

“A Light in a Dark Place”: A Tale of Two Kings and Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament¹

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BY YOUR WORDS I can see where I am going; they throw a beam of light on my dark path (Ps 119:105, *The Message*).

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INTRODUCTION

Near the end of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first volume of his magisterial trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, there is a poignant scene. As the motley group of human and non-human characters are about to leave on their fateful mission to save Middle Earth, the elven queen, Galadriel, appears and gives each member a parting gift. None is aware of the

horrific dangers ahead. The protagonist, Frodo, who is carrying the burden of the Ring, is given the final gift suited to his particular task. The beautiful queen presents to him an extremely valuable

jar of crystal containing the Light of Eärendil. Unknown to Frodo himself, this light is directly descended from the light of Iluvatar, the name of God given by Tolkien in the foundational creation story of his entire mythology, the *Ainulindale* that opens his *Silmarillion*. “May it be to you a light in dark places,” Galadriel remarks, “when all other lights go out.”² It is this precious gift, one directly (and indirectly) given by God, that will help Frodo navigate his way among the dangers that lurk ahead in the darkest of nights on his momentous mission.

A scene from the real world of 622 B.C. is equally significant in its context. A king of Judah is given a valuable gift during a period when his nation is walking in moral and spiritual darkness, whistling cavalierly, oblivious to the dangers of the times (2 Kings 22). This gift has been recovered from the rubble while repairs are taking place in the Temple of Jerusalem. It is a holy book which

has long been lost, and this fact alone is probably the reason for the darkness. It is brought to the king and his courtiers and when read and interpreted, they rip their clothes in desperation—they see themselves and their dire situation for the first time. It is as if this book shines a light in a very dark place, and immediate measures are taken to use this light to produce changes in themselves and their nation. Indeed, as the historical narrative unfolds, this light saves the nation as long as it uses it to see by. The just king, Josiah, is remembered with an epitaph written by the Lord himself: “He looked after the cause of the poor and needy. Was this not to know me?” (Jer 22:16). His life was mastered by Scripture.

A generation later, a very different picture emerges. The king is dead and one of his sons, Jehoiakim, is on the throne. The ways of his father’s reforms have been abandoned and the nation is in darkness again, oblivious to a steep precipice of judgment nearby. Like a generation earlier, a book has been “discovered” and it is brought to the new ruler and his intimate circle, as he warms himself by a fire in his “winter” palace (Jeremiah 36). As the scroll is unraveled and its words read by a scribe to the king, the king does not rip his clothes—he rips up the book instead and tosses its leaves into the fire. The light on the nation’s plight flickers momentarily every time the words are read, but the king extinguishes it before anything can be seen distinctly. Unfortunately, judgment is not averted this time. The nation plunges over the precipice. The king is decidedly not like his father, but more like his brother who wanted to live like a celebrity and not a servant (Jer 22:15). His life sought to master Scripture.

These three stories, one fictional, and the other two drawn from the very center of the Hebrew Bible, are noteworthy in helping clarify what is at stake in theological interpretation of the Old Testament. The fictional story indicates the important role that divine light will play in accomplishing the mission to save Middle Earth. The other stories indicate the critical role that “divine light” from

the Torah and Prophets plays at the core of the Hebrew canon, and by extension the rest of the Scriptures and the real world.

The Hebrew Bible can be divided into approximately two halves of 150,000 words each.³ The first half comprises what has been called the Primary History, a history extending from creation (Genesis 1) to exile (2 Kings 25). The second half consists of prophetic texts beginning with Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and the Twelve, followed by the Writings which in many manuscript traditions end with Chronicles.⁴ Consequently, the last book of the first half is 2 Kings which contains the story of the king who ripped his garment in response to the discovery of the divine scroll, and the first book of the second half is Jeremiah, which has the account of the king’s son who ripped up the divine scroll and threw it into the fire. Both kings saw the divine word as powerful, but one wished to submit to its power and the other wished to manipulate its power, thus becoming a party to perhaps the first book burning in history.⁵ It may be instructive that such responses to books which became an integral part of Holy Scripture are found at the mid-point of the Hebrew Bible, for they provide both a positive and negative way to respond to the Scripture. Josiah, although a king, was a servant to an ultimate Authority. In contrast, his son wished to submit to no higher authority than himself. The text can master us, or we can master the text.⁶ The text is there to help us “see where [we are] going,” to “throw a beam of light on [our] dark path” (Ps 119:105, *The Message*). Or we can choose to remain in darkness.

RECOVERING THE NARRATIVE OF SCRIPTURE

In recent years there has been a growing awareness of a theological and spiritual crisis in Western Culture not unlike that in ancient Judah.⁷ The Bible has been lost as far as its essential message is concerned, or if it has been found, it has been cut up into a thousand pieces and thrown into the fire. An attempt at recovery has been called “theologi-

cal interpretation,” and it has arisen because there has been the growing conviction among many Christian scholars and lay people alike that there is a famine for the Word of God throughout the land not unlike the time predicted in Amos’s day (Amos 8:11-14). In many churches, the Scripture has been *Left Behind for Your Best Life Now* among the many *Purpose Driven* books and popular *Self-Help* manuals. If by chance its words are read, they are often placed in the context of *how to* become a better person, or *how to* have a better marriage, or *how to* improve one’s potential, or *how to* live one’s dream, or *how to* understand the Bible as a cipher for future events. Frequently bits and pieces of the text are read and one never gets a sense of the entire picture so that the scripture is reduced to a daily series of “devotionals,” or a book of quaint quotations, a source for private inspiration or public motivation.

A recent news story told how Bible verses were engraved on the gun sights of rifles by an arms manufacturer to be used in Iraq and Afghanistan. This prompted one wit to ask the question, “Who would Jesus shoot?”⁸ The church has become so imbedded into the culture that it has difficulty even understanding the Bible.⁹ On the other hand, in the more liberal wing of Christianity, the Bible suffers a different fate, being cut up into a thousand pieces and thrown into the fire to be reduced to ashes by the flames of historical criticism, deconstruction, or other ideological criticisms whether liberationist, feminist, post-colonial or whatever reading strategy has become the current fad.¹⁰ In both contexts, conservative and liberal, the Bible does not set the agenda; the church and the culture do. The Bible is simply a means to an end determined by the church working in lock step with the culture.¹¹

A BEGINNING AND AN END

Theological interpretation seeks to recover the Scripture for the church so that the Bible sets the agenda, so that God’s voice can be truly heard, shedding light on the surrounding darkness.¹²

The Bible begins with, “In the Beginning God,” and ends with, “In the End God.”¹³ God is the Great Subject and without Him there is nothing but *töhû wäbööhû* and “darkness covering the face of the deep” (Gen 1:2a). Period. Significantly the first word of the divine Subject is, “Let there be light!” With God as the central Subject there will always be light.

This stress on the comprehensive subject of the Bible is set within a comprehensive scope—the beginning and the end—and a comprehensive setting—the heavens and the earth. Thus the Bible is seen as the ultimate Story of cosmic existence within which all other stories fit, whether those stories are the story of the Sumerian Empire of 3000 B.C. or the American Empire of 2000 A.D., whether they are the first individual human stories on the planet or the last stories, and all the billions of individual stories in between. All cultures, all nations, all individuals, all projects, all “isms,” everything that there is finds its place within this comprehensive scheme and is addressed by the *comprehensive Subject*. Ultimately, everyone and everything have to do with God. And this God is the Creator, Judge, and Savior of the world bringing his Story to its ultimate end.¹⁴ As humanity was addressed by God in the beginning when God breathed into its nostrils the breath of life (Gen 2:7), as the dry bones of Judah heard the word of Ezekiel on the Babylonian killing fields and became a new Adam (Ezekiel 37), as Jesus addressed his disciples after the resurrection by breathing into them the Holy Spirit and commissioning them with his Word to the nations (John 20:19-23), all of these pivotal texts indicate that to be addressed by the living God constitutes the core of what it means to be human. Without this word, humanity is like the psalmist who cries, “Lord, if you do not speak to me, I am like those going down to the pit” (Ps 28:2). Or “like the animals that perish” (Psalm 49) that “live on bread alone” (Deut 8:3). Each human being is made in the image of God and is a radically referential, totally dependent creature. Every individual

needs the divine word not only to exist but also to flourish.¹⁵ Without it there is only *tōhū wābōhū* and “darkness covering the face of the deep.” Theological interpretation is first *theological!*

Theological criticism shows the importance of the *comprehensive scope* of this Story. The first three quarters of Christian Scripture—the Old Testament—tell the beginning of the Story, and narrate the fundamental events of creation, fall, and the beginning of God’s great reclamation project—redemption before the ultimate restoration of the cosmos. Without the faithful interpretation of this all-inclusive narrative, the world will never find its Story but will manufacture different ones, whether they be varieties of capitalism, communism, or expressive individualism.¹⁶ When Christians do not hear this part of the story, their spirituality drifts into a vapid sentimentalism, which longs for an ahistorical escape from a material prison in the hope of someday going to heaven.

For it is particularly the Old Testament that describes the beginning of the Story where “God creates the world, the world gets lost, [and] God seeks to restore the world to the glory for which he created it.”¹⁷ It is the Old Testament which sets the context for this comprehensive Story from the creation of Adam to the greater Son of Adam,¹⁸ from the beginning (*rē’šīt*) to the end (*’aHárīt*).¹⁹ It sets the historical wheels in motion moving from creation through fall to the call of Abram, to the Exodus, through Sinai and conquest, through the exile and return, and finally to the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of God’s Son, which are anticipations of the end when Christ will hand over the kingdom to the Father and God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28). In the light of this comprehensive context, the ultimate purposes of God for the cosmos are clear.

The radical significance of the Christian message can also be seen and the place of the church within this context. As Don Garlington has remarked, “It is not as if Christians are now living in the last days before God acts within history to bring everything to an end by finally defeating

evil. Because of the significance of the Christ event, we are now living in the first days after the great act of God to defeat sin and death and liberate the whole cosmos.”²⁰ Or to word it somewhat differently, “The one true God had done in Jesus of Nazareth in the middle of time what Jews expected he would do for Israel at the end of time.”²¹ But this can only be seen when the New Testament is viewed in the context of a grand story begun in the Old Testament. The church is the body of Christ doing the will of God in the world, bringing God’s rule to the nations.

Without this context one can never get a sense of the whole, and the Bible will degenerate into an incoherent anthology of literature. This was a major problem for the Judaism of the time of Jesus just as it is a major problem today. Jesus complained to the religious leaders that they would tithe the dill, mint, and cumin—the smallest herbs, but would forget the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith (Matt 23:23-24). They had no sense of the whole.

In a recent study on rabbinic interpretation Alexander Samely remarks that a key feature of early Jewish interpretation was the “proverbialization of Scripture.”²² There was no sense of an overall narrative structure as each verse functioned like an independent proverb. Consequently, the fact that divorce is legalized in Deuteronomy 24 is not seen in the context of its historical development, that it is a concession to human evil, the result of the fall from an originally good creation.²³ The problem with this approach is that the real story controlling the interpreter is not that of the Scriptures but the one determined by the *Zeitgeist* of the interpreter and his times. All the various trees of Scripture thus find their place not within the forest of Scripture (the biblical Story) but the forest of contemporary culture, to be understood accordingly.²⁴

RECOVERING THE CONTEXT OF THE BIBLE

Theological interpretation also stresses the importance of the comprehensive Setting of the Story: the heavens and the earth. With its doctrine of creation, the Old Testament grounds believing faith firmly in the soil of this world. It is no wonder that many Gnostic sects in the ancient world wanted nothing to do with the Old Testament, with its material earthiness. They preferred to think of a disembodied, ethereal existence elevated above the world of the five senses. The Old Testament will have nothing of this but describes a God who gets his hands muddy with the creation of Adam and bloody with the creation of Eve. The Hebrew Scripture is rooted firmly in the material world with its concern for sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell in the courtyard of the temple, its passion for sex and the body in Songs, its zest for life *now* in the Proverbs, its fervor for listening to the groans of victims in the Prophets, its celebration of the glory of God in the thunder claps of the storm in the Psalms, and its desire to alleviate coldness at night in Exodus and hunger during the day in Ruth.

It is in the Old Testament where we learn that creation is fractured and broken and in need of radical redemption and that redemption has begun with the call of Israel out from the world. The world is not being abandoned but is being redeemed. Seen in this light, old Abraham holds the clue to the secret of universal restoration: “God so loved the world that he chose Abraham!”²⁵ Abraham and Sarah are to the world what Frodo and Sam are to Middle Earth. Thus when Jesus appears, he is not an afterthought but as the seed of Abraham, he is the clue to all of creation.²⁶ His incarnation means that God has finally “moved into the neighborhood” forever (John 1:14, *The Message*). His miracles are a foretaste of the redeemed cosmos; his death is the final judgment on human sin and the beginning of the removal of the curse of creation; his resurrection the beginning of the transformation of the

heavens and the earth. The empty tomb means that the great enemy of Death has finally bit the dust and will eventually die!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, languishing in a German prison, emphasized the importance of taking time in the Old Testament before automatically moving to the New Testament:

My thoughts and feelings seem to be getting more and more like those of the Old Testament and in recent months I have been reading the Old Testament much more than the New. It is only when one knows the unutterability of the name of God that one can pronounce the name of Jesus Christ; it is only when one loves life and the earth so much that without them everything seems to be over that one may believe in a resurrection and a new world; it is only when one submits to God’s law, that one may speak of grace; it is only when God’s wrath and judgement are hanging over the heads of one’s enemies that something of what it means to love and forgive them can touch our hearts. In my opinion it is not Christian to want to take our thoughts and feelings too quickly and too directly from the New Testament.²⁷

By seeing the world in the light of the first three quarters of the Christian Bible—the Old Testament—a truncated evangelical gospel is avoided as well as the biblically emasculated version of a liberal church. A thousand watt bulb is infinitely more effective in lighting up one’s surroundings than a hundred watt specimen.

CHRIST THE CENTER

Theological interpretation of the Old Testament also means that the Old Testament is seen in the light of its ultimate goal in Christ. Just as reading through a story the second time means that we read with our eyes more attentive to the development of the story, so the same happens when we read through the Story the second time with Christ as an interpretive guide (Luke 24:13-53).²⁸ Knowing the end of *The Lord of the Rings*

shows the importance of Gandalf's exhortation to Frodo to have compassion on Gollum since "he may have some part to play yet for good or ill." Correspondingly, as the Bible is read again, "in the face of Adam, who went wrong, are already faintly visible the features of Jesus who went right, was right, lived and died to make all things finally right and whole."²⁹

In Cain's rhetorical question to God, "Am I my brother's keeper?", we hear the echoes of the same underlying cynicism in the scribe's query to God's son, "Who is my neighbor?", and the profound answer of Jesus, the ultimate brother's keeper and the ultimate neighbor, when he stumbles down the *Via Dolorosa* under the back breaking weight of a cross (Gen 4:9; Luke 10:29). Lamech's vengeful boast of seventy-seven-fold retribution is answered by Christ's call for seventy-times-seven-fold forgiveness (Gen 4:24; Matt 18:22). Abraham's failure to avert the judgment of Sodom on account of the lack of ten righteous individuals finds its counterpart in the intercession of one righteous man who turns aside judgment for the world (Gen 18:16-33; Rom 5:1-21.)! When the repentant Judah desperately addresses his brother Joseph, begging for the release of his younger brother, Benjamin, his words carry deeper significance in the light of Christ's great commission: "How can I go back to my Father if the boy is not with me?" (Gen 44:34a; Matt 28:18-20). The rape of the helpless Dinah and Tamar (Genesis 34; 2 Samuel 13.), the gang rape and murder of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19), the murder of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11)—all of these "texts of terror"³⁰ in the Old Testament find ultimate expression and resolution in the murder of God's own beloved Son.

RECOVERING THE PAST

Theological interpretation of the Old Testament also underscores the importance of seeing the Word of God in the light of the history of interpretation. I remember studying at seminary and mentioning a recently purchased book to a

fellow student, *Commenting and Commentaries* by C. H. Spurgeon.³¹ The student remarked, "Why would anyone want to read old commentaries? They have nothing new to offer." I felt embarrassed for even mentioning the book. But the remark and my own personal embarrassment both reflected the dominant modernist mentality with its notion that objective, detached scholarship, taking into consideration all the latest historical research, renders obsolete any understanding of the scriptures before the twentieth century.

A few years ago, a scholar wrote a book which sought to make accessible some of this "obsolete," interpretation. Entitled, *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, John Thompson describes how this experience of reading the Bible in company with orthodox, ancient interpreters can keep us from the blind spots that we invariably pick up from our own cultural readings which are often preoccupied with concerns of psychological therapy and consumer comfort.³² Thus we can be delivered from the tyranny of the present and the self which know a lot more about the last six minutes than the last six centuries. C. S. Lewis once remarked that "a man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village: the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and microphone of his own age."³³ One of the few salutary benefits of postmodernity is to highlight these blind spots of the modern age. Thus there will be reading "in good company" by mentors who have gone before us and "who may be more spiritually alive than many who are with us now"³⁴ and who can help us from going down false hermeneutical trails.³⁵

CONCLUSION

Finally, to return to the point of all theological interpretation, it is to confront us with the grand Subject. God speaks, "Let there be light!" We can see where we are and take the right path. We are not to emulate Josiah's son, Jehoiakim, who

sought to master the text by ultimately extinguishing its light and thus removing any possibility of hope for himself and his nation. On the contrary, we need to be like his father, Josiah, who sought to be mastered by the text. Although a king of Judah, he was more importantly a servant to the Word.

At the end of *The Two Towers*, the second volume of Tolkien's trilogy, the dramatic significance of Galadriel's gift to Frodo is revealed. When in the depths of Cirith Ungol and unaware of their terrible peril in "Shelob's Lair," surrounded by impenetrable darkness with a dreadful monster nearby, Frodo's partner, Sam Gangee, remembers the gift and reminds Frodo,

"The Lady's gift. The star-glass! 'A light to you in dark places,' she said it was to be. The star-glass!"

"Why yes! [Frodo remembers] Why had I forgotten it! *A light when all other lights go out!* And now indeed light alone can help us."³⁶

Holy Scripture was such a light in ancient times and is such a light today. As the darkness closes in, it is particularly that light to help us when all other lights go out.

ENDNOTES

¹I owe thanks to Judy Dempster, Greg Maillet, and Malcolm Elliott-Hogg for reading drafts of this article and for their helpful suggestions.

²J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 423.

³David Noel Freedman, *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1993).

⁴The order is that described in a saying from an earlier period (baraita) which is prescribed in the Talmud (Baba Bathra 14b): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, The Twelve (Minor Prophets), Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles. This was probably the

oldest Jewish order. See, e.g., Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); S. G. Dempster, "From Many Texts to One: The Formation of the Hebrew Bible," in *The World of the Aramaeans I: Biblical Studies in Honour of Paul-Eugene Dion* (ed. P. Michèle Daviau, John William Wevers, and Michael Weigl (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2001), 19-56.

⁵There were probably many book burnings which happened as the result of the destruction of cities and towns by conquerors before this time but texts were probably not intentionally targeted. E.g., the archive of Ebla escaped for the most part the massive fires which destroyed the city in the late third millennium. Clay tablets were often fire-proof. Other notable burnings of biblical books ("bibliocausts"): the Maccabean times (1 Macc 1:56); the persecution of Christians under Diocletian, and of course the period at the end of the Middle Ages in Europe. Ironically it was the church which was largely responsible for the censoring of Scripture in the last period and during the Inquisition it was responsible for burning Hebrew Bibles! For the use of the term "bibliocaust," see Haig A. Bosmajian, *Burning Books* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006).

⁶Both of these attitudes are shown in the recent movie *The Book of Eli*. The villain wishes to use the Bible for his own selfish ambitions; the hero wishes to let the text use him for its purposes. One is led by sight, the other by faith. Ironically the one who has sight is blind and the one who is blind can see.

⁷See, e.g., for culture, Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992); for scripture see, Richard John Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Christopher R. Seitz, "Scripture Becomes Religion(s): The Theological Crisis of Serious Biblical Interpretation in the Twentieth Century," in *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 13-34.

⁸Charles E. Peña, "Who Would Jesus Shoot?" [cited

14 May 2010]. Online: <http://original.antiwar.com/pena/2010/01/21/who-would-jesus-shoot>.

⁹For example, see Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity in America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

¹⁰Jack Miles, citing the contemporary Pope, ironically refers to much of this criticism as the study of the Bible *etsi Deus non daretur* (as if God does not exist). See J. Miles, "Between Theology and Exegesis," *Commonweal* 134 (2007): 21.

¹¹Ironically, in both environments the locus of authority has moved from the text to the audience.

¹²Kevin Vanhoozer, A. K. Adam, and Francis Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); Kevin Vanhoozer, *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

¹³See, e.g., Daniel Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 187-206.

¹⁴"Scripture truthfully tells the story of God's action of creating, judging, and saving the world. God is the primary agent of the biblical narrative.... This same God is still at work in the world today." Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1.

¹⁵"To approach the Bible with a theological interest, however, is to read in order to hear what God is saying to the church—to discern the *divine* discourse in the *canonical* work." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Imprisoned or Free: Text, Status and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (ed. A. K. M. Adam, et al.; Grand Rapids: Baker), 51-94.

¹⁶Cf. how the story of modernity has been fragmented into a million pieces in Robert W. Jenson, "How the World Lost Its Story," *First Things* 36 (1993): 19-24.

¹⁷Frederick Buechner, "The Bible as Literature," in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 48.

¹⁸Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Bib-*

lical Theology of the Hebrew Bible (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 43.

¹⁹John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 285.

²⁰Don Garlington, personal communication.

²¹This is a slight adaptation of a statement by N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 36.

²²Alexander Samely, *The Rabbinic Interpretation of Scripture in the Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002) 48-50.

²³See the argument of Jesus in Matt 19:1-12.

²⁴For the classic statement of how this happened in biblical interpretation see Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University, 1980).

²⁵This is an adaptation of Christopher Wright's perceptive statement: "God so loved the world that he chose Israel." See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 329.

²⁶Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of our God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 173.

²⁷Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (updated; Austin: Touchstone, 1997), 156-57.

²⁸See also Richard B. Hays, "Reading Scripture in the Light of the Resurrection," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, 216-38.

²⁹Buechner, "The Bible as Literature," 42.

³⁰The phrase is from Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

³¹Charles H. Spurgeon, *Commenting & Commentaries* (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1876).

³²John L. Thompson, *Reading the Bible With the Dead: What You Can Learn from the History of Exegesis That You Can't Learn from Exegesis Alone* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

³³C. S. Lewis, "Learning in War-Time," in *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 58-59.

³⁴Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1993), 18. This quote is an adaptation of one of Palmer's statements.

³⁵It is precisely this type of ignorance of or contempt for the history of interpretation that results in

scholars such as Walter Brueggeman describing the account of the Fall in Genesis 3 as an exceedingly marginal text, or David Robertson and John B. Curtis arguing that the biblical Job totally rejects God at the end. See David Robertson, "The Book of Job: A Literary Study," *Soundings* 56 (1973) 446-469; John B. Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahweh," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1979) 497-511. It is a similar mentality that leads scholars to argue that "there is not such a thing as a biblical view on anything, not even God." Cited in Vanhoozer, Adam, and Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church*, 67, n. 38.

³⁶J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (New York: Ballantine, 1994), 415.

The Old Testament (often abbreviated OT) is the first part of the Christian biblical canon, which is based primarily upon the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible (or Tanakh), a collection of ancient religious Hebrew writings by the Israelites believed by most Christians and religious Jews to be the sacred Word of God. The second part of Christian Bibles is the New Testament, written in the Koine Greek language.