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A FRESH APPROACH

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TESTAMENT
THEOLOGY

A Fresh Approach

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TO THE STUDENTS OF
SPURGEON'S COLLEGE
PAST, PRESENT, AND TO COME

CONTENTS

PREFACE	ix
I. THE PROBLEM OF OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY	I
1. The Origins of Old Testament Theology	4
2. Historical Criticism and Theological Method	11
3. The Old Testament as Canon	15
4. The Old Testament and the Bible	19
2. DIMENSIONS OF FAITH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT	26
1. The Literary Dimension of Faith	27
2. The Historical Dimension of Faith	33
3. The Cultic Dimension of Faith	40
4. The Intellectual Dimension of Faith	46
3. THE GOD OF ISRAEL	53
1. The Being of God	58
2. The Names of God	62
3. The Presence of God	66
4. The Uniqueness of God	72
4. THE PEOPLE OF GOD	79
1. People and Nation	82
2. The Theology of Election	87
3. The Theology of Covenant	96
5. THE OLD TESTAMENT AS LAW	104
1. The Meaning of <i>tôrâh</i>	106
2. The Pentateuch as <i>tôrâh</i>	110
3. The <i>tôrâh</i> and the Prophets	120
4. From <i>tôrâh</i> to Law	127
6. THE OLD TESTAMENT AS PROMISE	131
1. Prophecy and the Judgment of Israel	137
2. Prophecy and Hope	140
3. The Forms of Prophetic Hope	144
4. The Promise in the Law and the Writings	149

7. THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE HISTORY OF RELIGION	155
1. The Old Testament and the Religions of the Ancient East	157
2. Religious Polemic in the Old Testament	165
3. Authority in Israelite Religion	170
4. The Old Testament in Religion	174
8. THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE STUDY OF THEOLOGY	179
1. The Old Testament and Biblical Study	182
2. The Old Testament and the Study of Theology	186
3. The Old Testament and the Study of Religion	191
4. The Old Testament and Mankind	196
NOTES	201
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	207
GENERAL INDEX	210
INDEX OF AUTHORS	211
INDEX OF BIBLICAL REFERENCES	212

PREFACE

The lectures set out here are based upon a course given under the Louisa Curtis Foundation at Spurgeon's College, London, on 21-23 January, 1975. I have taken the opportunity provided by a period of sabbatical leave, and prompted by numerous suggestions of colleagues, to develop the original arguments into the form here presented. That they still represent only a tentative essay in a well-trodden field will be obvious to all Old Testament scholars.

Already there are a number of 'Theologies of the Old Testament' in current publication, as well as many volumes of history and critique of the subject. Rumour indicates that even more volumes of a similar kind are in course of preparation. I am genuinely reluctant to add to them, however disingenuous such a remark must appear in a preface of this nature. The original lectures were intended primarily as a critique of the theologies of the Old Testament which are at present available, with some suggestions about the way in which the discipline might be carried further. To have published them in this form, however, would quite properly have been subject to the criticism that they simply exploited the difficulties which others have sought to overcome. I have therefore endeavoured to carry the arguments of the original lectures further in the direction of suggesting how a theology of the Old Testament might look.

It will become clear to the person who reads this book that much of the argument hinges upon the question of the essential nature of theological thinking. That theology is the handmaid of religion, and not necessarily its crowning achievement, is a conviction that underlies this work. Writing from a Christian context, I find myself, in the company of most Christians, committed to the Old Testament as a consequence of the history and genesis of my own faith. To pretend that this is not so, and that some better reasons for studying the Old Testament might

be found, would not be intellectually honest. There is a need therefore for seeking to understand the Old Testament theologically from this perspective. I am also made very profoundly aware that the Old Testament is a Jewish book, and that the pattern of study of Old Testament theology, as it has developed, offers little by way of understanding and explanation of this relevance of the Old Testament to Judaism. The failure here seems particularly lamentable, especially in its consequences for Christian theological education.

A third factor has also impinged upon the arguments laid out in the following pages. At the present time the study of theology in an academic context is being seriously, and quite properly, challenged by the need for a fuller attention to the problems of the historical and comparative study of religion. No more readily available text exists for beginning this than the Old Testament, since it occupies a central place in the sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity and has profoundly affected a third religion, Islam. Furthermore, the study of the Old Testament raises many far-reaching issues about the nature of religion and the role of theology and rational thought within it. Not least also the Old Testament continues to affect very profoundly the attitudes adopted towards other religions by Christians, Jews and Muslims. In all of these ways, therefore, a renewed interest in the theological impact of the Old Testament would appear to be highly desirable. To add yet another volume, therefore, to an already overcrowded library of volumes on this subject can at least be defended.

It remains for me to express my deep indebtedness to Principal and Mrs R. Brown of Spurgeon's College for their hospitality and encouragement at the time when the original lectures were given, and to the Trustees of the Louisa Curtis Foundation for extending the original invitation. I am also much indebted to Dr Peter Toon and to Mr P. J. Lardi of Messrs. Marshall, Morgan and Scott for their encouragement to me to develop the lectures for publication in Marshalls Theological Library.

R. E. CLEMENTS

October 1977