

OT 501--Old Testament Introduction

Lecture Notes—History of Research, Methodology, Historiography, World-view

Much of this section of notes is based on John Rogerson, *Beginning Old Testament Study*, Second Edition (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1998). (*BOTS*)

History of OT Study

Critical study of the Old Testament (OT) is not a modern development. Even in early Judaism, teachers analyzed the OT, interpreting for their students, and applying to life in their time. The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) and the New Testament (NT) display the exegetical methods employed by these early interpreters of the OT.¹ While most of the early interpretive work was interpretive in nature, and not what more modern scholars would consider “critical study,” the ancient writers and teachers certainly applied critical thought to their work.

--Pre-Eighteenth Century

--Scholars may question the critical nature of these ancient interpreters; however, critical study of the OT certainly began early in the history of the Christian church. Even from earliest times, people studied the OT critically. Early scholars, such as Origen, Jerome, and Augustine asked many of the same questions that scholars ask today, concerning authorship, origins, and literalness. They studied the text and asked hard questions about authenticity and translations.

--Origen (185-245 AD)—

--Origen, who lived in Caesarea, produced a six-column work called the *Hexapla*. The six columns included the Hebrew text, the Hebrew transliterated into Greek, and four columns of various Greek translations (or recensions) of the OT. The *Hexapla* was lost during the Muslim invasion of Palestine, but some of the work survived in quotations by those who used it.

--Origen also produced voluminous commentaries on several OT books.

--Jerome (4th c. AD)

--Jerome, who lived in Bethlehem, was “the greatest Christian Hebrew scholar in the early Church.”² He learned Hebrew and translated the Hebrew Bible in Latin, as well as producing several commentaries and treatises on the OT.

--Augustine (5th c. AD)

¹See Matthias Henze, ed., *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Peter Flint, *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation*, Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); and James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, Library of Early Christianity, Vol. 3, Wayne A. Meeks, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), for basic studies of early OT exegesis.

²*BOTS*, 9.

--Augustine moved from textual questions to several important critical problems in the OT. He concluded, for example, that the 7 days of creation in Genesis 1 were not days and nights as now understood. He applied critical techniques to his interpretation of the OT, utilizing the resources available to him.

--Protestant reformers, such as Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin also asked certain critical questions concerning the OT, such as authorship or the Pentateuch and the relationship of science to scripture. Many of their conclusions might surprise modern interpreters, but for the most part all of the pre-18th century scholars stayed within the bounds of doctrinal orthodoxy, which precluded the more radical conclusions that would follow in a relatively short time.

--Martin Luther

--While crying “*sola scriptura*,” Luther came to some critical conclusions regarding the biblical text, such as entertaining the possibility that some prophetic books may not have been written by the prophets.

--John Calvin

--Calvin was a more systematic theologian and Bible scholar than Luther. He asked critical questions of the biblical text, such as how there could be waters above the heavens (from Gen.), suggesting that this description is not scientific, but written so that the common person can understand.³

-- Nineteenth Century & Following

--Beginning in the late 18th century, biblical scholarship began to be removed from church authority, often in educational systems that were not under the church. At this point, scholars were free to question even long held dogma. In this environment, that which became known generically as the “historical critical method” was developed. Actually, the questions, and perhaps even the methods, had not changed radically, but the conclusions did. Furthermore, critical scholars of the 18th and 19th centuries did not cease to be people of faith who believed in authoritative scripture.⁴ They simply did not feel that this faith required them to hold to previous understandings of scripture, science, and rational thought.

--J. Eichhorn wrote the first introduction to the OT, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, in 1780.

--M. de Wette argued in 1806-1807 that the laws of the OT had grown up over centuries, rather than coming from God through Moses. He argued that Samuel and Elijah’s lack of knowledge of the Deuteronomic law requiring that all sacrifices be offered in Jerusalem proved that Deuteronomy was written after Samuel and Elijah. The change that de Wette inserted into OT critical study was that he questioned the historical presentation of Israel in the OT. Rogerson called this a “radical turn in critical scholarship that has affected the discipline every since.”⁵

³ *BOTS*, 13.

⁴ *BOTS*, 17-18.

⁵ *BOTS*, 19-20.

--Julius Wellhausen

--In his *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*,⁶ Wellhausen espoused a historical-critical view of the OT that has come to be associated with his name. Certainly, he certainly built upon the work of de Wette and others; but his work would become the watershed in the field. This book included the detailed description of the JEPD sources for the Pentateuch and a revised understanding of Israel's religion, one that is accepted by most scholars today. This position vis-à-vis Israel's religion is that in the early stages, contrary to the laws of the Pentateuch, Israel worshiped much like the Canaanites in the land. Only later, under the influence of the prophets did monotheism and centralized worship become a part of Israel's religion.

--S. R. Driver

--Driver published *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* in 1891⁷, and Rogerson calls it "still the best introduction in English to the so-called Documentary Hypothesis and its implications for the history of Israel's religion."⁸

Driver argued that

Criticism in the hands of Christian scholars does not banish or destroy the inspiration of the Old Testament; it *presupposes* it; it seeks only to determine the condition under which it operates, and the literary forms through which it manifests itself; and it thus helps us to frame truer conceptions of the methods which it has pleased God to employ in revealing Himself to His ancient people of Israel, and in preparing the way for the fuller manifestation of Himself in Christ Jesus.⁹

--This statement by Driver leads into the next discussion, evangelical and fundamentalist reaction to the conclusions presented by critical scholars concerning the OT.

--Faith, Fundamentalism, and Critical Methods

--One should note that critical study of the OT does not preclude faith in God, Jesus Christ, or even the truth of the scripture. The fundamentalist belief in the absolute inerrancy of our OT text may indeed be at odds with modern critical study, but faith in Jesus Christ or in the veracity of the Bible is not.

--One might consider this statement concerning inspiration and inerrancy:

The Bible is the inspired word of God written under the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit; God is the real author. The Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation of the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, Section 11, made clear that the writers of the sacred books were true authors making use of their abilities and literary skills while they served as instruments of God, the primary and divine author, who directed them and inspired them as they composed their works. Hence the scriptures teach "firmly and faithfully, and without error, that truth which God

⁶ Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Berlin: Reimer, 1883; Reprint, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1983).

⁷ S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, Sixth ed. (n.p., 1897; Reprint, New York: The Meridian Library, 1956)

⁸ *BOTS*, 21.

⁹ Driver, xiii.

wanted to be put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.” God furnishes the message itself which is inspired and unerring, while the writers provide the style. Because of the limitations of the writers there are some grammatical, geographical, and historical errors which do not compromise the message in any manner.¹⁰

--The issue revolves around the nature, inspiration, authority, and purpose of the Bible. The Bible is primarily a book of faith, not of scientific, historical records. Certainly history and science is found in scripture, but much of the ancient mindset can simply not be harmonized with modern scientific study. The purpose of the Bible was to transmit God’s work with His people, ushering in salvation for all who would believe in and follow Him. Everyone falls on a continuum of literalness, often depending upon presuppositions and religious, philosophical, or denominational background. All students of scripture must be careful not to condemn scholars with whom they disagree until they have heard the scholar thoroughly.

Methods for Old Testament Study

A brief description of several methods, not meant to be exhaustive, will follow, based upon the discussion by David J. A. Clines.¹¹ The reader should note that the methods are not mutually exclusive, and in fact will normally appear in some combination.

“Historical-Grammatical”

--The student of the OT must be primarily concerned with the text itself and its historical background. This is the first goal of most biblical scholars. Most (this writer included) would argue that this is the correct starting place for OT studies. However, it is not the last word.

--“Textual Criticism” is the attempt to arrive at the best (or sometimes the “original” or “most pristine”) text of the OT. Historical Grammatical investigation presupposes textual criticism in order to have the best possible text for study. Textual criticism and interpretation most go hand-in-hand, since interpretation is necessary even for the proper decision concerning the “correct” form of the text.

Redaction Criticism

--The student of the OT must be primarily concerned with the sources as they were gathered by a “redactor” or “editor,” thus making the redactor’s purpose and historical setting of primary importance. Redaction Criticism focuses upon the process of redaction, more than the origin and date of the sources themselves.

Rhetorical Criticism

--The student of the OT must be primarily concerned with the words of the text, often with no concern about the original author—either background or intent. This may include the study of poetic forms, meanings of the words themselves, the structure of texts, or

¹⁰“The Story of Jesus of Nazareth,” online, available at <http://www.prayerline.us/edvideos/bible101part2.html>, accessed on 06 September 2007.

¹¹ *BOTS*, chapter 2.

“reader-oriented” approaches. Most scholars utilize rhetorical criticism at some times, but most probably would not see this as the primary approach (though, of course, some would see historical grammatical research as meaningless!).

--Feminist/Third World Criticisms

--The student of the OT must be primarily concerned with how the Bible speaks to modern issues, or more correctly how it can be viewed from the perspective of those on the margins, whether they are women, minorities, or the oppressed. Today, a veritable smorgasbord of these studies is available, some helpful even to the most conservative reader, others radical enough even to shake the liberal mind. The major purpose of these studies seems to be emphasizing the selective nature of modern biblical studies, which often neglects or ignores how this text might speak to the marginalized. Others seek to radically alter the traditional understanding of scripture by emphasizing possible sexual and gender related faux pas throughout scripture.

--One example of this approach, and perhaps the most paradigmatic example, is feminist, or sometimes womanist, criticism. The feminist approach to the OT seeks to point out the ubiquitous subjugation of women and womanhood, primarily to the role of bearing sons. In fact, several books have been published emphasizing the other primary presentation of women in the OT, “the wicked seducer.”¹²

--Reader-Response Criticism

--As Clines states, “reader-response criticism regards meaning as coming into being at the meeting point of text and reader.”¹³ Thus, meaning comes from the reader, not the writer. As the editors of the *Interpreting Biblical Texts* series from Abingdon stated in the foreword to the volume on the Pentateuch, this type of criticism focuses “on the world *created* by the texts in their engagement with readers.”¹⁴ Scholars using this approach to the biblical text normally have formal training in traditional biblical scholarship, such as Terence Fretheim, who wrote the volume quoted above. These scholars are, then, seeking a different “world” created by the text, rather than the world “behind the text”¹⁵ or the text itself. Thus, each reader is responsible to create his or her own “world” when reading the text. This approach, obviously, can become quite subjective; yet a helpful understanding of the text is presented when viewed from the perspective of readers in the present, as well as, past generations.

--Deconstruction

--Deconstruction is normally associated with a post-modern hermeneutic. Deconstruction is an observation, and often an argument, that texts tend to deconstruct themselves by

¹² *BOTS*, 39; see, for example, the now classic text, Tribble, Phyllis, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, *Overtures in Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Bird, Phyllis A., *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*, *OBT* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1997); Jonathan Kirsch, *The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997).

¹³ *BOTS*, 41.

¹⁴ Terence Fretheim, *The Pentateuch*, *Interpreting Biblical Texts*, edited and foreword by Gene Tucker and Charles Cousar (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

becoming self-contradictory, or sometimes presenting a new meaning. The method is based upon the fact that texts were presented by communities trying to uphold, protect, or defend their beliefs. When viewed from outside the community of origin, deconstructionists would argue that they find new meaning in the text. Clines concluded, deconstruction is an especially powerful tool in biblical study, in that it relativizes the authority attributed to biblical texts, and makes it evident that much of the power that is felt to lie in the texts is really the power of the community that supports them and sanctions them.¹⁶

--Historical Criticism

--The term, "historical criticism" is often given to the field of critical biblical studies as a whole, but the term does have a narrower meaning. The term refers to the process of attempting to discern the historical events behind the texts. Theoretically, therefore, the goal of historical critics is not interpretation of the biblical texts, but an interpretation of history. This history, however, does feed "back into biblical study and determine one dimension of the biblical texts (their relationship to what happened)."¹⁷

--Source Criticism

--Whereas practitioners of redaction criticism seek to understand the process by which a text came into being, the source critic seeks to reconstruct those sources. Redaction and source criticism are often considered identical, and are often practiced simultaneously; the two are not actually the same. The source critic attempts to determine the identity of sources and the extent of their use in texts, which leads to the determination of editorial materials outside the sources.

--Form Criticism

--The form critic argues that in the biblical text are remnants of old forms (German *gattungen*) that sprang from experiences in the lives of the people of ancient Israel (German *sitz im leben*, "situation in life"). Thus, these critics identify legends, hymns, laments, prophetic speech, instruction, and sagas. Hermann Gunkel is often seen as the father of form criticism, and his work on the Book of Psalms revolutionized the study of psalms to the point that virtually all students and teachers of the Book of Psalms utilize his work.¹⁸

--Canonical Criticism

--Brevard Childs¹⁹ argued that the critical studies of the OT had obscured the canonical nature of the Hebrew Bible, ignoring its preservation and use by people of faith. He sought to take into account the strengths and weaknesses of critical methodology, while at the same time recognizing the importance of the OT, as well as biblical canon. Thus, the final form of the canon and history of interpretation are extremely important.

¹⁶ *BOTS*, 43.

¹⁷ *BOTS*, 45.

¹⁸ Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, translated by Thomas M. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

¹⁹ See Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), esp. Part I.

Old Testament History & Historiography

--“The OT does not contain the history of ancient Israel.”²⁰ This statement would bother many students of the Bible. But it is true. At best, the OT contains *a* history of ancient history. More correctly, the OT contains traditions and stories of ancient Israel, expressing their relationship with God. Together, these traditions form a spotty history of Israel, and one written without the benefit of much of the information available today. Much of the problem of modern readers is a misunderstanding of history and historiography.

--Historiography

--Literally, “the writing of History,” it is the study of the techniques of historical research and historical writing. It can also be understood as the science or discipline of recording events. Understanding historiographical presuppositions is important for any historical research, including the OT.

--Western Assumptions of History Writing

--Chronological—Events are presupposed as written in the correct order without the omission of significant events and/or people.

--Systematic—Its only goal is the passing along of “historical events.”

--This is not the norm for history writing, which is normally formatted toward a particular worldview or selective group of people.

--Objective—It is verifiable, normally by an “eyewitness.”

--History writing is actually both exclusive (chosen by a particular group of people) and interpretive (written from a particular point of view). These truths explain the modern explosion of histories, written from varieties of perspectives, with various combinations of ethnic, racial, religious, geographical, economic, and gender backgrounds. Each of these bring with them a certain set of presuppositions that impact the understanding, recording, and interpretation of historical events.

--George Orwell, *1984*:

Who controls the past, controls the future:

Who controls the present controls the past.

--“Historical Event”

--A happening or occurrence that is empirical objective, with verifiable facts. For scholarly study, verifying historical event from more than one source is always desired and helpful. Of course, the confirmation of recorded events by archaeological research is also helpful.

--“Biblical Event”

--Faith event, an event of revelation, an event that has been interpreted so as to have meaning. While biblical events may be “historical,” they are seldom empirically verifiable, and almost always theological interpreted. The purpose of OT historical writing is to evaluate that history against the standards of the Torah, or the prophetic word.

²⁰ *BOTS*, 56.

--Archaeology & Chronology

--Has archaeology proven the Bible to be true? Absolutely not! Many archaeological data are actually at odds with the Bible, a fact that conservative preachers tend to conveniently ignore when preaching apologetically about the historical truth of the OT. While the archaeological record supports many biblical events, many biblical events are not supported by archeology, and some are contradicted.

--An example of an abuse of archeology is the claim by many preachers and teachers that the walls of Jericho have been found, falling outward exactly as described in the Book of Joshua. A wall was found by Garstang in the early 20th century that he proclaimed as the wall of Joshua. He argued that it, indeed, had fallen outward, not inward. The problem is that when Kathleen Kenyon further excavated Jericho, she discovered that the wall Garstang labeled as Joshua's wall was actually a Middle Bronze wall from approximately 2300 BC, 1000 years before Joshua.

--This fact does not mean that the Bible is wrong, but it does mean that preachers should be more careful before proclaiming, "Every biblical event for which there is archaeological evidence has been supported [or proven true] by that data." These types of statements are both untrue and misleading. Preachers and teachers do not need to produce more controversy or drive a greater wedge between themselves and the academic community at large. [This does not mean that biblical conservatives must submit to scholarly positions that they do not believe, such as evolution or the JEPD theory in the Pentateuch, but it does mean that rhetoric must be correct!]

World View of the Old Testament

--Boundaries

--Boundaries were very important to the ancient Israelites (and other ancient peoples as well). God is "holy," set apart by an invisible boundary (at least normally invisible). Based upon God's holiness, objects within this natural world are also set apart as "holy" and "unholy," or "pure" and "impure," or "clean" and "unclean." God's sovereignty and power are the basis of most of Israel's theological (& historical for that matter) teachings. Problems arose when Israel made either too much (thus He is unreachable or uninvolved) or too little (thus He became unimportant and irrelevant) of God and the boundaries He had established.

--Sacrifice

--Sacrifice is made specifically because of these boundaries. Sin and other unclean things make the boundary between God and man uncrossable, even in the context of prayer and worship. The sacrifice of an animal in place of the offending party returns the access to the inaccessible God. In the NT, the author of the Book of Hebrews argues that the old sacrificial system of Israel is obsolete because of the sacrifice of Jesus. Coupled with this teaching, the words of the prophets condemning the sacrifices of the people of Judah and Israel (e.g. Is. 1:12-20; Jer. 7:21-26, and Amos 5:22-24) are often taken to suggest that the sacrificial system was not as important as many took it. However, the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and Israel was dependent upon a means to overcome the

boundaries created by such a relationship between unclean humans and a holy God. That means was the OT sacrificial system.²¹ In fact, the death of Jesus presented in the NT is a testimony to the terrible difficulty of crossing the boundaries between humanity and God.

--Magic

--Did the ancient Israelites believe in magic? Certainly some of their activities look like magic, such as Gideon's fleece, casting lots, sacred prostitution, and dancing prophets. All of these occurred in ancient Israel, some with divine authorization and some without. The reader must recognize that the world-view of ancient Israel certainly allowed a magical function of rituals that the modern may not allow, whether correctly or incorrectly. The prophets condemned almost all of the magical rites of their own people and their neighbors.

--The issue was not so much the magical nature of some activities of OT people, but the acceptance of a world-view that questioned the sovereignty of Yahweh. John Rogerson argued, "The OT writers were not saying to the ordinary people: you must carry out your work of agriculture and trust in God rather than in magic. They were warning against total commitment to the interpretation of life that willingness to share in magico-religious ceremonies involved."²²

--Social Organization

--In early formative Israel (i.e. Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel), the center of life appears in the text to be the tribe. Certainly tribal life, with its retributive and patriarchal nature, was an important entity in ancient Israel. However, probably the more basic unit was the family.²³ One need only look at the Book of Ruth to see the central role of family, rather than tribe, in social and legal matters. This is very different from modern legal standard controlled by state authority.

--In the monarchical period and later, the OT presents Israel as an organized, fairly efficient state, complete with central administration. The truth is probably that, even in the monarchical period, ancient Israel remained a society based upon tribal and especially family authority, although the authority of town and village leaders should not be dismissed. The role of family and local leadership can be recognized in the long-term failure of every major reformation attempt, most notably Hezekiah and Josiah.

Individual and Community in the OT

In *Beginning Old Testament Study*, Paul Joyce discussed the role of the individual and community in the OT.²⁴ He noted the obvious OT emphasis upon the community and group, often over the individual, and also mentioned two theories that he believed were over-emphasized by OT scholars.

²¹ *BOTS*, 72.

²² *BOTS*, 66.

²³ See Leo Perdue, et al, *Families in Ancient Israel*, The Family, Religion and Culture, ed. Don S. Browning and Ian S. Evison (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), and Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin, *The Social World of Ancient Israel, 1250-587 BCE* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), esp. chapters 1-8.

²⁴ *BOTS*, ch. 5.

--H. Wheeler Robinson

--Robinson argued that there was a “corporate personality” in ancient Israel, which differed at a foundational level from the modern understanding of society and individual. Robinson contrasted his “corporate personality” with the modern sense of “social solidarity” that is based upon common interest or obligation. He stated that “corporate personality”

denotes the primitive idea of a family, a clan, a tribe, or a nation as one, so that on occasion the whole group and the individual member of it may be treated as identical, whether in law or religion, with fluidity of transition from the one to the many and vice versa.²⁵

--Another aspect of Robinson’s theory, and others, is that the OT idea of the human responsibility gradually became less communal and more individual, as seen in Ezekiel’s prophecies in Ezek. 18.

--Walther Eichrodt traced this deterioration of “community solidarity” to individual responsibility. He argued that the monarchy began the deterioration by placing the state above the clan in the authority structure. The prophets, especially Jeremiah and Ezekiel, further expounded individual responsibility before God. Nevertheless, as Eichrodt concluded, “prophetic thought does not see community and individual in mutually exclusive opposition, but in fruitful interaction.”²⁶

--The Israel presented in the OT clearly valued the community and its authority in a way inconceivable to most modern individuals, which is the point. Modernity values the individual and his or her abilities and needs above the community, while ancient eastern society (and perhaps the emerging post-modern society) valued the needs of community and family above the individual.

Ethics in the OT

--Ethics in Ancient Israel

--Moral norms went through change and development through the history of Israel, an apparent fact that Christian readers can easily ignore because they read the OT as a finished product and view it as a somewhat monolithic literary piece.

--The critical reader may be struck by the lack of discussion regarding keeping the Sabbath until after the exile. This would suggest that, while Sabbath-keeping was a part of OT law, it was not a central tenet of Israel’s religion until the period of the exile and nascent Judaism (e.g., Neh. 10:31-33, 13:15ff; Is. 56; Jer. 17).

--The difficulties of producing a systematic or historical presentation of ancient Israelite ethics are multi-fold. First, the prophetic demands related to ethics suggest that the nation’s leadership had tended to disobey the laws to which the prophets referred. Furthermore, the “people of the land” (*am ha’aretz*) were

²⁵ H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Old Testament: Its Making and Meaning* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1937), 85.

²⁶ W. Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, Translated by J. A. Baker, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), ch. XX.

either disobedient to or ignorant of many of the religio-ethical requirements of the law (e.g. cultic prostitution).

--As Barton²⁷ correctly points out readers of the OT are missing a necessary requirement for a complete understanding of ancient Israelite (or OT, for that matter) ethics—a multi-level presentation of ethical and moral attitudes and expectations. The presentations in the OT are clearly limited to prophetic, royal official, and sapiential (wisdom teaching) traditions, omitting many voices.

--Furthermore, the OT does not contain a systematic presentation of ethical philosophy, although one could argue whether other cultures have do so either, on more than an “ivory tower” level. Ethical battles are fought on the street, then debated at the philosophical and political level, then canonized, often after the fact, when many of their tenets are passé or obsolete.

--Ethics in the OT

--Motives for ethical behavior

--Future—Laws pointing to results (both positive and negative) are the norm for ethical life, both in the OT, ancient Israel, and modern life. Threat and promise have always been the “carrot” held out to promote expected ethical behavior (sometimes more effectively than others).

--Past—In the OT, past actions by God are often used as motivations for proper behavior. In response to God’s actions, the people of ancient Israel are called to love God and obey Him (especially in Deuteronomy). One wonders, however, whether this is also future motivated, since the threat of God’s future absence, or even judgment, is always implied.

Present—The “inherent moral beauty of God’s laws”²⁸ are often presented as reason enough to obey them. Psalm 119 presents this view of ethics most clearly, although the Book of Proverbs also is based upon the propriety of God’s laws as representative of the orderliness of creation.

--Despite the desire of Christians (across the theological spectrum) to interpret the OT ethical norms as even somewhat homogeneous, the diversity of the ethical and legal materials of the OT must be recognized.

--“Proof Texts”—Christians tend to use the OT as a source for proof texts, for and against their own ethical issues, such as polygamy, capital punishment, divorce, and war.

--“General drift”—Barton suggests, instead, that the reader of the OT must see the “general drift” of OT ethics.²⁹ His example is the incompatibility of worship of God (Yahweh) and orgiastic religious practices. One wonders if the sanctity of marriage (with questions of polygamy left aside) could also be applicable here, as well as honesty and integrity in business dealings. The Epilogue of the book returns to the issues of applying the OT to modern life.

²⁷ *BOTS*, 118-119.

²⁸ *BOTS*, 123.

²⁹ *BOTS*, 125.