. 28:18 | Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall. |

Fig. 1.20. Retribution Theology in Israel's Wisdom Tradition (cont.)

All of these texts highlight that in God's world, "you reap what you sow." Nevertheless, numerous other proverbs identify that this harvester's principle has many exceptions *in this life*. For example, the "better . . . than" proverbs clearly show that a simple act-consequence pattern does not always hold up in the present: "Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice" (Prov. 16:8). "It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud" (16:19). A number of other proverbs simply declare explicitly that in this cursed age, the righteous do not always prosper and the wicked sometimes do: "A gracious woman gets honor, and violent men get riches" (11:16). "The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice" (13:23). The "less fitting" and "number" proverbs declare the same thing—this life does not always work out according to the act-consequence nexus: "It is not fitting for a fool to live in luxury, much less for a slave to rule over princes" (19:10). "Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up: a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is filled with food; an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she displaces her mistress" (30:21–23).[66]

Consider now the biblical proverbs in figure 1:21. While all offer truth claims, some of these truths (##1, 3, 6) are not apparent now but will be realized only in the future when God overcomes all evil and makes all things right.

1.	Prov. 10:27	The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.
2.	Prov. 11:20	Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the LORD, but those of blameless ways are his delight.
3.	Prov. 13:21	Disaster pursues sinners, but the righteous are rewarded with good.
4.	Prov. 16:1	The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

Fig. 1.21. Sample Proverbs to Consider the Significance of Eschatology

66. Both the Preacher in Ecclesiastes 8:14 and the sons of Korah in Psalm 44:17–19 equally lament how retribution theology is more complex than it first appears.

5.	Prov. 16:4	The Lᴏʀᴅ has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.
6.	Prov. 16:31	Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.
7.	Prov. 19:21	Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lᴏʀᴅ that will stand.
8.	Prov. 21:30	No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lᴏʀᴅ.

Fig. 1.21. Sample Proverbs to Consider the Significance of Eschatology (cont.)

Proverbs that predict a certain outcome are not necessarily absolute promises *for the present age*, but they do express absolute, ultimate—even eschatological—truths that time will prove unless God intervenes for good or ill. Douglas Stuart offers the following three examples, which I have adapted for my purposes.[67]

a. *Proverbs 15:25.* "The Lᴏʀᴅ tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries."

Life and Scripture testify that there are arrogant people whose houses still stand and widows whom greedy creditors abuse or defraud. Accordingly, we read in Job 24:2–3, "Some move landmarks; they seize flocks and pasture them. They drive away the donkey of the fatherless; they take the widow's ox for a pledge." Similarly, Jesus declared in Mark 12:40, "[The religious leaders] devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." The point of Proverbs 15:25 is *not* to declare a truth that always stands in the present but rather to assert a more ultimate principle: "God opposes the proud and cares for the needy, and he will eventually make all things right." This principle is absolute, but in the present age there are many situations that counter it (see Heb. 2:8). We rest in hope, however, knowing that God's disposition is toward the broken (Deut. 10:18; James 1:27) and that God will make all things right.

b. *Proverbs 22:26–27.* "Be not one of those who give pledges, who put up security for debts. If you have nothing with which to pay, why should your bed be taken from under you?"

Does this passage teach that we should *never* buy a house on mortgage (a secure debt)? Will all credit-card debt automatically result in God's taking away all your possessions—including your bed? No, the proverb teaches a single principle that is always true: "Debts should be undertaken cautiously because foreclosure is very painful."

67. Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 243–45.

c. Proverbs 29:12. "If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked."

Does this proverb guarantee that a government official has no choice but to become corrupt if his superior (the king, president, prime minister, tribal chief, etc.) heeds the voices of liars? No, it simply instructs that "the ruler who insists on hearing the truth will help keep a nation's leadership honest."

In conclusion, our present lives are filled with many ironies and enigmas (see "הֶבֶל ['Vanity'?] in Ecclesiastes" in chapter 7). Nevertheless, we must still heed the call to walk in wisdom, because God, who is always just and ever constant, will ultimately punish the wicked and uphold the righteous: "Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished, but the offspring of the righteous will be delivered" (Prov. 11:21). "Fret not yourself because of evildoers, and be not envious of the wicked, for the evil man has no future; the lamp of the wicked will be put out" (24:19–20). "But these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors. . . . For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster" (1:18–19, *32–33*).[68]

Reconsidering Proverbs 22:6

Now I want to relook at a proverb familiar to all parents—Proverbs 22:6. Regularly in my pastoral ministry and parenting I have encountered confusion regarding the meaning of this well-known verse. The whole verse has two lines, the first stating a command and the second detailing the consequence. Those who don't know Hebrew may want to jump over this section, but I encourage all to keep reading.

חֲנֹךְ לַנַּעַר עַל־פִּי דַרְכּוֹ	6	Train up a child in the way he should go;
גַּם כִּי־יַזְקִין לֹא־יָסוּר מִמֶּנָּה׃	b	even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Fig. 1.22. Proverbs 22:6 in the MT and ESV

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68. This same eschatological hope is set forth in numerous places through the Writings (e.g., Job 19:25; 30:23; Pss. 5:11–12[H12–13]; 21:3, 6[H4, 7]; 24:5; 29:11; 67:1, 6–7[H2, 7–8]; 28:8–9; 72:17; 73:24–26; 109:26–31; 112:1–2; 115:12–15; 119:20–21; 129:8; 132:13–18; 133:3; 134:3; 147:13; Eccl. 2:11–13; 8:12–13). For a similar eschatological approach to the truths in proverbs, see Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 107–9.

1. Questions Arising from the Traditional Rendering

If you know Hebrew and read the text closely, two important observations become apparent as you read the traditional rendering seen in the ESV. First, in its three other occurrences, the rare verb חֲנֹךְ that the ESV renders "train" refers to "dedicating" houses, whether of a man (Deut. 20:5) or of God (1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chron. 7:5). This suggests that the initial imperative is calling for parents to actively devote or commit their youth to a certain, perhaps even religious, course of action—intentionally and formally pointing their child toward magnifying the greatness, worth, sufficiency, and saving power of God.[69] The point here is that "train up" may be too weak and misses the potential element of consecration to religious and moral direction.

Certainly "dedicating" a child would include the common ceremony of commitment that many parents engage in at the birth of their children. Yet most of Proverbs addresses the parenting of teenagers, suggesting that the act of dedicating in Proverbs 22:6 is focused on an intentional, sustained, God-dependent shepherding of our children's hearts as they grow into adulthood—one in which the children themselves are aware of the parents' trajectory-setting intentions. This is not a passive calling for dads and moms.

Second, the ESV's "in the way he should go" is a very idiomatic way of capturing the Hebrew "according to the dictates of [lit., the mouth of] his way" (עַל־פִּי דַרְכּוֹ).[70] We could therefore translate the command line of the proverb, "Dedicate a youth according to the dictates of his way," or, perhaps more commonly, "Dedicate your child according to what his way demands."

2. Assessing the "Way" of a Child

So what does עַל־פִּי דַרְכּוֹ ("according to the dictates of his way") most likely mean? Significantly, in wisdom literature such as Proverbs there are only two "ways"—the way of wisdom and life and the way of folly and death. The previous verse declares, "Thorns and snares are in the *way* of the crooked; whoever guards his soul will keep far from them" (Prov. 22:5). Similarly, Proverbs 11:5 says, "The righteousness of the blameless keeps his *way* straight, but the wicked falls by his own wickedness." Consider also Proverbs 14:2, which reads, "Whoever walks in uprightness fears the LORD, but he who is devious in his *ways* despises him." And again, Proverbs 16:17 says, "The highway of the upright turns aside from evil; whoever guards his *way* preserves his life."

Within Proverbs, the moral content of one's way depends on the doer—whether God (Prov. 8:22), the wise (11:5; 14:8; 16:7), humans in general (16:9; 20:24), or fools (19:3).[71] Significantly, a "youth's way" is often negative. First, when left to themselves, the "young" lack judgment and have hearts filled with foolishness: "And I have seen

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69. So Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15–31*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 204.

70. The fact that עַל־פִּי is a Hebrew idiom meaning "according to the dictates of" is clear in texts such as Genesis 41:40; 43:7; Exodus 34:7; and Deuteronomy 17:6, 10–11 (ibid., 205n62). Cf. *HALOT*, 2:826, s.v. עַל.

71. So Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15–31*, 205.

among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense"
(7:7). "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far
from him" (22:15). Second, without discipline, the young bring disgrace on their par-
ents: "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to
his mother" (29:15). Out of this context, parents are thus exhorted to discipline their
children and to instruct them in wisdom: "Discipline your son, for there is hope; do
not set your heart on putting him to death" (19:18; cf. 1:1, 4; 29:15). In Proverbs the
"way" of a child seems more negative than positive; it is the way without wisdom.

3. Cultivating and Shaping Potential

These texts could lead one to read Proverbs 22:6 as a sarcastic or ironic command
that warns parents of the result of not establishing standards and boundaries for their
children. A similar ironic command comes in Proverbs 19:27, which also begins with
an imperative: "Cease to hear instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words
of knowledge." If you read Proverbs 22:6 in a similar way, the principle would be, "Let
a boy do what he wants, and he will become a self-willed adult incapable of change!
Raise him in accordance with his wayward heart, and he will stay wayward."[72] I once
read the proverb in this way.

But I now question this approach for three reasons.[73] First, the sarcastic reading
requires a more passive approach to parenting that does not account for the verb חֲנֹךְ
("dedicate"), which expresses conscious intention. Certainly we as parents are always
training our kids, even through our passivity. By failing to lead them to repentance
before the Sovereign God, we teach them that they are fine to continue living as
self-made kings and queens rather than servants. By failing to instruct them in God's
commandments, we teach them that God's Word is *not* the highest authority in our
lives. By failing to set boundaries, we instruct them that we really do not care whether
they do good or ill. Nevertheless, this type of passive training is *not* what seems to
be expressed in the imperative "Dedicate!" Rather, the sage is here calling parents
to intentionally commit or orient the moral and religious trajectories of their youth.

Second, while the youth's way is naturally negative *when left to himself*, Proverbs
22:6 pictures not a self-willed individual but one who is benefiting from *the intentional
discipline and instruction of his parents* ("Dedicate!"). With this, the idiomatic "according
to the dictates of his way" seems most naturally to express *the way that ought to be*. That
is, every youth's future is filled with possibility, and we as parents must recognize this
and direct our child's path toward God. This verse is about trajectories and potential,
which suggests that the ESV's "the way he should go," while missing specificity, dynami-
cally catches the point of the text.

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72. For some interpreting Proverbs 22:6 in this way, see Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs*, OTL (Louisville: West-
minster John Knox, 1999), 197; Gordon P. Hugenberger, "Train Up a Child," in *Basics of Biblical Hebrew: Grammar*,
by Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 162–63; Douglas Stuart, *Old
Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 41–42.

73. I am grateful to Bruce Waltke for pushing me to reconsider my understanding of this verse; I have followed
many of his exegetical decisions on this passage.

Third, the consequence of heeding the command is that "even when he grows old, he will not turn from it." In Proverbs "the wise, not fools, are crowned with the gray hair of age (20:29),"[74] so the proverb seems to anticipate a trajectory *toward wisdom*, not foolishness.

The consequence statement in Proverbs 22:6 implies that the parents' intentional moral and religious shaping early on will have a permanent effect on their child for good. This statement is not a hard-and-fast promise to parents, however, for the rest of the book makes clear that the power of the youth's future depends not only on the parents' guidance but also very much on the choices that the child himself makes. The immediately preceding verse implies that the youth must guard his soul from those who are crooked (Prov. 22:5). He could choose to follow the wicked unto death (2:12–19), or he could heed the wisdom of his parents and choose the good paths of the righteous unto life (22:1–11, 20).

4. A Proverb for Parents and Children

While Proverbs 22:6 is framed as instruction to parents, the book as a whole gives guidance to the young (1:4). This fact suggests that Proverbs 22:6 was actually intended to call straying youth back toward the right way. If you are a son or daughter who had parents who worked hard to set positive moral and religious trajectories for your life (though imperfectly), you must not counter this trajectory by making foolish decisions today.

Proverbs 22:6 sets out a principle that time will prove true unless God intervenes for good or ill. As a parent, I rejoice in the directions given me in God's Word—the Lord calls me and my wife to actively and intentionally dedicate our children to represent, reflect, and resemble the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Yet Proverbs 22:6 also reminds me how much I and my children fail, so I also rejoice in the power of the gospel to curb my own faults and the hardest of my children's hearts. God in Christ makes those dead in sin alive (Eph. 2:4–5), forgives all who confess (1 John 1:9), and overcomes the old creation with the new (2 Cor. 5:17).[75]

A Final Note on Biblical Proverbs

We have found numerous proverbs from all around the ancient world, but none of these call for the fear of YHWH. What distinguishes biblical wisdom from all the rest

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74. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15–31*, 205.

75. For more on this proverb, see Ted Hilderbrandt, "Proverbs 22:6a: Train Up a Child?," *GTJ* 9, 1 (1988): 3–19; Peter J. Gentry, "Equipping the Generation: Raising Children, the Christian Way," *JDFM* 2, 2 (2012): 96–109.

is its affirmation that YHWH alone orders the universe, defines value, and clarifies right and wrong. The fear of the Lord provides the basis for wisdom because it aligns one with right order and provides the only proper disposition by which to live God's way. "The fear of the Lᴏʀᴅ is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life" (Prov. 9:10; cf. 1:7).

Throughout the Old Testament, God called people to fear him (e.g., Ex. 20:20; Deut. 10:12), but very few did, and the result was destruction. I find hope in the fact that Jeremiah predicted that in the new covenant God would supply the fear of the Lord by which we work out our salvation (Phil. 2:12). Hear the Word of the Lord in Jeremiah 32:40: "I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me." In this text God is promising to help every new covenant believer walk in the ways of wisdom.

Finally, biblical proverbs find their culmination in Christ, the one who is wisdom for us. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:30, "Christ Jesus . . . became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (cf. 1:24). He is the ultimate one to whom Proverbs 30:4 speaks: "Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and *what is his son's name*? Surely you know!" The first name requested is most certainly *YHWH*, the one from whom wisdom comes (Job 28:23; Prov. 8:22; Eccl. 12:11). As for his "son's name," *son* in the book most commonly designates a member of the royal family (Prov. 1:1, 8; 4:1–9), who was to heed his father's teaching in order to align with the Deuteronomic ideal for kingship (Deut. 17:18–20). Thus, God's royal and wise "son" refers first to the imperfect Davidic offspring, but each of their lives served as a marker of hope for the more ultimate, perfect son of David (2 Sam. 7:14, 16; Ps. 2:7)—the one whom we now know as Jesus, the embodiment of wisdom. James tells us that for those in Christ, when we lack wisdom, all we have to do is ask, and God will give generously without reproach (James 1:5).

Key Words and Concepts

Genre and genre analysis
TaNaK
Principles of criticism, analogy, and correlation
Prophet
Oracle
Oracles of indictment, instruction, warning/punishment, and hope/salvation
Apodictic vs. casuistic laws
Criminal, civil, family, cultic/ceremonial, and compassion laws
Royal psalms
Psalms of lament, trust, thanksgiving, and praise
Proverb

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Describe the construction of Jesus' Bible in its threefold structure. How does each part contribute to the whole message of the Old Testament?

2. How should we think of the Old Testament's similarities to and differences from other ancient writings of the day?

3. How much is an account's historicity related to genre?

4. What is the problem with denying the Bible's historicity yet still claiming that the Bible bears a meaningful, authoritative message?

5. How should the principles of criticism, analogy, and correlation be reworked for a theistic worldview?

6. What is the difference between *foretelling* and *forthtelling* in biblical prophecy?

7. How do the four types of prophetic speech relate to the Mosaic covenant? Working from figure 1.6, identify the different curse types and restoration blessing types apparent in Jeremiah 16:4, 14–15.

8. Which of the interpretive fallacies do you see yourself most prone to? Elaborate on the danger if we affirm these fallacies.

9. "The psalms that initially stood as the prayers of the Christ now become the songs of the saved." Explain what this means.

10. What are three characteristics of biblical proverbs?

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