

Book Review

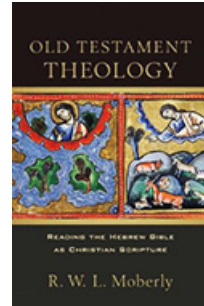
R. W. L. Moberly.

Old Testament Theology:

Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture.

Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic Press,

2013. hb, xxiii, 330. ISBN: £17.99, \$34.99.



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At first glance, readers quickly find that this theology is different from more traditional texts on biblical theology. At only 330 pages, the book lacks the intimidating heft of other theologies, such as Waltke's, Eichrodt's, and von Rad's. Likewise the introduction is a mere 6 pages rather than a long tedious discussion of academic debates regarding Old Testament theology. But the real difference lies in the book's substance. So unlike other biblical theologies that seek to cover all the major themes and problems in the hopes of creating a great synthesis, Moberly addresses only a handful of passages chosen on the basis of their theological heft or relevance to "modern" concerns. Moberly's decision for depth over breadth not only permits readers to consider a wide range of evidence as they consider the significance of these passages for contemporary use but also requires them to continue to develop their own theology.

The eight passages or motifs Moberly discusses can be divided into two sections. Like the Paul's writings, the first five deal with theological concepts and the last three with practical or existential concerns. Moberly opens his investigation, appropriately enough, with Dt 6:4. He argues the passage calls readers to understand God as the object of ultimate love. If God is Lord of all then, he suggests, secular space is not morally neutral, and its ethics and ideas may conflict with the call of this passage.

Chapter 2 takes up the scandalous notion of Israel's election. He beautifully explains how Israel's election reflects God's love. Interestingly, Moberly believes that interpreting Israel's election as primarily instrumental (i.e. to bless the nations) is a canonical re-reading of the original text. Moberly focusses a significant portion of the chapter to a discussion of *herem* which Moberly believes should be understood in primarily in a figurative or metaphorical fashion.

The next chapter investigates the role and meaning of manna. He explains how Israel's relationship to sustenance was illustrative of her relationship to God. In Chapter 4, Moberly turns to the thorny problem of God's immutability. I consider this chapter to be worth the price of the book by itself. With expert and thoughtful care, Moberly explains how to understand the notion understanding God as a person, capable of change, without falling into the error of Process theology. In Chapter 5, Moberly investigates two issues namely, does Isaiah predict Jesus? and the motif of exaltation and humility in Isaiah as it relates to belief in Christ.

Chapters 6-8 address problems of personal faith and action from the perspectives of Jonah, Israel's experience of God's blessing and curse, and Job's faithfulness during suffering. These chapters are particularly challenging because readers cannot ignore the existential questions they imply for their own lived-out-faith. Moberly correctly challenges intellectual

faith that fails to penetrate behavior, recognize suffering, or remain faithful during trials. Moberly ends the book with an Epilogue that explains his methodology and serves as a précis for the individual chapters. I suggest reading the Epilogue first rather than last as it is placed in the book.

Old Testament Theology is a complex read. Moberly's treatment of these selected passages offers readers a rigorous engagement of the passages while not ignoring pastoral or existential significance. I think his mindfulness of the existential questions raised by scripture is commendable. Moberly is quite right that our reading of scripture should not simply be an intellectual exercise but should impact our lives as well.

Though disappointed by Moberly's frequent acknowledgement of higher critical ideas, I was impressed by the extent to which he tried to show that these ideas could be side-stepped by looking at the passage differently. Sometimes he was successful in arguing that traditionalists and higher critics were asking the wrong questions, such as in regards to the historicity of Jonah. But more often, I found his attempt to disconnect the link between the world behind the text and the text as a Faustian bargain that dislodged the authority and value of scripture than protect it. For instance, his approach prevented him from finding more passages that prefigure Jesus in Isaiah than secular scholars permit. It also prevented him from accepting the full force of what God wanted *herem* to mean for Israel. While noting many excellent observations about this term, Moberly overlooked that wars can be waged in multiple ways, such as demonstrated by the "Cold War." I suggest that by commanding *herem*, God wanted Israel to be uncompromising in its opposition to the

religion of the Canaanites. Israel was to fight paganism either by violence (hot war) and/or cultural/ideological opposition (cold war). Thus there was no necessary reason to contend that in later Israelite history, *herem* became a more figurative concept.

These negatives aside, Moberly's work remains a worthwhile read. By focusing on the tough questions, Moberly forces readers to engage the Old Testament at an intellectual and existential level as they consider what the passages teach about God and living a faithful life.