

ASPECTS OF GRACE IN THE PENTATEUCH

David W. Baker*

Teaching Old Testament in a conservative Evangelical seminary, especially one in the middle of the 'Bible belt' in the central United States, has necessitated a frequent response to the question "Why should we study the Old Testament anyway, since it is 'Law,' which was done away with by the gospel of the grace of Christ?¹ Haven't you read Galatians (2-3) and Romans 6:15?" Many students also point to the "authoritative" notes in their Scofield Reference Bible to give validity to their questions.² My own dispensational upbringing, with its strict dichotomy between Old Testament = law and New Testament = grace has also contributed to the dilemma.³ This problem is not just recent, of course, with even Tertullian facing it in his response to Marcion:

[Marcion's] whole aim...centers in this, that he may establish a diversity between the Old and New Testaments, so that his own Christ may be separate from the Creator, as belonging to this rival god, and as alien from the law and the prophets...Marcion has laid down the position that Christ...is a different being from Him who was ordained by God the Creator for the restoration of the Jewish state, and who is yet to come. Between these he interposes the separation of a great and absolute difference--as great as lies between what is just and what is good; as great as lies between the law and the gospel, as great (in short) as is the difference between Judaism and Christianity. (Against Marcion, Bk IV, Chap VI)

In other words, the logical extrapolation of a Marcionite position is that the Creator God of the Old Testament is Jewish and not the same as the redeeming God of grace in Christ of the New Testament. Christianity is not simply an extension and fulfillment of Judaism, but is a radically different religion.

Articles and books, ranging from minor to massive, from profound to puerile, have addressed this issue of law vs. grace, and I cannot, nor do I care to, review them or their arguments here. What I hope to do is much more basic, and possibly also minor and puerile. Before making dogmatic statements based on systematic theological categories concerning the existence or nature of grace in the Old Testament, can we take a biblical theological approach, searching the texts themselves to see what they might actually con-

*David Baker (Ph.D., University of London) is Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at ATS.

Aspects of Grace in the Pentateuch

tain concerning grace rather than precluding in advance their incorporation of what we might not want to find in the first place?

LEXICAL ASPECTS

Grace as a biblical theological motif has the initial difficulty of not being a unified concept based around a single word, at least in the Old Testament. Unlike the New Testament with $\chi\alpha\rho\iota\varsigma$ and related terms, the Old Testament does not have a word or root uniquely related to our English concept of 'grace'.⁴ The more common English translations render several Hebrew words as 'grace' or 'gracious', including נָעַם ,⁵ which is least helpful for our discussion since it mainly deals with the physical attributes of grace and gracefulness, חַן and its root חֲנַן and cognates,⁶ which need to be the subject of further research, and will only be alluded to marginally here, and דָּוָה .⁷

Gordon R. Clark has recently undertaken an analysis of the lexical field of *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*,⁸ in which he studies six Hebrew roots dealing with interpersonal relations, usually indicating attitudes or actions toward one another. These are רָחַם , חֲנַן , חֶסֶד , שִׂנְאָה and אֲמָן , two of which (חֶסֶד and חֲנַן) we have just encountered. He summarizes his conclusions regarding human interrelationships as discernible within this lexical field as follows:

1. שִׂנְאָה ['hatred'] is remote from דָּוָה ;
2. דָּוָה is closely related to חֲנַן ; it includes 'grace' and 'mercy', but it is much more than grace and mercy;
3. דָּוָה is close to רַחֲמִים ; it includes 'compassion', but it is not merely compassion;
4. דָּוָה is close to אֱמוּנָה ; it includes 'faithfulness', 'reliability', 'confidence', but it is not merely faithfulness, reliability, confidence;
5. דָּוָה is not very close to אֲהַב ; while it includes 'love', its connotations are much broader than those of love.⁹

Several passages from the Pentateuch have been seen as especially important in understanding 'grace', at least as manifested in some of the words from the lexical field just mentioned. Deuteronomy 7:7-13 shows that:

Yahweh's relationship with Israel commences in his deep, yearning love, a love that longs for a close attachment and expresses itself in a lasting devotion - a love that is anticipated in v. 6 where Israel is Yahweh's precious possession. Such love Yahweh expresses by choosing Israel; and the speaker emphasizes

that the choice is not influenced by anything the people themselves contribute; they are not a great or mighty nation, but Yahweh chooses them simply because he loves them...The relationship that Yahweh establishes and seeks to maintain with his people is founded securely on his love for them--a committed, enduring love. The covenant in which he formulates this relationship expresses his loving commitment to them--a commitment that persists even in the face of their unfaithfulness [emphasis mine].¹⁰

When Yahweh initiates the covenant: 1. his choice of those with whom he establishes his covenant is based on his אהבה [love] for them; 2. he expects אהבה --but never, אהבה--from his covenant partners; 3. he is always ready to extend אהבה, to his people; even when they are rebellious his punishment is so moderated by his אהבה that it prompts them to return to him.¹¹

The expression of אהבה is appropriate to, and is often based in, a deep, enduring, persistent commitment of each party to the other. This commitment is characteristic of instances in which אהבה is expressed between two human parties and also when Yahweh expresses his אהבה to his people. Indeed, it appears that such a commitment is an essential factor in Yahweh's renewal of the covenant relationship with his wayward but now repentant people.¹²

Another key section is Exodus 34:6-7.¹³ This, and other similar verses,¹⁴ also highlights the constancy and long-lasting character of God's love as shown by his forgiveness.

There is one occurrence of the term אהבה which is generally ignored in discussions of the lexical field, namely that in Leviticus 20:17.¹⁵ Zobel denies any uses of אהבה to Leviticus,¹⁶ so he does not have to discuss this instance. The late W. J. Martin, however, saw this verse not as peripheral but as central to the semantic value of the word.¹⁷ He regularly translated אהבה as 'kinship love', deriving apparently from this very verse. What God metaphorically shows to his people through the covenant, and what humanity is expected to show to each other, is the love evidenced within a healthy, godly family, an intimacy and mutual support and encouragement that is usually found only within such a close-knit group. Our verse in Leviticus looks at where this intimacy strays over into the area of forbidden sexual relationships, an intimacy which is inappropriate within the parameters of the family. Here אהבה becomes incest. The term itself does not have a negative connotation, but only brings censure when established boundaries are breached.

COVENANTAL ASPECTS

Both of these elements, the everlasting nature of God's love, and his gracious forgiveness, come together in a powerful way in the covenant renewal between Israel and Yahweh at Shittim. It is vital to see that God does indeed provide 'grace in the end', as per the title of Gordon McConville's useful study.¹⁸ It is also pertinent to note that in a manner unique in the covenant documents of the ancient Near East, Yahweh codifies this offer of forgiveness and a second chance within the covenant itself in Deuteronomy 30. There Yahweh promises:

When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God ... then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you...

Deut 30:1-3 (RSV)

"Even when you sin," says the Lord, "I will show you forgiveness." Though there is no lexical 'grace' in the passage (רַחֵם and חַסֵּד are not present), there is present its theological reality, since surely unilateral forgiveness is an important aspect and example of grace.

As I have mentioned elsewhere:

This chapter thirty of Deuteronomy is extremely important not only in understanding Israel's covenant with her God, but also in understanding God himself. It is a linch-pin in the whole of biblical theology and the background of Israel's covenantal view of history....Wrath was...experienced by the Israelites, but this chapter in Deuteronomy allows the unique opportunity of having a second chance, or, as in the continued history of the biblical Israel, a third, fourth or fifth chance...

[T]his view of history is the backbone of the Bible...Israel, in doing what was right in her own eyes, repeatedly worshiped foreign gods...breaking the first and fundamental covenant stipulation...: "You shall have no other gods." The covenant was thereby broken and the curses were brought about by God, who allowed oppression by a foreign power. This was not the end, however, for when the people returned to God and to their covenant obligations, they were forgiven and restored, with their enemies dispersed (Judges 2:10-19). This is the flow of biblical history...

[16] This aspect of forgiveness as an integral part of God's covenant with his people has obvious application to the New Testament as well, and

serves to join the two Testaments into one Bible. It could have been this aspect of the covenant, among others, which Jesus had in mind when he said that the cup was a new covenant in his blood, the blood which cleanses and effects forgiveness. The forgiveness of the new covenant extends beyond the sons of Abraham, the signatories of the Sinai agreement, to include all who appropriate the healing blood to themselves. Going beyond the immediate meaning of Moses' words in Deut 24:14-15, "I am making this covenant, with its oaths, not only with you who are standing with us today in the presence of Yahweh our God but also with those who are not here today."¹⁹

The very act of establishing a covenant with Abram (Gen 12:1-3, but first called a 'covenant' in 15:18), and its nationalization at Sinai (Exod 19-24; cf. 19:5; 24:7), is an indication of God's gracious care for humanity, and for Israel in particular. This is in contrast to other ancient Near Eastern religions. For example, the Egyptian 'Book of the Dead' contains advice on how to approach the judgment in the afterworld in order to present oneself in such a way to obtain the favor of the gods and eternal bliss. Part of this is to state:

- (A1) I have not committed evil against men.
- (A2) I have not mistreated cattle.
- (A3) I have not committed sin in the place of truth...
- (A8) I have not blasphemed a god.
- (A9) I have not *done violence* to a poor man.²⁰

Meri-ka-re, in late 22nd century BC Egypt, was advised also about this judgment. He was told:

Do not trust in length of years, for they [the judges] regard a lifetime as (but) an hour. [fn- The judges of the dead remember all sins no matter [h]ow long the time may be.] A man remains over after death, and his deeds are placed beside him in heaps. [fn- As legal exhibits.]²¹

Human activity is not a prerequisite for relationship in the Old Testament, and one does not have to bring one's actions to be weighed or measured before gaining access to the presence of God. God's love is clearly stated as the precipitating reason for his desire for relationship in Deuteronomy 4:37, and his grace is evident in the covenant's own historical prologue. Israel should enter into covenant because "I am the Lord God, who [has already, before you responded to me in any way, graciously] brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Deut 5: 6; Exod 20:2). The writer explicitly refers

Aspects of Grace in the Pentateuch

to the covenant as 'grace' (חַנּוּן) in Deuteronomy 7:12.²² As Gordon Wenham has said, "all three covenants [Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic] are aptly described as acts of divine grace; that is, they are arrangements initiated by God out of his spontaneous mercy, not because of the deserts of those with whom the covenants are made."²³ These, and numerous other passages, clearly argue against a bifurcated God, as he is too often painted, one of law in the Old Testament but grace in the New Testament. Grace characterizes Yahweh first to last, as does law which, as Wenham has stated, is itself a manifestation of grace.²⁴

God's grace is not only manifest in his election of Israel, his establishing a covenant with them, and his forgiveness of them when they broke the covenant, but also in the whole area of discipline, the punishment which follows wrongdoing. This is an area not often considered in discussions of grace.

DISCIPLINARY ASPECTS

God's justice demanded that any severing of relationship, any breach of the law on the part of humanity, must be punished, so covenant curses and other punishments are built into the covenant document itself.

God's righteousness allowed him to inflict punishment only within certain parameters, however. A 'minor' offense could not be met with a major response. In this way, the behavioral expectations which Yahweh spelled out in the covenant reflect the very order of creation by which he chooses to bind himself. Thus, at least at this level, God does not change.²⁵ This righteous correspondence between sin and response is apparently how one is to read the well-known 'eye for an eye' passages (Exod 21:23-24; Deut 19:18-21). These do not require mutilation, but rather limit judicial response by not allowing excesses in punishment.

This brings us to another area of interest of as yet preliminary research, the correlation between crime and punishment in the Old Testament, and also the correlation between punishment and the punished; how the sinner as well as the sin is often taken into account when a response is made. It will be argued that these are manifestations of God's justice, righteousness and grace.

A contradistinction needs to be made between the nature of ancient Near Eastern deities as shown by their reactions to various stimuli, and Yahweh, the God of Israel.

Many of the neighboring deities were viewed as temporally finite, coming into being at some time in the past, so not having eternal preexistence

as did Yahweh and a limited number of other deities. Not only do they share, to some extent, humanity's limitations in this way, but also many of its weaknesses such as hunger, rage, lust and pride. These deities, being created in the image of humankind, can show human capriciousness and spite, especially when wronged or crossed. This can be seen both in the Babylonian creation account, *Enūma eliš*, and in the *Atra-hasis* epic. In the former, the God Apsu is disturbed by the rowdy younger gods and, in response, seeks to destroy them (ANET 61:20-40). In the latter account, the important God Enlil is roused from his peaceful slumber by raucous humanity which had, after all, been created to look after the needs of the gods, not to disturb their rest. In light of these 'serious' crimes, the human race faces total destruction by plague, famine and flood. The same kind of almost human overreaction on the part of the lesser gods can be seen earlier in the *Atra-hasis* epic when the overworked deities rise in rebellion and want to kill their taskmaster Enlil because they are too tired to carry on their designated work (A.h. 1:57-181).

Other examples of overreaction and spite are not rare: see, for example, Ereškiggal's homicidal reaction to Nergal's lack of respect for her messengers (ANET 103), and a similar reaction by Baal when he tries to murder the two messengers who deliver a challenge from Yamm (shades of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern!; ANET 130, III AB, B; 39-41), though Ashtoreth is wise enough to see that the bad tidings are not the responsibility of the bearer. Anath in particular is pictured as brutal, engaging in a literal bloodbath simply for blood-lust (ANET 136; V AB, B; 136) and killing Aqhat in order to obtain his bow which she coveted (ANET 152-153; Aqhat B(iv)). This very inconsistency of reaction on the part of the gods, or at least their inscrutability, is serious enough to give rise to some of the main questioning found in the Babylonian Theodicy (ANET 603:243-251) and in *Ludlul*, the Babylonian Job (ANET 596,1:95ff).²⁶

Egypt is also not exempt from apparent overreaction, as witnessed by Horus' decapitation of his own mother after she helps Seth in a contest (ANET 15, X).

The above observations are not in any way to suggest there is absolutely no correspondence between crime and punishment in the ancient Near East, for of course we find material in the law codes which corresponds not only to some biblical laws, but which also does not clash with our concepts of justice and righteousness. The field is too wide to be adequately discussed here (a scholarly way of saying that I have not had opportunity to explore it fully!), but examples include the compensation of slave for slave if a slave is lost through medical malpractice (Code of Hammurabi [CH] §219) or through a builder's negligence (CH §231).

Aspects of Grace in the Pentateuch

A problem with this system, from the perspective of one who is outside of it, is its inconsistency. The law codes are not in fact codifications of legal precedent collected to guide future generations, as one might mistakenly assume by referring to them as 'codes'. They rather serve an apologetic function, and are among the deeds and decisions which a ruler presents to a deity as indicating the quality of his rule, as shown in Hammurabi's prologue.²⁷ They are thus not meant for the perusal of anyone but the god. The inconsistency arises between the actions which one sees the gods themselves undertaking, and those which are expected or accepted of humanity. For the latter, murder, theft and debauchery are condemned, but not for the former. Though apparently not themselves bound by norms of conduct, the deities hold people responsible, though at times the norms of responsibility are not spelled out or even apparently change (e.g. Theodicy, Ludlul).

We have already noted that this is not the case with Yahweh. He sets out his behavioral expectations in laws which are not only fixed and beneficent, but also public.²⁸ They are to give the covenant people unchanging guidelines which can be depended on to be the same tomorrow as they were yesterday.

Turning now to a consideration of the correspondence between the crime and the punishment. Mutilation is a fairly common feature of Mesopotamian law. At times there is a correspondence here between the wrong and the penalty. For example, an adopted son will lose his tongue if he denies his parentage (CH §192; cf. also Sennacherib's similar punishment upon those who blasphemed his god Ashur, ANET 288), or a son who assaults his father will lose his hand (CH §195). There are even closer correspondences with the talion ('eye for an eye') laws (CH §196, §197, §200). At times the punishment relates to the malefactor (wet?) nurse losing her breast when the infant in her charge dies while in her care with her not informing the parents (CH §194).

In biblical law, physical mutilation is much rarer, especially if the talion laws are limiting rather than prescriptive. About the only legal text of which I am aware prescribing mutilation is Deuteronomy 25:11 in which the hand of woman is to be cut off if she intervenes in a fight between her husband and another male by grabbing his genitals. There the offending part is removed.

The death penalty is not infrequent in either the Bible or in Mesopotamia, and often for the same offenses, such as murder (ANET 542; Lev. 24:17; Deut 19:11-12), kidnaping (CH §14; Exod 21:16; Deut 24:7), or adultery (CH §116, §129; Eshnunna 28; Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22). Other occasions in the Old Testament necessitating death are violation of the sacred

(Lev 10: 1-2; 20:2; Num 4:15; 3:38; 18:3, 7, 22, 32) and the breach of fundamental relationships, such as that between people and God through idolatry (Exod 22:20; Num 25:6-8, cf. 5; Deut 6:14-15; 8:19; 9:12-13; 13:5; Josh 24:20), and those which can endanger the family unit, the basic societal structure in ancient Israel. This explains the severe penalties for adultery (Lev 20: 10), incest (20:11, 12), homosexuality (20:13), bestiality (Exod 22:19) or cursing or reviling the parent (Exod 21:15,17; Lev 20:9; Deut 21:20-21). Also, rebellion against the leader, either Yahweh or his delegate, was to be dealt with severely (Num 11:1,33; 16:41ff; 21:5; Deut 9:23-25; Josh 1:18; 5:6).

All of these relate to covenant, either that between humanity and God (or his representatives), or person and person (in the family). They also reflect God's justice and righteousness, being appropriate to the severity of the wrongs committed, since the very social and theological underpinnings of Israel were at stake if these sins/crimes were not dealt with.

This again is in contrast to some of the severe penalties for what seems from our perspective to be relatively minor infractions, such as the death penalty by drowning for the ale-wife who waters her drinks (CH §108)- a punishment relevant to the crime, but a bit excessive, as is the death by burning of the entum-priestess who as much as enters a wine shop (CH §110). In another case, a gadabout wife who denies her husband conjugal rights is also subject to death (CH §143).

Another aspect of justice which will not receive adequate exploration here is the fixed punishment for a crime in Israel, no matter who the victim and perpetrator are. By contrast, in Mesopotamia there are different penalties for the same crime. For example, if a gentleman's daughter is assaulted and consequently suffers a miscarriage, the penalty is 10 silver shekels. If the same fate befalls a commoner's daughter, five shekels are exacted, while for a slave only two are required. Justice seems to be class-conscious in Mesopotamia. Another example involves common assaults, where a gentleman who strikes another on the cheek is subject to a public scourging of 60 lashes, a slave who strikes a gentleman loses an ear, and a commoner who strikes one of his own class pays 10 shekels (CH §202-205).

The inverse of this is also evident in the Old Testament, with no-one being above the law. Leader and layperson, king and commoner, all are held accountable for their actions and must make restitution through sacrifice or other means (e.g. Lev 4; David before Nathan, 2 Sam 12).

The frequent appropriateness of a punishment to the perpetrator as well as the crime is another aspect of Yahweh's just righteousness. Quite often the appropriateness seems to be recognized by the biblical author himself as indicated by word choice and by narrative structure. Look for a moment at

some examples of correlations between crime and punishment, and punishment and criminal from Genesis 1-11.

Genesis 3 narrates the sins and resulting penalties for the serpent, the man and the woman. The serpent who was 'craftier' (עָרִים; 'arum) than any other creature' is now 'more cursed' (אָרַר; 'arur) than any other creature'. His misleading in the area of eating leads to his punishment in that same area, and the seduction of the woman leads to enmity with the woman, while the resultant eternal effect on her seed results in eternal hatred of his seed. His implicit pride in usurping the position of authority and command reserved for God alone is met by a new significance given to his means of locomotion, on his belly, not at all conducive to pride.²⁹

The woman's pain (עֲצָבוֹן) is increased (3:17) as she herself had increased the prohibition given by God by adding to it (3:3, cf. 2:17). This pain hits her in a way which is corresponding to her unique role as mother.³⁰ Her usurpation of authority, taking the place of God in her suggestions to her אִישׁ 'husband' (3:6) leads to her being herself ruled by her אִישׁ (v. 16).

The man is also punished in relation to his wrongful eating, losing the special 'good' food (3:6) for the ordinary (3:18). Again the punishment is uniquely appropriate to his gender in being specifically related to his social role in that period, as provider. The pain (עֲצָבוֹן) of the אָדָם ('adam) 'man' involves difficulty with the אֲדָמָה ('adamah) 'soil', in agricultural production, just as the pain of his wife involved her role in biological production.

Humanity desired to be like God, knowing good and evil, and this knowledge instead brought sweat, sorrow and pain,³¹ and the pure knowledge of God, in whose presence they had been able to walk in innocence (2:25), is now replaced by a knowledge of shame. The original harmony and equality that man and woman enjoyed (2:18), is replaced by recrimination (3:12) and subjugation (v. 16) following their usurpation of authority. They sought their own elevation and autonomy from God (3:5), to know as he knows and be able to make their own decisions and to provide for themselves. Instead of elevation they, like the serpent, are lowered to the earth (3:19), but their autonomy is exactly what they received from God as they were sent from his presence. Here, as is so often the case, the punishment is getting exactly what we ask for. Finally, their joint creation purpose to work the soil (2:5) becomes onerous and part of their punishment (3:23).

All of this causes one to wonder at Westermann's claim that: "The punishments in vv. 14-19 on the contrary have no direct relationship with the offense: they describe factually the present state of existence of serpent, woman and man which by way of after-thought are explained as punishments."³² All three sections are oracles of judgment, with the first being

a curse and the latter two indictments or judgment sayings.³³ If they were actualized, as such oracles often are in the biblical narrative, one wonders how they could have been presented in any other form than what we have before us in the text! Formally, what difference would there be between etiology and fulfilled judgment oracle? The author seems to be taking great pains here, and in other passages, to highlight the direct 'crime-punishment' relationships which Westermann is calling into question.

Correspondence is also evident in the Cain-Abel narrative. Cain, the sedentary agriculturist (4:2) loses the fruitfulness of the soil and, as a nomad, even the possibility of waiting for it to produce. His very existence is altered. Unlike Adam, whose task 'to work the soil' will only be fruitful when accompanied by pain (3:17), Cain's toil will be completely unproductive (4:12). The blood spilled on the ground (4:11) separates him from that ground, and his intentional separation from the company of others in order to perform his wickedness results in his forced separation from the company of others as an exile (4:14). His separation for murder was also from God's presence (see God's [rhetorical] question in 4:9), and part of his punishment was to be expelled from that same presence (4:16). The killer is himself in terror of death (4:14).

This expected correspondence and justice is part of the shock of the life of Lamech (4:22-24), where the punishment which he metes out seems far in excess to the crime- fitting him more into his ancient Near Eastern rather than his biblical environment.

The flood narrative, and its precipitating background, continue our theme. The complete depravity of humanity (אָדָם 'adam, 6:5) is in stark contrast to the complete good of creation as it left the hands of its Creator (1:31), but does indicate the logical consequences of humanity's desire to know 'good and evil' (3:5). They knew the good experientially through the presence and providence of God in the Garden before the fall while under his lordship. Now they know the evil experientially in the absence of God, and their own self-rule outside the Garden after the fall. The completeness of depravity is related to the completeness of the destruction, with all of humanity (אָדָם 'adam), here including all living creatures, facing destruction (6:7). Since people fill the earth with violence, God will fill it with destruction (6:11,13). As humanity broke God's established ethical bounds, so God breaks his established physical bounds, bringing about uncreation and recreation. Reciprocity and correspondence is explicitly stated at the conclusion of the flood narrative, where bloodshed will be repaid by bloodshed (9:6).

Finally, the Tower of Babel incident results in a complete dispersion (11:4) of those who disobeyed God's instructions to disperse in order to fill the

Aspects of Grace in the Pentateuch

whole earth (1:28). As Gordon Wenham insightfully (so-stated because we both reach the same conclusion) states, “from a dramatic point of view, the irony of the story is certainly heightened: what man did his utmost to prevent, he is condemned to suffer by the decree of heaven.”³⁴ Correspondences are especially strong in this passage, and are brilliantly reflected by lexical and structural elements within the text, as well documented in Wenham’s commentary.³⁵

All of these examples should not be construed as proving a universal point. Various factors such as cultural distance or interpretational uncertainty at times preclude discerning a clear, appropriate link between crime and punishment. The examples just cited should serve, however, to show that such a correspondence is not rare. There seems to be a marked divergence from the ancient Near Eastern environment of Israel, where capriciousness and excess are much more readily evident, or our own North American system, where so many completely diverse crimes are dealt with by imprisonment, a universal response which takes no cognizance of either crime or criminal, and which in so many ways evidences the inhumanity of a ‘humanitarian’ system of punishment, as discussed by C. S. Lewis.³⁶

CONCLUSION

The caricature is too often painted of God the Father appearing in the Old Testament as a harsh, dictatorial overlord, while Jesus Christ the Son appears in the New Testament “as a pacifying, appeasing, abused mediator. The sense of union in the Godhead is terribly damaged by this kind of theology.”³⁷ Hopefully this paper has in a small way dispensed with at least part of this caricature. While God the Father is indeed Lord, his lordship is characterized by loving grace, in the Old Testament as well as the New. In addition to the ‘grace in the end’, which even dispensationalists would avow, seeing that which is directed toward the church in the present period and that directed toward a restored Israel during the millennium, we would like to affirm that there is equally ‘grace in the beginning’.

ENDNOTES

¹Dedicated to Richard Allison, a gracious colleague who has endeavored to share God’s grace with congregation and class at all times.

²From C. I. Scofield, The Scofield Reference Bible, new ed. (NY: Oxford, 1917), 1115 on Jn 1:17 “[Grace] is...constantly set in contrast to law, under

which God demands righteousness from man, as, under grace, he gives righteousness to man....Law is connected with Moses and works; grace with Christ and faith....Law blesses the good; grace save the bad....Law demands that blessings be earned; grace is a free gift...

As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ...The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works the fruit of salvation....”

From The New Scofield Reference Edition, E. Schuyler English, ed. (NY: Oxford, 1967), vii- “although not all Bible students agree in every detail of the dispensational system presented in this Reference Bible, it is generally recognized that the distinction between law and grace is basic to the understanding of the Scriptures.”

³A number of prominent Dispensational theologians have made statements on the topic. From C. I. Scofield, Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth (Findlay, OH: Fundamental Truth, 1940), 5: “The most obvious and striking division of the word of truth is that [4] between Law and Grace. Indeed, these contrasting principles characterize the two most important dispensations-- Jewish and Christian....Scripture never, in any dispensation, mingles these two principles. Law always has a place and work distinct and wholly diverse from that of grace. Law is God prohibiting and requiring; grace is God beseeching and bestowing.”

From L. S. Chafer, “Dispensationalism,” BibSac 93 (1936), 416: “The essential element of a grace administration--faith as the sole basis of acceptance with God, unmerited acceptance through a perfect standing in Christ, the present possession of eternal life,...--are not found in the kingdom administration. [The essential elements are] declared to be the fulfilling of “the law and the prophets”...and [there is] an extension of the Mosaic law into realms of meritorious obligation.”

From Daniel P. Fuller, Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuity? The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 29: “Chafer’s statements [ibid., 422-3] make it clear that, depending on the dispensational period out of which a book was speaking, there were two ways of salvation set forth in Scripture. For the Jew under the Mosaic dispensation, salvation came by trying to keep the law and by faithfully offering sacrifices; for the Christian under grace, salvation is simply by faith in Christ’s finished work.

Aspects of Grace in the Pentateuch

⁴In fact there is no language that expresses so profoundly and so tenderly the unaccountable love of God as the Hebrew of the Old Testament”, T. F. Torrance, The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1948) 10-18.

⁵Zech 11:7, 10 in RSV and NIV.

⁶NIV - חן Ps 45:2; Prov 1:9, 3:22, 34; 4:9; Zc 12:10; חן Is 26:10; RSV - Est 2:17; Ps 45:2; Jer 31:2; Zc 4:7.

⁷NIV - Jon 2:8.

⁸(JSOTSup, 157; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

⁹Ibid., 267-268.

¹⁰Ibid., 131.

¹¹Ibid., 136.

¹²Ibid., 140.

¹³“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love [חַסְדִּים] and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love [חַסְדִּים] for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty...” (NRSV); cf. C. Baumgartner, La Grâce du Christ (Bruges: Desclée & Co., 1963), 15-19.

¹⁴E.g. Deut 4:31; 2 Chron 30:9; Ps 86:15; 103:8; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2).

¹⁵ “If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she see his nakedness, it is a disgrace (חִוּיָהוּ), and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people...”

¹⁶H. -J. Zobel, חַסְדִּים hesed, TDOT V, 45.

¹⁷Oral communication.

¹⁸J. Gordon McConville, Grace in the End: A Study in Deuteronomic Theology (Studies in Biblical Theology; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993).

¹⁹David W. Baker, "The Mosaic Covenant Against Its Environment," Ashland Theological Journal 20 (1988), 15-16, which was a revision of "The Uniqueness of the Mosaic Covenant," Proceedings of the Seventh South African Judaica Congress Held at the University of the Witwatersrand, 1983 (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1983), 1-11.

²⁰ANET, 34.

²¹ANET, 415:54-56.

²²"And it will be, as a consequence of you hearing and keeping and doing these ordinances, Yahweh will keep for you the covenant, that is [cf. D. W. Baker, "Further Examples of the Waw Explicativum," VT 30 (1980), 129-136] the grace which he swore to your fathers."

²³Gordon Wenham, "Grace and Law in the Old Testament," 3-23 in Law, Morality and the Bible, ed., Bruce Kaye and Gordon Wenham (Leicester/Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 4.

²⁴Ibid., 7- "Within the Sinaitic and Deuteronomic covenants law and grace are not antithetic. Law is the gift of a gracious, saving God. Through keeping the law man can experience more of God's grace.

²⁵Wenham, "Grace," 13 concerning the irrevocability of the covenant.

²⁶See John H. Walton, Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 183-185.

²⁷"Hammurabi, the shepherd...am I; the one who makes affluence and plenty abound...who causes light to go forth over the lands of Sumer and Akkad... When Marduk commissioned me to guide the people aright, to direct the land, I established law and justice in the language of the land, thereby promoting the welfare of the people. At that time (I decreed)..." [the laws follow] (ANET 164-165).

Aspects of Grace in the Pentateuch

²⁸See Gordon Wenham, "Law and the Legal System in the Old Testament," pp. 24-52 in Law, Morality and the Bible, eds. Bruce Kaye and Gordon Wenham (Leicester/Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 26, concerning the public character of Israel's covenant laws.

²⁹See D. Kidner, Genesis, (TOTC; Leicester/Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967), 70.

³⁰G. von Rad, Genesis, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 93-94.

³¹Kidner, 71.

³²C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11: A Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 257.

³³George W. Coats, Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature (FOTL; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 56.

³⁴Gordon J. Wenham, Genesis 1-15 (WBC, 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 240.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 234-236.

³⁶"The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment," 20th Century: An Australian Quarterly Review III/3 (1949), 5-12, reprinted in God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 287-294.

³⁷Elaine A. Heath, private communication, 6.27.94.