



The Old Testament and the New

In the wake of the Reformation, theologians sought to reform Christian doctrine in light of Scripture. As long as the Bible was approached with dogmatic ends in view, the relationship of the two Testaments was not considered a major problem; the Bible could be consulted as one book. But things have changed. Study of the Bible in modern times has caused us to raise the question of the relationship of the Testaments to each other in ways that the church fathers, Reformers, orthodox dogmaticians, and a lot of other people would not have considered. A checklist of factors may be given as follows. We read the Old Testament with a sense of history and want to understand its books and passages in light of their historical setting, just as we would any other book (but without implying that the biblical books are “just ordinary books”). We recognize that the Old Testament was not canonized by the Jewish community until after (and partly in response to) the rise of Christianity, and that the New Testament writers had no sense of a fixed canon even after Jewish canonization (and so they used many texts not found in the Jewish canon as scriptural resources for their own works). We say that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament, but that is a confession of faith, not a statement which can be demonstrated as true, for obviously Jewish communities of the first century and since have not agreed. We know that the New Testament writers made extensive use of the Old Testament and other Jewish literature, employing typology, midrash, and promise-and-fulfillment formulations; and while we are impressed by these methods and can grant their legitimacy for the early writers, we are bound to ask concerning the extent to which we may do the same in light of our historical sense of the texts. Many have said—and we must grant truth to the claim—that “the Old Testament is not first of all a Christian book.” On the other hand, we are not willing to side with Marcion and say that it is not a Christian book! All of this, and more, suggests that the relationship of “the Old Testament and the New” deserves thoughtful attention. Can we think of the two Testaments as a unity? If not, why not? If so, how?

Various articles in this issue take up the question. *Joseph Everson* explores the implications of the shift from systematic to historical categories in biblical interpretation and suggests a way of viewing the Bible by means of an analogy. *Terence Fretheim* and *Donald Juel* (an Old Testament and a New Testament specialist, respectively) consider the use of the Old Testament in Christian proclamation. Fretheim cites five factors which cause difficulties for the preacher, and he addresses each. Juel emphasizes that Old Testament interpretation by gentile Christians today must come to terms with the fact that these books were addressed first to Israel, not to themselves (as gentiles or Christians), and he offers two suggestions for preaching in the church. *George Nickelsburg* takes us back into the world of Jewish interpretation in which Christianity had its rise, showing how New Testament writers used methods current in their day

to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures in light of Jesus as the Christ. *Nils Dahl* (recently retired from a distinguished teaching career at the University of Oslo and Yale University) confronts issues raised by historical scholarship against the pre-critical Christian tradition of Old Testament interpretation. He asks whether we can maintain—without sacrificing critical scholarship—a “correspondence between God’s action in Jesus Christ and God’s intention as it was previously made known” in the Scriptures of Israel, in which a “crucified Messiah” is not expected. He answers his question by exploring the theme of God’s endangered and reaffirmed promises. *Duane Priebe* reviews ways that interpreters have sought to solve the problem of the unity of the Testaments, and he goes on to suggest that the risen and expected Jesus discloses the meaning of history, including that of Israel, so that the “original meaning” of the texts “is only one dimension in a history of meaning.” The article by *Walter Brueggemann* rounds off this section well by serving as a case study—tracing a tradition of promise, and the threat of loss, of children of faith in both Testaments—but also as an occasion to reflect on that theme for the ministry of the church.

Articles in the Resources section deal with Scripture in other ways. *Marlo Miller* shows how the “story” character of the Gospels has been rediscovered in recent years and what that can mean for preaching. *John Kuethe* provides a fresh look at how Kierkegaard viewed the Scriptures.

With this issue a new feature, called “Texts in Context,” is introduced. The Associate Editor, David Tiede, has kindly accepted editorial responsibility for this section, and his introduction to it provides further information about it. Finally, our Reviews section contains three reviews of particular relevance for the theme of this issue: reviews of the inaugural volumes in the Interpretation commentary series.

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