



GOD'S GLORY  
IN SALVATION  
THROUGH  
JUDGMENT

*A Biblical Theology*



JAMES M. HAMILTON JR.

*God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*

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Unless otherwise noted, translations of the biblical text are my own. I have sometimes used the English Standard Version as a base text, altering it somewhat, and always changing “LORD” to “Yahweh.”

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## THE SECOND COMING (1919)

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*William Butler Yeats*

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*  
Troubles my sight; somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

GOD'S GRANDEUR (1877)

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*Gerard Manley Hopkins*

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

## Chapter 1



# CAN THE CENTER HOLD?

### 1. Introduction

William Butler Yeats captured the spirit of Our Time in the opening lines of his poem “The Second Coming”:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold . . .

The image of a world spinning out of control, a world no longer heeding the call of its Master because truth is only “true for you,” matches the default settings of our intuitive templates. Biblical scholars and theologians are no exception.<sup>1</sup> Describing theologians since the 1960s, David Wells writes:

They, too, began not with divine revelation but with human experience, not with God’s interpretation of life but with the interpretation that in our self-asserted

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<sup>1</sup>For a fascinating example, see the “Afterword” in David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: JSOT, 1997), 130–31. Writing twenty years after the first edition was published, Clines states, “Today, since I think that we have moved into a post-modern age, I would be much more careful in speaking of meaning. I would not now be speaking of ‘the meaning’ of the Pentateuch nor claiming that ‘theme encapsulates the meaning of the work’ (p. 24), as if there was only one meaning for the Pentateuch. Nowadays I tend rather to believe that texts do not have meaning in themselves.” The page reference in the above quote is to his own book! In terms he uses to describe himself, the postmodern Clines takes exception to statements made by the modern Clines.

freedom we have devised for ourselves. They rejected the idea that there is any center to the meaning that they sought, any normativity to any one proposal.<sup>2</sup>

Academic practitioners of biblical theology have not transcended the spirit of the age. Walter Brueggemann has written that “in every period of the discipline, the questions, methods, and possibilities in which study is cast arise from the sociointellectual climate in which the work must be done.”<sup>3</sup> While I would never assert that everyone who thinks biblical theology has no center has either capitulated to or consciously embraced the spirit of the age, the “sociointellectual climate” corresponds to the view that biblical theology has no center.<sup>4</sup> We are all affected by the temperature of the times. We need not look far to see that the center has not held, and things have fallen apart. As Brueggemann writes, “The new situation in Old Testament theology is reflective of a major breakpoint in Western culture. . . . The breakpoint concerns modes of knowledge that have too innocently yielded certitude.”<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this book, quixotic as it may seem, is to seek to do for biblical theology what Kevin Vanhoozer has done for hermeneutics<sup>6</sup> and David Wells has done for evangelical theology.<sup>7</sup> The goal is not a return to an imaginary golden age but to help people know God. The quest to know God is clarified by diagnosis of the problem (Wells), the vindication of interpretation (Vanhoozer), and, hopefully, a clear presentation of the main point of God's revelation of himself, that is, a clear presentation of the center of biblical theology. I hasten to embrace the humility articulated by Schlatter and recently restated by Schreiner: there is more than one way to pursue biblical theology, and there can be no final, definitive treatment of the subject. Though I am pursuing *the* center, I celebrate the fact that “each of the various approaches and perspectives can cast a different light upon the NT, and in that sense having a number of different approaches is helpful.”<sup>8</sup> I hope that even those who are not convinced

<sup>2</sup>David Wells, *No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 66. My capitalization of the phrase “Our Time” above reflects Wells's use of that phrase.

<sup>3</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 11 (italics removed).

<sup>4</sup>For a sampling, see A. J. Köstenberger, “Diversity and Unity in the New Testament,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 154; Elmer A. Martens, *Old Testament Theology*, IBR Bibliographies 13 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 57; C. H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 87.

<sup>5</sup>Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 60.

<sup>6</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

<sup>7</sup>Wells, *No Place for Truth*; Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>8</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 10. Cf. Adolf Schlatter, “The Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics,” in *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, ed. R. Morgan (1909; repr., Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1973), 117.



that I am right about the center for which I argue will nevertheless profit from the perspective articulated here.

Vanhoozer describes his goal as “reinvigorating author-oriented interpretation through a creative retrieval of Reformed theology and speech-act philosophy.” The urgency of his task grows out of the recognition that “the fate of hermeneutics and humanity alike stand or fall together.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Wells writes, “It is not theology alone in which I am interested but theology that is driven by a passion for truth; and it is not evangelicalism alone in which I am interested but evangelicalism as the contemporary vehicle for articulating a historical Protestant orthodoxy.”<sup>10</sup> These academic sallies are necessary because, in the words of Machen, “what is today a matter of academic speculation begins tomorrow to move armies and pull down empires.”<sup>11</sup> The ramifications ideas have in the wider culture reflect their impact on the church, and as Justin Taylor has noted, “As goes the academy, so goes the church.”<sup>12</sup> For Wells, in the providence of God, the upheavals in society “that could portend a very troubled future and perhaps the disintegration of Western civilization” also point to “a moment when, in God’s mercy and providence, the Church could be deeply transformed for good.”<sup>13</sup>

The transformation the church needs is the kind that results from beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18–4:6). This glory of God is a saving and judging glory—an aroma of life to those being saved and death to those perishing (2 Cor. 2:15–16), and this saving and judging glory is at the center of biblical theology. If there is to be a renewal,<sup>14</sup> it will be a renewal that grows out of the blazing center that is the glory of God in the face of Christ. This saving and judging glory, I contend, is the center of biblical theology.

Seeking to exposit the center of biblical theology is necessary because many today question whether the Bible tells a coherent story. There are many who do not embrace Machen’s idea of a center for biblical theology and yet maintain that the Bible is coherent,<sup>15</sup> but if the Bible tells a coherent story, it is valid to explore what that story’s main point is. That leads us to ask whether the Bible shows us what God’s ultimate purpose is. Understanding God’s ultimate purpose, even with our limited human capacities, gives us insight into the meaning of all things. We know why things exist because we know the one “for whom and through whom

<sup>9</sup>Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 10, 22.

<sup>10</sup>Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 12.

<sup>11</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” *Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913): 7. I wish to thank Justin Taylor for drawing my attention to Machen’s comment and his essay.

<sup>12</sup>Justin Taylor, “An Introduction to Postconservative Evangelicalism and the Rest of This Book,” in Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, *Reclaiming the Center* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 31.

<sup>13</sup>Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 91.

<sup>14</sup>See Robert W. Yarbrough’s insightful call for a renewal in scholarly interpretation of Scripture, “The Last and Next Christendom: Implications for Interpreting the Bible,” *Them* 29 (2003): 30–37, esp. 36–37.

<sup>15</sup>I am grateful for personal correspondence with David Reimer on this point.

are all things” (Heb. 2:10). This knowledge will organize our relationships and priorities, and it is desperately needed in Our Time. Wells writes,

Whatever else one may say about modernization, one of its principal effects has been to break apart the unity of human understanding and disperse the multitude of interests and undertakings away from the center, in relation to which they have gathered their meaning, pushing them to the edges, where they have no easy relation to one another at all.<sup>16</sup>

Evangelicals have lost the “theological center,” and this theological center is the Bible’s center. With no center, of course things fall apart. The problem, however, is not that the gravitational center of the Bible’s theology cannot hold. The problem is more along the lines of what Yeats described as the falcon not hearing the Falconer. That is to say, if we will listen carefully to the Bible, it will proclaim to us the glory of God. If we do not hear this, the problem is with us, not the Bible. As Schreiner has pointed out, “We could easily fail to see the supremacy of God and the centrality of Christ in the NT precisely because these themes are part of the warp and woof of the NT. Sometimes we fail to see what is most obvious, what is right before our eyes.”<sup>17</sup> God means to reveal himself in an astonishing display of his mercy and justice, with the justice highlighting the mercy.<sup>18</sup> Before we can pursue the demonstration of this thesis, however, we must consider several preliminary questions.

## 2. Do Things Fall Apart? (Is There a Unity in the Bible’s Diversity?)

There is much discussion today about the real diversity that exists within the overarching unity of the Bible.<sup>19</sup> In some circles there is also a widespread suspicion that there might be not one orthodoxy or a single theology of the Old and New Testaments but *orthodoxies* and *theologies*.<sup>20</sup> Walter Brueggemann asserts that there is “no going back to a singular coherent faith articulation in the text (much as canonical approaches might insist on it).”<sup>21</sup> We cannot go back, but I believe that if we do as Francis Watson proposes and radicalize “the modern theological

<sup>16</sup>Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 7.

<sup>17</sup>Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 13.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 313: “It is possible to discern a single divine purpose: to reveal God’s holiness and glory throughout the earth so that it is acknowledged by all peoples.”

<sup>19</sup>For two evangelical discussions, see David Wenham’s essay, “Unity and Diversity in the New Testament,” in George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. and ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 684–719; and Köstenberger, “Diversity and Unity in the New Testament,” 144–58.

<sup>20</sup>See, e.g., Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologies of the Old Testament*, trans. John S. Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

<sup>21</sup>Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, xvi. I am not sure how this fits with Brueggemann’s assertion on the following page: “Taken all together, these witnesses, different as they are, advocate a Yahweh-version of reality that is strongly in conflict with other versions of reality and other renderings of truth that have been shaped without reference to Yahweh and that determinedly propose a reality and truth that is Yahweh-free” (xvii). It would seem that the trajectory of this statement would tend to a conclusion at odds with the one

and exegetical concern to identify ever more precisely those characteristics that are peculiar to the biblical texts,”<sup>22</sup> we will find ourselves face to face with, as Brueggemann puts it, “a singular coherent faith articulation in the text.” At its center, I contend, will be the glory of God in salvation through judgment.

Denny Burk makes the point that scientific study “makes empirically testable predictions” and that theories “can only be tested by attempts to falsify” them.<sup>23</sup> In this book, I am putting forth the theory that the glory of God in salvation through judgment is the center of biblical theology. This theory will be tested against the “grammar” of the biblical evidence, with special attention given to any evidence in the Bible that might falsify it (and see chap. 8, where I discuss objections to the thesis). The remainder of this book will seek to show that this is “a theory that adequately explains a grammatical phenomenon [in this case, the teaching of the whole Bible!] without being falsified by the relevant body of empirical data.”<sup>24</sup>

One obstacle facing those committed to the unity of the Bible is a certain disdain some biblical scholars have for systematic theology. A strong desire to avoid the charge that one’s prior theological conclusions control one’s exegesis, coupled with a vague sense that “belief has a distorting effect on historical inquiry,”<sup>25</sup> leads many to prefer to “let the tensions stand,” indefinitely postponing legitimate and necessary theological synthesis.

As the spiral of meaning widens into incoherence for some, we can focus our gaze by beginning with the purpose of biblical theology. Having considered the purpose of biblical theology, we will take up the question of how to define the center of biblical theology and then ask how we identify the center of biblical theology.

### *2.1 Finding Our Way in the Widening Gyre: The History and Purpose of Biblical Theology*

We can think of the practice of biblical theology in two ways. On the one hand, we have the practice of the believing community across the ages. On the other hand, we have a label that describes an academic discipline. Regarding the first, I would argue that biblical theology is as old as Moses. That is, Moses presented a biblical-theological interpretation of the traditions he received regarding Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, and his

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quoted above, but perhaps Brueggemann’s commitment to pluralism keeps him from privileging the claims of the Yahweh-version of reality over other versions (cf. 61–64, 93, 95).

<sup>22</sup>Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 205.

<sup>23</sup>Denny Burk, *Articular Infinitives in the Greek of the New Testament: On the Exegetical Benefit of Grammatical Precision* (New Testament Monographs 14; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 19, quoting Ruth Kempson, *Semantic Theory*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1.

<sup>24</sup>Burk, *Articular Infinitives*, 20.

<sup>25</sup>Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* 23. Vanhoozer is describing Van Harvey’s book, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief*. For Harvey, “doubt is a virtue; credulity, a vice” (ibid.). Harvey’s perspective seems to have been adopted by many evangelical biblical scholars.

own experience with his kinsmen.<sup>26</sup> Joshua then presented a biblical-theological interpretation of Israel's history (Joshua 24), and the same can be said of the rest of the authors of the Prophets and the Writings, the Gospels and Acts, the Epistles and the Apocalypse. The biblical authors used biblical theology to interpret the Scriptures available to them and the events they experienced. For the believing community, the goal of biblical theology is simply to learn this practice of interpretation from the biblical authors so that we can interpret the Bible and life in this world the way they did.

It seems to me, then, that the history of biblical interpretation in the church is a history of more and less success in accurately understanding the interpretive strategies used by the biblical authors. Some figures in the history of the church were more adept at this than others.<sup>27</sup> Some failed miserably, but it seems that a shift happened with the rise of the so-called Enlightenment. Prior to that time, the effort to interpret the Bible the way the biblical authors did was an effort to follow them in typological interpretation, or figural reading of the Bible.<sup>28</sup> Hans Frei has shown how, in view of the rise of historical criticism, figural reading and typological interpretation came to seem "preposterous" and "lost credibility."<sup>29</sup> And this brings us to the second way of thinking about biblical theology, namely, as an academic discipline whose results are measured more by the academy than by the believing community, for as Frei has written, "Figural reading, concerned as it was with the unity of the Bible, found its closest successor in an enterprise called biblical theology, which sought to establish the unity of religious meaning across the gap of historical and cultural differences."<sup>30</sup>

Many recognize that the method of study referred to as biblical theology was marshaled by the Reformers,<sup>31</sup> who wanted to "chasten the church's unbiblical theological speculations."<sup>32</sup> During the Enlightenment, biblical theology came to

<sup>26</sup>For more on what I have in mind here, see my essay, "Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah? Tracing Typological Identification between Joseph, David, and Jesus," *SBJT* 12, no. 4 (2008): 52–77.

<sup>27</sup>See the brilliant biblical theology in Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha and Fragments*, ed. Stuart George Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

<sup>28</sup>I have suggested the following working definition of typological interpretation: "Typological interpretation is canonical exegesis that observes divinely intended patterns of historical correspondence and escalation in significance in the events, people, or institutions of Israel, and these types are in the redemptive historical stream that flows through the Bible" ("Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah," 53). For brief exposition of this definition, see *ibid.*, 53–54.

<sup>29</sup>Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 7.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>31</sup>Scobie points to Irenaeus as an early practitioner of biblical theology (*The Ways of Our God*, 10), yet the methods of biblical theology as we understand them today found wider currency at the time of the Protestant Reformation. For a helpful discussion, see Gerald Bray, "The Church Fathers and Biblical Theology," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. C. Bartholomew et al., *Scripture and Hermeneutics* 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 23–40.

<sup>32</sup>Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 20. Similarly Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2. Thielman's survey of "The Basic Questions" (19–42) is excellent, and Brueggemann's summary of the history of Old Testament Theology is informative as well (1–60).

be employed by many whose objective was to separate their study of biblical texts from the authority of the Bible and Christian readings of it.<sup>33</sup> Adolf Schlatter called this approach to the Bible's theology a "radical and total polemic against it."<sup>34</sup> Geerhardus Vos is regarded as something of a pioneer by many North American evangelical students of biblical theology. In a sense, Vos salvaged the tool from the damage done to it by the Enlightenment. Vern Poythress suggests that biblical theology had a "checkered history before Vos redefined it."<sup>35</sup>

For Vos, biblical theology was a kind of exegesis that studied "the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible." Biblical theology is "the study of the actual self-disclosures of God in time and space which lie back of even the first committal to writing of any Biblical document," and it "deals with revelation as a divine activity, not as the finished product of that activity."<sup>36</sup> In the years since Vos wrote, some less conservative scholars—not necessarily following Vos—have pitted "what happened" against "what the text says," and some have suggested that Scripture is merely a record of God's revelation rather than itself being revelation from God.<sup>37</sup> This is probably not what Vos meant to articulate,<sup>38</sup> but because of what has happened since he wrote, his description of biblical theology might be confusing in today's context.

For this reason I would suggest a slightly different description of what biblical theology is and what it should do. Again, there is more than one way to do biblical theology, and this book will not be the final word on the subject. There are insights to be gained from a variety of approaches because the Bible cannot

<sup>33</sup>For the history of the discipline, see G. F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978).

<sup>34</sup>Schlatter, "The Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics," 122.

<sup>35</sup>Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Kinds of Biblical Theology," *WTJ* 70 (2008): 132 (129–42). See especially Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948). J. V. Fesko, citing Richard B. Gaffin and Richard Lints, refers to Vos as "the father of Reformed biblical theology" ("On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology," in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008], 443).

<sup>36</sup>Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 4–5.

<sup>37</sup>I have in mind here the way that the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) has preferred the 1963 version of the Baptist Faith and Message over the 2000 version. See the commentary on pages 9–10 of the "1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message Statements: Comparison and Commentary," available online: <http://www.bgct.org/TexasBaptists/Document.Doc?&id=610>, accessed July 10, 2008. The 1963 version described the Bible as "the record of God's revelation of himself to man," and the 2000 version states that the Bible "is God's revelation of himself to man." The commentary explains that the phrase "*the record of*" has the effect of centering the revelation of God in God's mighty acts, i.e., in the *events* of salvation history, rather than in the *words* which describe these events. The words of scripture record the faith community's witness to these events, but the self-revelation of God is manifest in the events themselves." This is followed by the assertion that locating the revelation in the words of the Bible rather than in the events exalts the Bible over Christ. Against this, we only know Christ through the Bible's revelation of him. Moreover, the book of Revelation, for instance, claims to be "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1). See further Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859–2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 244–46 passim. Brueggemann is obviously not engaging in this dispute, but I agree with his assertion: "The Bible is a revelation" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, 3).

<sup>38</sup>Poythress notes regarding Vos's *The Pauline Eschatology* and *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews* that "Vos in these works appears to move past the boundary that he himself earlier put in place in his definition of biblical theology" precisely in that he dealt with the "'finished product,' namely the Pauline corpus and the Letter to the Hebrews" ("Kinds of Biblical Theology," 136).

be exhausted, and its truths are such that looking at them from different angles only increases our appreciation of the book's humble, and yet stunning, beauty. In this study, I will pursue a biblical theology that highlights the central theme of God's glory in salvation through judgment by describing the literary contours of individual books in canonical context with sensitivity to the unfolding metanarrative.<sup>39</sup> In my view this metanarrative presents a unified story with a discernible main point, or center. This study will be canonical: I will interpret the Protestant canon, and the Old Testament will be interpreted in light of the ordering of the books in the Hebrew Bible (see further below). It will be literary: I will seek to interpret books and sections of books in light of their inherent literary features and structures as we have them in the canon.<sup>40</sup>

Interpretation in light of the unfolding metanarrative assumes that the historical and chronological claims in the books be interpreted as they stand. That is, I will assume, for instance, that Deuteronomy was part of the impetus for rather than the product of Josiah's reforms. In doing this, I seek to allow the book to tell its own story instead of imposing onto it an alternative story generated by the modern academy. I would hope that even those who do not believe, as I do, that there was a real Moses who wrote the Pentateuch will nevertheless show themselves liberal enough to grant that the texts do make that claim, and tolerant enough to allow space for interpretations that deviate from critical orthodoxy.<sup>41</sup> Rather than interpreting a disputed scholarly reconstruction, I will interpret the claims the texts make. I believe the texts are true and trustworthy,<sup>42</sup> so Brueggemann's words on Barth's perceived fideism seem relevant:

It is relatively easy to indict Barth for fideism and theological positivism, and that indictment has been reiterated often. The problem is that there is obviously no legitimate starting point for theological reflection, and one must begin somewhere. The counterindictment is somewhat less obvious and has only more recently been mounted: that *the Cartesian program of autonomous reason, which issued in historical criticism, is also an act of philosophical fideism.*<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup>For a helpful discussion of the Bible as a "nonmodern metanarrative," see Richard Bauckham, "Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 38–53.

<sup>40</sup>For further thoughts on literary features of texts and biblical theology, see the discussion of the structural features and intertextual connections that the authors used to connect their work to the Bible's big story and encourage their audiences in my essay, "Biblical Theology and Preaching," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 193–218.

<sup>41</sup>For an example of intolerance and illiberality that resorts to pejorative slurs and name calling, see Philippe Guillaume, "Review of C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary*," *RBL* 04/2008, available online: [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/5953\\_6324.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/5953_6324.pdf), accessed July 12, 2008.

<sup>42</sup>For my understanding of the nature of the Bible, see my essay, "Still *Sola Scriptura*: An Evangelical View of Scripture," in *The Sacred Text: Excavating the Texts, Exploring the Interpretations, and Engaging the Theologies of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. Michael Bird and Michael Pahl (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010), 215–40.

<sup>43</sup>Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 17 (emphasis original). See also Richard B. Hays, "A Hermene-

Biblical theology seeks to understand the Bible in its own terms,<sup>44</sup> in its own chronology, as reflected in its canonical form. One of the key tasks of biblical theology is to trace the connections between themes and show the relationships between them.<sup>45</sup> There is an important point of application in connection with this weighing and sorting of scriptural themes: biblical theology is concerned with what the Bible meant for the purpose of understanding what the Bible means. The biblical theologian who writes in the service of the church<sup>46</sup> does so to elucidate the biblical worldview,<sup>47</sup> not merely so that it can be studied but so that it can be adopted.<sup>48</sup> This approach rejects the view that biblical theology is concerned with what the Bible meant, leaving what the Bible means to systematic or dogmatic theology.<sup>49</sup>

To make such a declaration is, in a sense, to plant a flag. Brueggemann explains that

most scholars who have attempted to work in Old Testament theology since Barth have been double minded . . . . The tension that scholars face is between the epistemological assumptions of modernity that issue in historical criticism and that resist normative statements as fiduciary and potentially authoritarian, and the neoevangelical statement of normative theological claims that are perhaps impositions on the biblical materials. . . . Old Testament scholarship until recently has refused to choose and has sought to have it both ways. This refusal to choose has constituted the great problem for Old Testament theology.<sup>50</sup>

Asserting that what the Bible meant is normative is “fiduciary,” but this is not a problem for those of us who are convinced that faith is properly basic.<sup>51</sup> As for “authority,” to reassert the claims of the Bible is to assert the Bible’s author-

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neutic of Trust,” in *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 192 (190–201).

<sup>44</sup>Brueggemann observes that the Reformers “insisted with great passion . . . that their evangelical modes of Bible reading were not imposed but in fact arose from the substance of the biblical text itself” (*Theology of the Old Testament*, 4).

<sup>45</sup>I base this on Thomas R. Schreiner’s description of Pauline theology: “The task is not merely to reproduce Paul’s thinking on various topics, but to rightly estimate what is most important in his thinking and to set forth the inner connections between the various themes” (*Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001], 15). See also the helpful description of biblical theology in Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 17.

<sup>46</sup>Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 26: “The most influential Old Testament interpreters in the twentieth century were admitted and convinced church believers, and they understood their work to be in the service of the church. . . . They intended to serve the preaching of the church.”

<sup>47</sup>Cf. Schreiner (*Paul*, 15) again: “The goal in writing a Pauline theology is to unearth Paul’s worldview and present it to contemporaries.”

<sup>48</sup>See Peter J. Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 and 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2003), 9–23, esp. 22–23.

<sup>49</sup>For the view that biblical theology pursues “what it meant” and leaves “what it means” to dogmatic theology, see K. Stendahl, “Biblical Theology, Contemporary,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1:418–32.

<sup>50</sup>Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 19.

<sup>51</sup>See Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford, 2000), and Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge, and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 167.

ity. This is prideful only if we conduct ourselves as though we have invented these claims or are not subject to them ourselves. But we who assert the Bible's authority should be eager to submit humbly to that authority and repent when the Bible indicts us. Placing oneself under the authority of the text in this way would seem to be the best way to avoid "impositions on the biblical materials."<sup>52</sup> This is to make a choice that moves us beyond "the great problem for Old Testament theology."

Thus, the purpose of biblical theology is inductively to understand the canonical form of the Bible's theology as it is progressively revealed in its own literary forms and salvation-historical development, and this sharpens our systematic and dogmatic theology. Biblical theology is always done from some systematic perspective. Rudolf Bultmann's influential *Theology of the New Testament*<sup>53</sup> perfectly illustrates this point: his approach was found by many to be compelling precisely because it presented a holistic *system* that accounted for all the details—of course, the details that did not fit were attributed to a later redactor. But what is at issue here is that Bultmann's *biblical* theology was *systematic*.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Walther Eichrodt wrote, "We have to undertake a *systematic examination* with objective classification and rational arrangement of the varied material."<sup>55</sup>

Our biblical-theological understanding will line up—implicitly or explicitly—with our systematic conclusions. This cannot be denied, and it should be embraced, with the two disciplines of biblical and systematic theology functioning to further our understanding of God and his word. John Goldingay says, "I want to write on the Old Testament without looking at it through Christian lenses or even New Testament lenses,"<sup>56</sup> but such an approach seems analogous to a botanist examining an acorn in order to predict what will sprout from the seed. How seriously would we take such a botanist professing openness to the idea that the acorn might make potatoes?<sup>57</sup> Botanists know what oak trees are, and Goldingay professes to be a Christian. Rather than trying to transcend our ultimate philosophical and theological conclusions, we should use them to help

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Brueggemann states that for Barth faith is "a nonnegotiable premise and assumption of all right reading of the Bible and all right faith" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, 17).

<sup>52</sup>See the insightful comments of Bauckham, "Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story," 52–53, and Hays, "A Hermeneutic of Trust," 190–201.

<sup>53</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Scribners, 1955).

<sup>54</sup>So also John Ashton, "History and Theology in New Testament Studies," in *The Nature of New Testament Theology: Essays in Honour of Robert Morgan*, ed. Christopher Rowland and Christopher Tuckett (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 3: "Many of his readers might well feel that in his work as a whole theology has the upper hand."

<sup>55</sup>Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961, 1967), 1:27 (emphasis his), cf. 28.

<sup>56</sup>John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 20. Similarly Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 93, 107.

<sup>57</sup>See further the insightful essay by David C. Steinmetz, "Uncovering a Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and the Construction of Historical Method," in Davis and Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture*, 54–65.



us understand, with constant readiness to submit them to the searchlight of Scripture. We cannot, after all, abstract ourselves from our creatureliness, from our backgrounds and experiences, and from our convictions and beliefs.<sup>58</sup> We have not that ability. If our presuppositions do not help us understand, rather than pretend we do not have them, why not revise or, if necessary, reject them? The great challenge in biblical theology is to hold together everything the Bible says so that nothing is nullified, negated, or neglected. The particular usefulness of biblical theology comes from its inductive approach.

Some today are referring to biblical theology as a “bridge discipline”<sup>59</sup> that connects exegesis and systematic theology, but we can also view biblical theology, systematic theology, and historical theology as equal tools, each of which can be used to sharpen our exegesis and theology.<sup>60</sup> And the reality is that all these methods are used in teaching Christians, which makes them all dogmatic theology. We might not need all these tools for a good reputation in the academy, but we need each of them for the health of the church. As Reventlow says:

“Biblical theology” is in the widest sense of the term an exegetical, hermeneutical and systematic discipline. . . . For its concern is to present to Christian faith an account of how far and why the *whole* of the Bible, Old Testament and New, has come down to us as Holy Scripture. Biblical scholarship cannot refuse the church an answer to this question.<sup>61</sup>

The purpose of biblical theology, then, is to sharpen our understanding of the theology contained in the Bible itself through an inductive, salvation-historical examination of the Bible’s themes and the relationships between those themes in their canonical context and literary form. In this book I am arguing that one theme is central to all others. If one theme is central to all others, how do we define and identify that theme?

## 2.2 How Do We Define the Center of Biblical Theology?

Reventlow describes the search for the center of biblical theology succinctly as “the attempt to discover a particular concept or central idea as a connecting link between the two Testaments or as their ‘centre,’ around which a biblical

<sup>58</sup>For these reasons, John Barton’s proposal to reduce Old Testament theology to a descriptive task that is part of the history of ideas fails (John Barton, “Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective,” in *The Nature of New Testament Theology: Essays in Honour of Robert Morgan*, ed. Christopher Rowland and Christopher Tuckett [Oxford: Blackwell, 2006], 21).

<sup>59</sup>Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 8.

<sup>60</sup>For the positive value of biblical theology for systematic theology and the “reverse influence of systematic theology on biblical theology,” see Poythress, “Kinds of Biblical Theology,” 132–34. He writes, “One must get one’s framework of assumptions—one’s presuppositions—from somewhere. If one does not get them from healthy, biblically grounded systematic theology, one will most likely get them from the spirit of the age, whether that be Enlightenment rationalism or postmodern relativism or historicism” (134; cf. 142).

<sup>61</sup>Henning Graf Reventlow, *Problems of Biblical Theology in the Twentieth Century*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), vii.

theology can be built up.”<sup>62</sup> I would suggest that the connecting link between the testaments and the central idea around which we can build a biblical theology is the idea that the texts put forward as God’s ultimate purpose. The Bible gives a number of explanations of the actions of God. Sometimes these explanations are presented as statements made by God himself. The center of biblical theology will be the ultimate reason that the Bible gives to explain what God has done. Jonathan Edwards<sup>63</sup> helpfully distinguishes between “subordinate ends” and “ultimate ends.”<sup>64</sup> If my ultimate end is to go to work to do my job, there are many subordinate ends that must be accomplished in the pursuit of my ultimate end. Among other things, I get out of bed and get dressed. I make oatmeal in the microwave so that I can eat breakfast to keep from being hungry. I put my key in the car to drive to work. Getting out of bed, putting on clothes, eating breakfast, and driving are all subordinate to the end of doing my job.

When we examine the explanations the Bible gives for why God does what he does, we find clearly stated subordinate and ultimate ends. Though God is beyond our comprehension, we can know him and speak meaningfully about him because he has revealed himself to us in the written and living word. Moreover, God has given his Spirit to teach and lead those who believe. By the Spirit, in faith, we can discern God’s subordinate and ultimate ends because the Bible reveals them to us.

If it can be shown that the Bible’s description of God’s ultimate end produces, informs, organizes, and is expositied by all the other themes in the Bible, and if this can be demonstrated from the Bible’s own salvation-historical narrative and in its own terms, then the conclusion will follow that the ultimate end ascribed to God in the Bible is the center of biblical theology.<sup>65</sup> At the conclusion of his treatise concerning *The End for Which God Created the World*, Edwards writes,

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 149. Reventlow characterizes this as one of three different models for regaining a theology of the whole Bible. For a bibliographic summary of proposed centers, see *ibid.*, 154–64.

<sup>63</sup>In defense of allowing Jonathan Edwards to weigh in on a discussion of biblical theology, note William Baird’s statement on Edwards in his second volume of his monumental *History of New Testament Research: From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 10: “Edwards’s primary contribution is in the area of biblical theology.”

<sup>64</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, in John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards, with the Complete Text of The End for Which God Created the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 125. See also Walter Schultz, “Jonathan Edwards’s *End of Creation*: An Exposition and Defense,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 247–71.

<sup>65</sup>Those who refer to a concept such as “covenant” as the “organizing theological centre . . . around which the entire message of the Old Testament has been constructed, and providing the essential coherence between the Old Testament and the New” are defining the “center of biblical theology” somewhat differently than I do here. The quote is from Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 31. Williamson is discussing Eichrodt’s view, and for his own part he sees “covenant simply as one of Scripture’s major theological themes” (32, emphasis added). See also Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 28: “Eichrodt’s program is to explore how all of the variations and developments of Israel’s religion can be seen to be in the service of a single conceptual notion, covenant” (italics removed). What I am proposing as the center of biblical theology is the “organizing principle” of biblical theology in the sense that it organizes the thoughts of the biblical authors. Nothing is more important to the biblical authors than God, and from what the texts say of God, nothing is more important to God than his own glory. Therefore, nothing is more important to the biblical authors than the glory of God.

“All that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God’s works, is included in that one phrase, *the glory of God*; which is the name by which the ultimate end of God’s works is most commonly called in Scripture; and seems most aptly to signify the thing.”<sup>66</sup>

### 2.3 How Do We Identify the Center of Biblical Theology?

Many themes have been put forward as the center of biblical theology. Arbitrating between these requires attention to what the Bible tells us about these themes in both their immediate and canonical contexts. The center of biblical theology will be the theme that is prevalent, even pervasive, in all parts of the Bible. This theme will be the demonstrable centerpiece of the theology contained in the Bible itself, because this theme will be what the biblical authors resort to when they give ultimate explanations for why things are the way they are at any point in the Bible’s story. Before we consider the various proposed centers, it will be helpful to summarize briefly the metanarrative, or all-encompassing story, the Bible tells.

In broadest terms, the Bible can be summarized in four words: *creation, fall, redemption, restoration*. This sequence functions as an umbrella story encompassing the whole canonical narrative, but it is also repeated countless times on both individual and corporate levels. The whole cosmos is created, is judged when man rebels, is redeemed through Christ’s death on the cross, and will be restored when Christ returns, but this also happens to the nation of Israel and to particular individuals. For instance, God’s word *creates* Israel as a nation when, having already called Abraham out of Ur, God calls the descendants of Abraham out of Egypt and gives them his law at Sinai. The nation *falls* at Sinai, is *redeemed* by God’s mercy, and, in a sense, is *restored* through the second set of stone tablets. This pattern is repeated again and again in the Bible. God’s word *creates* David as king of Israel, David *falls* with Bathsheba, he is *redeemed* after coming under the judgment of the prophetic rebuke, and he is *restored* and allowed to continue as king. Within the grand drama that goes from creation to consummation there are many such “plays within the play.”

One significant variation on this theme takes shape as Yahweh brings Israel out of Egypt, makes a covenant with them, and gives them the Promised Land, where they sin, they are exiled, and the Old Testament prophets point to a return from exile that will be a new exodus.<sup>67</sup> In significant ways the Gospels interpret the death and resurrection of Jesus in these terms.<sup>68</sup> It is as though his death is the climactic moment of exile, the moment when the temple is destroyed (cf.

<sup>66</sup>Edwards, *The End for Which God Created the World*, 242.

<sup>67</sup>See Roy E. Ciampa, “The History of Redemption,” in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 254–308.

<sup>68</sup>See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

John 2:19), and his resurrection begins the new exodus (cf. Luke 9:31). This story of salvation history is a story of God's glory in salvation through judgment. Those who believe in Jesus have been saved through the salvation through judgment of the exile and restoration he accomplished in his death and resurrection, and we are now sojourning, passing through the wilderness on our way to the Promised Land, looking for that city with foundations, where the Lamb will be the lamp.

At creation Yahweh designed a cosmic theater for his glory. On the cosmic stage God constructed a garden-temple, and he put his image in the temple. The image of God, man, was to extend the borders of the garden-temple by ruling over the earth and subduing it (cf., e.g., Num. 14:21; Hab. 2:14).<sup>69</sup> Describing the commission Adam and Eve received, Beale writes:

They were to extend the geographical boundaries of the garden until Eden covered the whole earth. . . . The penultimate goal of the Creator was to make creation a liveable place for humans in order that they would achieve the grand aim of glorifying him. . . . God's ultimate goal in creation was to magnify his glory throughout the earth.<sup>70</sup>

Adam and Eve rebelled. They were expelled from the garden-temple. The charge to multiply and fill, rule and subdue, was passed down, however, and eventually a nation, Israel, was given the task. Just as God walked with his image in the garden, he walked with the nation, dwelling in a tabernacle and then a temple, both of which appear to be modeled on the garden.<sup>71</sup>

Just as Adam was to rule and subdue, the nation was to extend its borders until the glory of God covered the land as the waters cover the sea (Num. 14:21; Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14), and this would be accomplished as all the kings of the earth bowed the knee to the anointed king of Israel, to whom God said he would give the nations as his inheritance (Ps. 2:1–12). These nations would stream to Zion to learn the law of Yahweh (Isa. 2:1–5). This is the ideal, but just as Adam failed, so the kings of Israel failed. Just as Adam was expelled from the garden, so the nation was expelled from the land. A subtle indication of hope for the future was stated both in the words of judgment at Adam's fall<sup>72</sup> and in those

<sup>69</sup>See the texts listed in appendix 2 (§6) to chap. 3, "All the Earth Filled with the Knowledge of Yahweh's Glory." Cf. also G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 66–80.

<sup>70</sup>Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 81–82.

<sup>71</sup>See §2.1.4 in chap. 2 on "The Primeval Temple," with table 2.3: "Correspondences between Eden and the Tabernacle and Temple."

<sup>72</sup>See James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *SBJT* 10, no. 2 (2006): 31–32, and Hamilton, "The Glory of God in Salvation through Judgment: The Centre of Biblical Theology?" *TynBul* 57 (2006): 62.

that accompany Israel's fall. Beyond the exiles from Eden and the land, a new day will dawn.

God never abandoned the purpose of causing his glory to cover the land as the waters cover the sea. Moreover, even though Adam and Israel failed, God's purpose was not thwarted. Mysteriously—in a way that was not revealed until Jesus came—even the failure of Adam and Israel and the judgment that fell on them was part of the outworking of God's purpose.

At long last, the king came with healing in his hands, succeeding where Adam and Israel failed, dying on behalf of his people, rising from the dead in triumph, and building a new temple—not a building but a body of believers (e.g., Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Pet. 2:4–5).<sup>73</sup> This new temple is to be built from people of all nations, but the building of this temple is not the consummation of God's purposes. God's purposes will be realized when all see Jesus coming with the clouds, even those who pierced him, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only son, while the redeemed rejoice (Rev. 1:7; Zech. 12:10). He will then ascend the throne and judge the living and the dead (Revelation 19–20), and the dwelling of God will be with men in the new and better Eden, the new creation (Revelation 21–22). God and the Lamb will be the temple (21:22). There will be no need for sun or moon, for the Lamb will be the lamp of God's glory, radiating light aplenty, the centerpiece of praise (21:23–24).

The center of biblical theology is the theme that organizes this metanarrative, the theme out of which all others flow. Having originated from their center, other themes exposit and feed back into it. Many of these other themes have been put forward as central to biblical theology, causing some confusion as to whether the idea of a "center" is even viable. Remarkably, the theme that I am suggesting as *the* center of biblical theology has not received much consideration in this discussion.

### 3. Mere Anarchy Is Loosed upon the World: The Plethora of Proposed Centers

Scholars have proposed an almost bewildering array of themes each of which contends for the claim to centrality in Old Testament theology, New Testament theology, and biblical theology. These include: God's self-revelation, God as the Lord, the holiness of God, God's steadfast love, the sovereignty of God, God's name, God's rule, God's kingdom, God's presence, God's design, God's election of Israel, the organizing principle of the covenant, promise-fulfillment, the new creation, God himself, and Jesus.<sup>74</sup> The criticisms of these proposals come down

<sup>73</sup>For discussion of the way Jesus constitutes his people as the new temple, see James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, NACSBT (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 154–60; for the imagery in Paul's letters, 123; for several indications that the church is a new temple in the apostolic Fathers, see 145–46 n. 59.

<sup>74</sup>For documentation of who proposed these centers and where, see Hamilton, "The Glory of God in Salvation through Judgment," 65–70.

to the objection that they are either too broad or too narrow.<sup>75</sup> D. A. Carson, for instance, objecting to the proposal that Jesus is the center of New Testament Theology, writes, “Although at one level that is saying everything at another level it is saying almost nothing.”<sup>76</sup> Too general. On the other end, Hasel writes, “Any center of the NT (or the Bible) is not broad, deep, and wide enough to do justice to the whole canonical NT.”<sup>77</sup> Too narrow. The validity of these criticisms is attested to by the multiplication of proposals. Unsatisfied scholars continue to search for an adequate center. Joining them, I contend that there is a theme that has not been seriously considered, a theme broad enough to encompass all the data while also being focused enough to help readers of the Bible organize what they find in all the texts they read.

Some conclude that the very fact that so many “centers” have been proposed proves that there is no center. Carson writes: “The pursuit of the center is chimerical. NT theology is so interwoven that one can move from any one topic to any other topic. We will make better progress by pursuing clusters of broadly common themes, which may not be common to all NT books.”<sup>78</sup> Andreas Köstenberger concurs: “The quest for a single center of NT theology is misguided and should be replaced with an approach that recognizes several themes as an integrated whole. . . . The search for a single center of the NT should be abandoned. It seems more promising to search for a plurality of integrative motifs.”<sup>79</sup> Elmer Martens writes similarly of Old Testament Theology: “One must speak, therefore, of a unity forged via interlocking traditions; the language . . . of trajectories and boundaries rather than ‘center.’ By the end of the twentieth century, a consensus of sorts emerged questioning the viability of a center.”<sup>80</sup> And Charles Scobie writes regarding biblical theology: “It is difficult to understand the obsession with finding one single theme or ‘center’ for OT or NT theology, and more so for an entire BT. It is widely held today that the quest for a single center has failed. . . . It is the multithematic approach that holds most promise.”<sup>81</sup>

In spite of the judgment of these respected scholars, it must be observed that their statements do not seem to have taken into account one theme that has only recently been put forward as the center of biblical theology: the glory of God.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>75</sup>So also Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 20, 27. Merrill’s own proposed center is something of a short exposition of Gen. 1:26–28: the sovereign God glorifying himself through man, the agent through whom God will fulfill his purposes (*ibid.*, 27, 647).

<sup>76</sup>D. A. Carson, “New Testament Theology,” *DLNTD*, 810.

<sup>77</sup>Hasel, *New Testament Theology*, 164.

<sup>78</sup>Carson, “New Testament Theology,” 810.

<sup>79</sup>Köstenberger, “Diversity and Unity in the New Testament,” 154.

<sup>80</sup>Martens, *Old Testament Theology*, 57.

<sup>81</sup>Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 87.

<sup>82</sup>Virtually everything that John Piper has written argues for the centrality of the glory of God, and Thomas R. Schreiner presents the glory of God in Christ as the center of Paul’s theology in *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 15–35. Bruce Waltke agrees: “The ultimate theological truth that unifies the whole of Scripture is the irruption of the merciful King’s rule to his glory” (*An Old Testament*

Whether this theme is broad enough to encompass all other themes will be addressed below. Anticipating the charge that it might be too broad to be useful, I am sharpening the proposal to focus specifically on the glory of God manifested in salvation through judgment. Can the center hold? Is the gravitational force of the glory of God in salvation through judgment sufficient to organize the universe of biblical theology?

#### 4. The World Is Charged with the Grandeur of God:

##### Proposed Centers and the Center

I have suggested that all the Bible's themes flow from, exposit, and feed back into the center of biblical theology. Do other proposed centers relate this way to God's glory in salvation through judgment? Proposed centers in the discussion below are italicized to draw attention to them; otherwise they might be overlooked as they find their proper place in orbit around and in service to the central theme of God's glory in salvation through judgment.

The created realm (*creation*) is a spectacular theater that serves as the cosmic matrix in which God's saving and judging glory can be revealed. God's glory is so grand that no less a stage than the universe—all that is or was and will be, across space and through time—is necessary for the unfolding of this all-encompassing drama. The psalmist sings, "The heavens are recounting the glory of God, and the skies are proclaiming the work of his hands" (Ps. 19:1). Similarly, Paul exclaims, "From him and through him and to him are all things; to him be the glory forever! Amen" (Rom. 11:36). *Creation* is for the glory of God.

If we ask why God reveals himself (*the self-revelation of God*) in creation, we meet with answers in such texts as Numbers 14:21, "The glory of Yahweh will fill the whole earth"; Isaiah 6:3, "The fullness of the whole earth is his glory"; Habakkuk 2:14, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea"; Psalm 72:19, "His glory fills the whole earth"; and Revelation 4:11, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, because you created all things and because of your will they existed and were created." *The self-revelation of God* is for the glory of God.

The *holiness of God* is an attribute of God that is put on display, particularly when he judges (e.g., Lev. 10:1–3, 10). As such, when God judges he *reveals himself* as a *holy God*. The psalmist urges,

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*Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007], 61, cf. also 144). As this study was in preparation, Schreiner's *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) appeared, also arguing for the centrality of the glory of God in Christ. Systematic theologians have long recognized the centrality of the glory of God, but in summaries of the discussion of the center of Old Testament, New Testament, Pauline, or biblical theology, the proposal does not appear. See, e.g., H. G. Reventlow, "Theology (Biblical), History of," *ABD*, 6:483–505; Werner E. Lemke, "Theology (OT)," in *ABD*, 6:449–73; Robert Morgan, "Theology (NT)," in *ABD*, 6:473–83; R. P. Martin, "Center of Paul's Theology," in *DPL*, 92–95; Joseph Plevnik, "The Center of Pauline Theology," *CBQ* 51 (1989): 461–78.

Ascribe to Yahweh the glory of his name;  
 worship Yahweh in the splendor of holiness. (Ps. 29:2)

There is a connection here between the *name of Yahweh*<sup>83</sup> and his *holiness*, and both are to result in the worship of Yahweh, which ascribes to him due glory. *The holiness of God* is for the glory of God,<sup>84</sup> and it is most commonly *revealed* in judgment.

Just as the *holiness of God* is often seen in judgment, the *steadfast love of Yahweh* is an attribute of God that is put on display when he works salvation. Just as God's *revelation* of his *holiness* results in his glory, so it is with his *steadfast love*: "Not to us, O Yahweh, not to us, but to *your name* give glory, because of your *steadfast love*, because of your truth" (Ps. 115:1, emphasis added). *The steadfast love of God* is for the glory of God, and it is most commonly *revealed* in *salvation*.

While the *holiness of God* is often seen in judgment, and the *steadfast love of God* is often seen in salvation, it is also true that God *reveals* his *holiness* when he saves, because when he saves he fulfills promises he has made. *Salvation* reveals God's uniqueness and his righteousness (aspects of *holiness*) as he keeps his promises. Judgment and salvation *reveal* God's *holiness*.

Similarly, while God's *steadfast love* is seen in salvation, it is also seen in judgment. When God judges, he enforces standards he himself has set, showing *steadfast love* to himself and the demands of his character. Further, when God judges, he shows *steadfast love* to his people. They are saved from their enemies when he judges those enemies. They are saved from their sins when God judges

<sup>83</sup>It is unfortunate that English translations render *Yahweh* as "the LORD," because the word "LORD" in small caps is a title. This title is not Yahweh's name, even when the letters are put in small caps. The old "Jehovah" might be preferable, but in any case, readers would be helped if they could know Yahweh by name. The practice of replacing *Yahweh* with *Adonai* ("Lord") or some other substitute is as old as the LXX and the DSS, and a significant consideration is that the New Testament seems to follow this practice—citing texts that refer to Yahweh in the Old Testament with the Greek translation's *kyrios*, "Lord." This conveniently allows certain texts from the Old Testament that speak of Yahweh to be applied to Jesus (e.g., Rom. 10:13). The substitution of *Adonai* for *Yahweh*, which led to the translation *kyrios*, apparently does not derive from the command not to take Yahweh's name in vain. Jeffrey Tigay writes, "There is no evidence for the common view that this avoidance of the name was based on the third commandment. Philo and R. Levi think that it is based on Leviticus 24:15–16. . . . However, this view is rejected in the Talmud" (*Deuteronomy*, JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996], 431). For discussion of Rabbinic evidence, see Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud: The Major Teachings of the Rabbinic Sages* (1931; repr., n.p.: BN Publishing, 2008), 25–27. Albert Pietersma ("Kyrios or Tetragram: A Renewed Quest for the Original Septuagint," in *De Septuaginta*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Claude Cox [Mississauga, ON: Benben, 1984], 85–101) shows that in the original translation of the Pentateuch the divine name was rendered *kyrios*, and that its replacement with the tetragram in some manuscripts reflects an "archaizing tendency" (99). See also John William Wevers, "The Rendering of the Tetragram in the Psalter and Pentateuch: A Comparative Study," in *The Old Greek Psalter: Studies in Honor of Albert Pietersma*, ed. Robert J. V. Hiebert, Claude E. Cox, and Peter J. Gentry, JSOTSup 332 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 21–35. A brief description of Jewish scribal practices can be found in Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 101–4.

<sup>84</sup>Cf. Robin Routledge, "Is There a Narrative Substructure Underlying the Book of Isaiah?" *TynBul* 55 (2004): 194: "Holiness may be seen as an inward characteristic; it is an essential divine attribute, intimately related to who God is. Glory is the outward manifestation of that holiness: the radiant splendour of the presence of God."



their sins (e.g., Isa. 40:2; Rom. 8:3). And they are saved from self-centered thinking when God's judgment crashes in upon the idolatry of the self and crushes it.

As God enforces the standards he has set and keeps the promises he has made, we see that *promise-fulfillment* serves salvation through judgment. God *promises* to save and judge, and he *fulfills* these *promises* by saving and judging. But again, *promise-fulfillment* is not an end in itself. Salvation and judgment *reveal* God's *steadfast love* and his *holiness*. God *reveals* his *holiness* and his *steadfast love* not as ends themselves, however, but as means to the end of displaying his own glory.

The psalmist describes the way that *holiness* and *steadfast love* are manifestations of God's glory:

Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,  
that glory may dwell in our land.  
Steadfast love and truth meet together;  
righteousness and peace kiss each other. (Ps. 85:10–11)

And again,

Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of your throne;  
steadfast love and truth go before you. (89:15, ET 14)

The *holiness of God*, God's *steadfast love*, and the manifestation of these in *promise-fulfillment* all serve to show the glory of God in salvation through judgment.

The *election of Israel* displays the character of Yahweh. He does not choose the most numerous or the largest and strongest (Deut. 7:7). Rather, he *chooses Israel* in order to establish his *steadfast love* to the weak and lowly. He then enables them to love him and keep his commandments, but he has also chosen them to execute the requiring destruction demanded by his *holiness* against those who hate him (7:9–10). God *elects Israel* to show his *love* by saving them, which entails judgment upon the enemies of the nation—and both Israelites and non-Israelites prove to be enemies of the nation. This shows that the *election of Israel* reveals the *name* of God by affording him an opportunity to *reveal himself* as a *holy God* who shows *steadfast love*. The *election of Israel* demonstrates the glory of God in salvation through judgment.

God's *covenant* with Israel also highlights his glory, as he condescends to reveal his covenant *name* to Moses and Israel (Ex. 3:13–15), a *name* that is later proclaimed by Yahweh himself as he reveals his glory to Moses.<sup>85</sup> As Eichrodt

<sup>85</sup>See the discussion of "The Glorious Name: Exodus 32–34" in chap. 2, §3.4, along with the appendix (§8) to chap. 2, which catalogs Ex. 34:6–7 in the Law, Prophets, and Writings.

recognized, Yahweh's *covenant* with Israel is not an end in itself but serves the greater purpose of forging a relationship with his people,<sup>86</sup> and in this relationship he will make himself known (*God's self-revelation*) as a *holy God* who shows *steadfast love* because of his *covenant*. As Scott Hafemann has written regarding the covenant relationship, "This relationship is the means by which God reveals his glory."<sup>87</sup> God's *covenant* is for his glory, and his glory will be seen in salvation through judgment.

From these considerations of the relationship between other proposed centers and the center proposed here, I submit that these other proposals flow from, exposit, and feed back into the glory of God in salvation through judgment.

## 5. "Salvation through Judgment to the Glory of God":

### What Does This Phrase Mean?

What is the glory of God? I would suggest that the glory of God is the weight of the majestic goodness of who God is, and the resulting name, or reputation, that he gains from his revelation of himself as Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer, perfect in justice and mercy, loving-kindness and truth.

What is meant by the phrase "salvation through judgment"? As a preview of the argument developed throughout the book, what follows is a brief explanation of what I intend "salvation through judgment" to communicate.

Salvation shows God to be "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and great in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex. 34:6b–7a). Ross Wagner rightly states, "These words are invoked repeatedly throughout Israel's sacred writings as a way of characterizing the intimate connection between God's very nature and his commitment to his people."<sup>88</sup> Judgment shows God to be the one "who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the sons and

<sup>86</sup>Eichrodt (*Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:41) writes, "The existence of the nation could not become an end in itself. From the start it had to remain subordinate to a higher purpose, an overriding conception, the achievement of the nation's religious destiny." I would suggest that the nation's religious destiny is to rejoice in and thereby glorify God when he saves them through the judgment of both their own sin and the enemies who oppose them. In a statement that clearly subordinates the covenant to God's concern for his own glory, Eichrodt writes, "Israel is to be spared from the judgment of wrath not as a consequence of the indestructibility of the divine *berit*, but because of God's jealousy for the honour of his Name" (1:60).

<sup>87</sup>Scott J. Hafemann, "The Covenant Relationship," in Hafemann and House, *Central Themes in Biblical Theology*, 30. Hafemann's essay is a thoroughgoing treatment of "the covenant as the integrating concept of Scripture" (24), though he too thinks that "the attempt to isolate [a center] has proved to be too specific to gain a consensus or too general to be of explanatory power" (23). For a trenchant critique of proposals that subsume the various covenants in the Bible under one umbrella "covenant," see Jeffrey J. Niehaus, "An Argument against Theologically Constructed Covenants," *JETS* 50, no. 2 (2007): 259–73. Peter J. Gentry ("Kingdom through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image," *SBJT* 12, no. 1 [2008]: 16–42) grants that "Dumbrell may . . . blur the distinction between covenant and covenant renewals, but his definition is based on passages like the treaty in Genesis 21" (18). Gentry also defends Dumbrell's understanding of "cutting a covenant" as a description of the making of a covenant and "confirming/establishing a covenant" as a phrase used to indicate a covenant partner's experience of a promise of a previously initiated covenant (against Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 73).

<sup>88</sup>J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul in Concert in the Letter to the Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 53.

on the sons of the sons, on the third and on the fourth generations” (Ex. 34:7b; for a catalog of quotations of and allusions to this text, see the appendix to chap. 2, §8, “Exodus 34:6–7 in the Law, Prophets, and Writings”). Thus, salvation and judgment balance one another. The reality of judgment should keep us from thinking of God in purely sentimental terms as though he were a grandfatherly buddy who just lets things go. The reality of salvation should likewise keep us from thinking of God as merely a terrifying, vengeful judge.<sup>89</sup> Those who flee to him will be saved, but those who do not fear him will be judged. Paradoxically, it is the reality of his terrifying judgment that is meant to send us fleeing to him. This matches the “eternal gospel” proclaimed by the angel in Revelation 14:6–7: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship the one who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of water.”

Salvation always comes through judgment. Salvation for the nation of Israel at the Exodus came through the judgment of Egypt, and this pattern is repeated throughout the Old Testament, becoming paradigmatic even into the New. When God saves his people, he delivers them by bringing judgment on their enemies. This is not limited to Old Testament enemies such as the Philistines. At the cross, the ruler of this world was cast out (John 12:31). At the consummation, Jesus will come to afflict those who afflict his people (2 Thess. 1:6, cf. 6–10).

Salvation for all believers of all ages is made possible by the judgment that falls on Jesus at the cross. The cross allows God to be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:24–26). The cross of Christ, the climactic expression of the glory of God in salvation through judgment, is the turning point of the ages.

Even though members of the old covenant remnant lived before Jesus, saving faith for them was explicit trust in the promises of God. The promises of God began in Genesis 3:15, with the promise of a seed of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head.<sup>90</sup> Many of the Old Testament’s promises concern an anointed Redeemer, who came to be referred to as the messiah, whom God would raise up to accomplish the salvation of his people. So even though Old Testament saints did not know that the messiah would be named Jesus, grow up in Nazareth, and so forth, in the words of Genesis 3:15 they heard God promise to raise up a man who would save them. Faith came by hearing, and they trusted God to keep his word. They were saved by faith in God’s promised messiah.

<sup>89</sup>Cf. R. W. L. Moberly, “How May We Speak of God? A Reconsideration of the Nature of Biblical Theology,” *TynBul* 53 (2002): 200–202 (177–202). See also Hermann Spieckermann, “God’s Steadfast Love: Towards a New Conception of Old Testament Theology,” *Biblica* 81 (2000): 305–27.

<sup>90</sup>See Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman,” and “The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” *TynBul* 58 (2007): 253–73.

Everyone who gets saved is saved through judgment. All who flee to Christ and confess that he is Lord and that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9) do so because they realize their need for a Savior. They realize their need for a Savior because they have become convinced that God is holy, that they are sinful, and that God will judge. In a sense, they feel the force of God's condemning justice. They sense the weight of the wrath that remains upon them (John 3:36), and they recognize that Jesus is their only hope. Thus, historically (in Christ on the cross) and existentially (in their own experience of the wrath of God that makes them feel their need for Christ), believers are saved through judgment.<sup>91</sup>

There is another way in which salvation works itself out in the Bible, chiefly to be seen in the Old Testament Writings and the New Testament Letters. This is the way that announcements and warnings of coming judgment are meant to function to lead people to salvation. The vocalization of the truths of God's justice is meant to cause people to be saved through judgment for the glory of God. The certainty of the justice of God prompts people to seek his mercy, and both sides of this equation glorify God.

All of this reveals God as righteous and merciful, loving and just, holy and forgiving, for his own glory, forever. And his glory is what is best for all concerned.<sup>92</sup>

This section on the way that God's glory in salvation through judgment functions as the center of and organizing principle for biblical theology can be summarized in seven points:

The glory of God in salvation through judgment is

1. God's way of showing his glory and defining his own name (Ex. 33:18–34:7; see the appendix [§8] to chap. 2, "Exodus 34:6–7 in the Law, Prophets, and Writings");
2. the goal of God in redemptive history (e.g., Isa. 66:20–24; Rev. 19:1–8; see the texts in appendix 2 [§6] to chap. 3, "All the Earth Filled with the Knowledge of Yahweh's Glory");
3. the pattern of the Bible's metanarrative—creation, sin, exile, restoration;

<sup>91</sup>As Mark A. Seifrid (*Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, NSBT [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000], 59) writes, "For Paul, the justification of human beings takes place only through God's triumph and their defeat." In other words, justification takes place by means of salvation through judgment.

<sup>92</sup>Some theologians (particularly those with a strong disdain for Calvinism) allow the philosophical concept of God's "omnibenevolence" to control their reading of the Bible. I think it better to allow the Bible to inform our philosophical concepts. If God wanted to reveal that his controlling attribute is omnibenevolence, surely he would have done so in a statement such as Ex. 33:19, or when he proclaimed his own name to Moses in Ex. 34:6–7. I am not denying God's omnibenevolence. I am, however, insisting that those who submit their theology to the Bible by *definition* must allow the Bible to define this concept for us, and here we look to texts such as Ex. 33:19 and 34:6–7, where we clearly see God setting both his justice and his mercy on display. Biblical theology is in this sense descriptive, not prescriptive. As Denny Burk has written, "We do not dictate *a priori* what should be. We merely analyze what is" (*Articular Infnitives*, 21).

4. the pattern of each major redemptive event in the Bible—fall, flood, exodus, exile from the land, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the return of Christ;
5. the existential experience of individuals who are convicted of their sin, feel condemnation, trust God for mercy, and join him in seeking the glory of his great name (see the appendix [§7] to chap. 4, table 4.9, “Old Testament Prayers Appealing to God’s Concern for His Own Glory”);
6. the ground of the Bible’s ethical appeals—fear of judgment curbs behavior and keeps people on the path that leads to salvation;
7. the content of the praises of the redeemed (e.g., Exodus 15; Judges 5; Psalm 18; Rev. 11:17–18; see the appendix [§5] to chap. 6, table 6.7, “Doxologies in the New Testament”).

## 6. Like Shining from Shook Foil

It would be impossible to exhaust the Bible’s testimony to the glory of God in salvation through judgment. All we need to do is shake the foil, so to speak, and it will gather to a greatness like the ooze of oil.<sup>93</sup> God’s glory is like a many-faceted gem, which reflects and refracts light in ever-new, ever-unexpected ways as it is admired. The plan of this book is not to dissect the gem, but selectively to admire it.

As we proceed through the canon in this study, I will follow Stephen Dempster’s helpful explanation of the sequence of the books of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>94</sup> On this understanding, the Old Testament falls into three sections (table 1.1): Torah (Law), Neviim (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings). This is the way the Old Testament is laid out in the JPS translation of the Old Testament called the Tanak. The word TaNaK is formed from the first letter of each section: Torah, Neviim, Ketuvim.

**Table 1.1. The Tripartite Shape of the Hebrew Bible**

Torah	Law
Neviim	Prophets
Ketuvim	Writings

<sup>93</sup>See the first four lines of Gerard Manley Hopkins’s poem, “God’s Grandeur,” which is presented on the facing page to this introductory chapter.

<sup>94</sup>See Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003). Paul House also follows this arrangement of the Old Testament in his *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), as does William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

This is not the only way of approaching the books of the Old Testament (and there is some variation in the arrangement of the books of the Old Testament in the order of the Writings), but this way of looking at the Old Testament seems to match the way Jesus described it in Luke 24:44 when he referred to “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.”<sup>95</sup>

The contents of these three sections are slightly different than what might be expected by Christian readers of English translations of the Old Testament, so in table 1.2, the books are listed under their headings. Perhaps the most unexpected features are that the books of Joshua through Kings are referred to as “Prophets,” while Daniel is classed with the “Writings.” The Prophets actually fall into two parts, the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets. And the Writings can be divided into three parts, The Book of Truth,<sup>96</sup> the *Megilloth* (small scrolls), and the Other Sacred Writings.<sup>97</sup>

**Table 1.2. The Books in the Tripartite Order**

Torah
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
Neviim
<i>Former Prophets:</i> Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
<i>Latter Prophets:</i> Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Book of the Twelve (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)
Ketuvim
<i>The Book of Truth:</i> Psalms, Proverbs, Job
<i>The Megilloth (Small Scrolls):</i> Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther
<i>Other Sacred Writings:</i> Daniel, Ezra–Nehemiah, Chronicles

Dempster has explored the way that a narrative story line is begun in the Torah and carried through the Former Prophets.<sup>98</sup> This story takes us from Adam to the exile. When we proceed into the Latter Prophets, instead of a continuation of the narrative story line, we find poetic commentary on that story line. Isaiah

<sup>95</sup>See also *Baba Bathra* 14b, the prologue to Sirach, lines 8–10, and 4QMMT, line 10 (4Q397, Frags. 14–21, p. 801 in DSS<sup>95</sup>). For discussion, see Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 111–12.

<sup>96</sup>This name appears to be derived from the acronym אמת (“truth”) made from the first letter of the three books: Psalms (Hebrew: תהלים, *Tehilim*), Proverbs (Hebrew: מִשְׁלֵי, *Mishley*), and Job (Hebrew: אִיּוֹב, *Ayov*). Cf. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 3–4.

<sup>97</sup>I am following the order set forth by Roland Kenneth Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969; repr., Prince Press, 1999), x–xi.

<sup>98</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 45–51.

through Malachi is thus commentary on Genesis through Kings.<sup>99</sup> The poetic commentary continues through the first two-thirds of the Writings, when the narrative story line is resumed in Esther and continued through Chronicles (table 1.3).

**Table 1.3. Narrative Story Line and Poetic Commentary**

<b>Narrative Story Line</b>
<i>Torah</i>
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
<i>Neviim</i>
<i>Former Prophets:</i> Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
<b>Poetic Commentary</b>
<i>Latter Prophets:</i> Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Book of the Twelve (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)
<i>Ketuvim</i>
<i>The Book of Truth:</i> Psalms, Proverbs, Job
<i>The Megilloth (Small Scrolls):</i> Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther
<b>Narrative Story Line</b>
<i>Other Sacred Writings:</i> (Esther) Daniel, Ezra–Nehemiah, Chronicles

Again, approaching the Old Testament this way follows ancient tradition regarding the arrangement of the Old Testament (the prologue to Sirach, lines 8–10; 4QMMT, line 10; Luke 24:44; and *Baba Bathra* 14b). Moreover, Christopher Seitz writes, “In actual fact, the only order that settles down in the history of the Old Testament’s reception is the tripartite of the Hebrew order.”<sup>100</sup>

In a fascinating essay, David Noel Freedman observes the remarkably balanced amount of material in the major sections of the whole of the Old Testament.<sup>101</sup> The amount of material is based on the number of words, and Emanuel Tov writes, “According to tradition, the Masorah stemmed from the time of Ezra, called a סופר מהיר, ‘an expert scribe,’ in Ezra 7:6, and the time of the *soferim*

<sup>99</sup>Similarly Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Orton, Tools for Biblical Study (Leiden: Deo, 2005), 7.

<sup>100</sup>Christopher Seitz, “Canon, Narrative, and the Old Testament’s Literal Sense: A Response to John Goldingay, ‘Canon and Old Testament Theology,’” *TynBul* 59 (2008): 28 (27–34); cf. also 29: “The convention of modern printed Bibles, with a fourfold order [Law, History, Poetry, Prophecy], is just that: a convention, and it has no known exemplar before the modern period.” See also Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*, 181–234.

<sup>101</sup>David N. Freedman, “The Symmetry of the Hebrew Bible,” *Studia Theologica* 46 (1992): 83–108, and Freedman, *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991). The evidence that Freedman presents excludes the book of Daniel from consideration, but Roger Beckwith presents evidence for an early date for Daniel in “Early Traces of the Book of Daniel,” *TynBul* 53 (2002): 75–82. In the numbers I give in the text above, I include Daniel in the Writings. This does not radically alter the total count.

in the generations after him. See *b. Qidd.* 30a: ‘The older men were called *soferim* because they counted all the letters in the Torah.’”<sup>102</sup> Freedman finds what he refers to as a “bilateral symmetry” by which he means “that the whole Hebrew Bible is divided into two equal halves, and these in turn are subdivided into relatively equal or proportionate parts.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, the Torah and the Former Prophets, the narrative story line, are roughly the same length as the Latter Prophets and the Writings, the poetic commentary and the resumption of the story line:

Torah + Former Prophets = 149,668 words  
 Latter Prophets + Writings = 155,856 words

Freedman’s analysis also finds a roughly chiasmic symmetry in the length of these major sections of the Hebrew Bible:

Torah, 79,983 words  
 Former Prophets, 69,685 words  
 Latter Prophets, 71,852 words  
 Writings, 84,004 words

This information prompts Freedman to assert:

It is our contention that such palpable symmetrical patterning cannot be the result of random forces; the canonical collection we know as the Hebrew Bible could not have been achieved by the process advocated by most scholars, i.e., gradual accretion over a long period of time. . . . The collection as we know it (with modifications . . .) must be the product of one person, or of a very small group, working at one time, in one place, to achieve the results visible in the entire structure of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>104</sup>

On the basis of this information, which Stephen Dempster has referred to as “an extraordinary fact,”<sup>105</sup> Freedman concludes, “We attribute the conception and execution to the Scribe Ezra and Governor Nehemiah, who may have worked partly in tandem, but also in sequence, with Ezra responsible chiefly for the conception and Nehemiah for the execution and completion of the project.”<sup>106</sup>

<sup>102</sup>Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 72. Tov also observes that “More extensive than the lists in biblical manuscripts are the lists at the ends of books in the second Rabbinic Bible . . . , which were culled from various sources by the editor of that edition. . . . This final Masorah of the second Rabbinic Bible counts the number of letters, words, and verses in the different books of the Bible” (74). Cf. also Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*, 161: “In the Babylonian Talmud, we are told that ‘the early scholars were called *sopherim* (scribes) because they used to count (*saphar*) all the letters of the Law.’”

<sup>103</sup>Freedman, “The Symmetry of the Hebrew Bible,” 83.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 83–84.

<sup>105</sup>Stephen Dempster has used Freedman’s analysis constructively in “An ‘Extraordinary Fact’: *Torah and Temple* and the Contours of the Hebrew Canon: Parts 1 and 2,” *TynBul* 48 (1997): 23–56; 191–218.

<sup>106</sup>Freedman, “The Symmetry of the Hebrew Bible,” 105.



If Ezra and Nehemiah did organize the Old Testament in the way that Freedman suggests, it would not seem too much to imagine that they understood their work to communicate a coherent message with a main or central theme.<sup>107</sup>

The argument that the Bible's theology does have a center is strengthened by this evidence that a "canonicler" arranged the books of the Old Testament and presented them in their canonical form, presumably under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>108</sup> The idea that the Bible's theology has a center is not, however, dependent upon this way of accounting for the Old Testament canon.

I am convinced that God's revelation of his saving and judging glory to the earliest biblical author on record, Moses, had a decisive influence on the progress of revelation as it unfolded. More will be said about this in the discussion of the book of Exodus in chapter 2 (§3),<sup>109</sup> but introducing this consideration here is warranted because it is so decisive for my argument. Yahweh declared his own name to Moses when Moses asked to see his glory (Ex. 33:18–34:8). Can there have been a greater influence on Moses' understanding of Yahweh than that event? In short, Yahweh announced himself to Moses as a merciful and forgiving God who upholds justice (34:6–7). Moses quickly bowed low and worshiped (34:8). What I am arguing is that when Yahweh declared his name to Moses (33:19), showed him his glory (33:18), and caused all his goodness to pass before him (33:19), he defined himself as a saving and judging God, a God who saves through judgment. Yahweh's steadfast love and refusal to clear the guilty, then, are intrinsic to his identity and inform everything he does. Yahweh's declaration of his name, which announces both his reputation and his character, profoundly influenced Moses, whose writings in turn profoundly influenced every other biblical author.<sup>110</sup> I hope to show that the saving and judging glory of God dominated the implicit assumptions of the biblical authors, that it was the gravitational lodestone that held together the stories they told, the songs they sang, and the instructions they gave. Indeed, the glory of God in salvation through judgment is the center of biblical theology.

Returning to the way the biblical canon will be approached in this study, Dempster further observes that the New Testament can be seen to have a similar shape in that it begins with the narrative story line of Jesus and the early church in the Gospels and Acts, continues with commentary on the story line in the Letters, and concludes with a resumption of the narrative story line in

<sup>107</sup>Freedman offers his assessment of "the purpose of the author/editor" and the Old Testament's "pervasive unity" in *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible*, 39, 98.

<sup>108</sup>For the use of the term "canonicler," see John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 240.

<sup>109</sup>See esp. chap. 2, §3.4, "The Glorious Name: Exodus 32–34."

<sup>110</sup>See the appendix to chap. 2 (§8), "Exodus 34:6–7 in the Law, Prophets, and Writings."

the Apocalypse (Revelation).<sup>111</sup> Viewed this way (see table 1.4), the Bible is seen to be a unified metanarrative that begins at creation and ends with the consummation of all things.

**Table 1.4. The Shape of the New Testament**

Narrative Storyline
Gospels and Acts
Commentary
Letters
Narrative Storyline
Revelation

This metanarrative is, of course, composed of individual books, written by many different human authors who were guided by the divine author. A word is in order on how these individual books will be treated in the following study, for, as Paul Hoskins has noted, “Two common pitfalls accompanying studies in OT and NT theology are insufficient care in interpreting biblical texts in their contexts and focusing attention upon certain passages while failing to integrate others.”<sup>112</sup> This book intends to cover the whole Bible, treating every text in context and integrating all the Bible’s teaching (especially parts that might appear to be in conflict with my thesis), but this book cannot be a full commentary on every verse of the Bible.

Structuring what follows according to its canonical form identifies this study with the “canonical approach” to biblical theology.<sup>113</sup> For the most part, each chapter that follows will begin with an overview of the biblical books covered in

<sup>111</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 232–34. Dempster also engages in a canonical exercise in biblical theology that treats the Bible along these divisions in his essay, “The Servant of the Lord” in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology*, 128–78.

<sup>112</sup>Paul M. Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 9 n. 37.

<sup>113</sup>Elmer Martens identifies six different ways of approaching biblical theology: (1) structured (Eichrodt); (2) diachronic (von Rad); (3) lexicographic (P. F. Ellis); (4) thematic (Bright); (5) canonical (Childs, Rendtorff, House, Dumbrell, Dempster, Sailhamer); and (6) narrative (Goldingay) (Elmer Martens, “Old Testament Theology Since Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.,” *JETS* 50 [2007]: 674–78 [673–91]). It should be noted that several who approach biblical theology from a “canonical” perspective are also very “literary” in their approach, which means that they also do “narrative theology.” I am pursuing biblical theology canonically, with sensitivity to literary features of the text, and assuming the reliability of the historical claims of the canonical text. Daniel J. Treier has presented a “fivefold typology of ways to relate” biblical theology to “theological interpretation of Scripture,” and it seems to me that most evangelical biblical theologians would see themselves as occupying *both* Treier’s second and fourth categories—believing biblical theology that is *both* historical (category two) and literary (category four). Treier understands himself and “theological interpretation of Scripture” to be in the third category. Treier concedes that D. A. Carson, his example of someone who belongs in category two with its historical emphasis, has balanced his approach with more literary sensitivity, which Treier says belongs to category four (Daniel J. Treier, “Biblical Theology and/or Theological Interpretation of Scripture?” *SJT* 61 [2008]: 16–31; the note on Carson is on p. 26, n. 24). Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that a historical emphasis prevailed among evangelicals in the twentieth century, with more and more attention being given to literary/narrative features near the end of the millennium and at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

the chapter: their story, themes, and particular way of showing forth the glory of God in salvation through judgment. After the overview, each book will be discussed in more depth, and most will be examined according to the literary structure inherent to the book itself. I am seeking to show how the glory of God in salvation through judgment is communicated in the parts and the wholes of the biblical books in an effort to preempt the charge that I have foisted this center onto the material. So the treatment will seek to attend to canonical and literary features, but in some cases, Genesis, for instance, my discussion will be more thematic. I make this choice for a book like Genesis because the ten *toledoths* that appear to structure the book (Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2) are well known and often discussed,<sup>114</sup> and so it seems to me that there is a place for discussing the contents of Genesis according to themes growing out of Genesis 3 and 12 in an effort to showcase the center of the theology of Genesis. Drawing attention to these themes in Genesis will also point out key features of the stage on which the rest of the Bible's drama will be enacted.

There will surely be a main theme of this overarching story. Seeking to discover this theme is a legitimate enterprise, for as Dempster writes, "If it is the case that the Hebrew canon is also a Text with a definite beginning, middle, ending and plot, then the task of discovering a fundamental theme becomes not an exercise in futility but an imperative of responsible hermeneutics."<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Elmer Martens states that "Biblical theology is an attempt to get to the theological heart of the Bible."<sup>116</sup>

The New Testament authors present their accounts as the completion of the story begun in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament itself creates the expectations realized in the New Testament. The two are to be read together, and this book will follow, in its general outline, the structure of the Old and New Testaments that has been briefly discussed above. As the story unfolds, the central theme of the theology contained in the Bible itself will flame out like shining from shook foil, and the dearest freshness deep down in these rich soils will be the glory of God in salvation through judgment.

<sup>114</sup>See, e.g., Richard Schultz, "What Is 'Canonical' About a Canonical Biblical Theology? Genesis as a Case Study of Recent Old Testament Proposals," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 83–99.

<sup>115</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 43. Dempster helpfully explores the theme of dominion and dynasty, geography and genealogy in the Old Testament, tracing the interrelationships of the promises of the land and the deliverer. In my view, this twin theme serves the central theme of God's glory in salvation through judgment, as the one whose dynasty is traced is the one who will be God's agent of both salvation and judgment, and the restoration to the land will be salvation for God's people and judgment on their enemies. Dominion and dynasty display the glory of God in salvation through judgment.

<sup>116</sup>Martens, "Old Testament Theology Since Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.," 680 n. 37, citing his own essay, "Tackling Old Testament Theology," *JETS* 20 (1977): 123.

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