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## THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF AMOS

In modern times, Amos has come to be considered one of the most important prophets, mainly for his uncompromising message about social justice. This book provides a detailed exploration of this theme and other important elements of the theology underlying the book of Amos. It also includes chapters on the text itself, providing a critical assessment of how the book came to be, the original message of Amos and his circle, which parts of the book may have been added by later scribes, and the finished form of the book. The author also considers the book's reception in ancient and modern times by interpreters as varied as rabbis, the Church Fathers, the Reformers, and liberation theologians. Throughout, the focus is on how to read the book of Amos holistically to understand the organic development of the prophet's message through the many stages of the book's development and interpretation.

John Barton is Oriel and Laing Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture, University of Oxford. He is the author of numerous monographs, including *Amos's Oracles against the Nations* (1980), *The Spirit and the Letter: Studies in the Biblical Canon* (1997), and *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (2007).

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## OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

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*University of Oxford*



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*For my father, Bernard Barton*



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## *General Editors' Preface*

Some years ago, Cambridge University Press, under the editorship of James D. G. Dunn, initiated a series entitled *New Testament Theology*. The first volumes appeared in 1991 and the series was brought to completion in 2003. For whatever reason, a companion series that would focus on the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible was never planned or executed. The present series, *Old Testament Theology*, is intended to rectify this need.

The reasons for publishing *Old Testament Theology* are not, however, confined solely to a desire to match *New Testament Theology*. Instead, the reasons delineated by Dunn that justified the publication of *New Testament Theology* continue to hold true for *Old Testament Theology*. These include, among other things, the facts that (1) given faculty and curricular structures in many schools, the theological study of individual Old Testament writings is often spotty at best; (2) most exegetical approaches (and commentaries) proceed verse by verse such that theological interests are in competition with, if not completely eclipsed by, other important issues, whether historical, grammatical, or literary; and (3) commentaries often confine their discussion of a book's theology to just a few pages in the introduction. The dearth of materials focused exclusively on a particular book's theology may be seen as a result of factors like these; or, perhaps, it is the cause of such factors. Regardless,

as Dunn concluded, without adequate theological resources, there is little incentive for teachers or students to engage the theology of specific books; they must be content with what are mostly general overviews. Perhaps the most serious problem resulting from all this is that students are at a disadvantage, even incapacitated, when it comes to the matter of integrating their study of the Bible with other courses in religion and theology. There is, therefore, an urgent need for a series to bridge the gap between the too-slim theological précis and the too-full commentary where theological concerns are lost among many others.

All of these factors commend the publication of *Old Testament Theology* now, just as they did for *New Testament Theology* more than two decades ago. Like its sister series, *Old Testament Theology* is a place where Old Testament scholars can write at greater length on the theology of individual biblical books and may do so without being tied to the linear, verse-by-verse format of the commentary genre or a thematic structure of some sort imposed on the text from outside. Each volume in the series seeks to describe the biblical book's theology as well as to engage the book theologically – that is, each volume intends to *do* theology through and with the biblical book under discussion, as well as delineate the theology contained within it. Among other things, theological engagement with the composition includes paying attention to its contribution to the canon and appraising its influence on and reception by later communities of faith. In these ways, *Old Testament Theology* seeks to emulate its New Testament counterpart.

In the intervening years since *New Testament Theology* was first conceived, however, developments have taken place in the field that provide still further reasons for the existence of *Old Testament Theology*; these have impact on how the series is envisioned and implemented and also serve to distinguish it, however slightly,

from its companion series. Three developments in particular are noteworthy:

1. *The present hermeneutical climate*, often identified (rightly or wrongly) as “postmodern,” is rife with possibility and potential for new ways of theologizing about scripture and its constituent parts. Theologizing in this new climate will of necessity look (and be) different from how it has ever looked (or been) before.
2. *The ethos change in the study of religion, broadly, and in biblical studies in particular*. No longer are the leading scholars in the field only Christian clergy, whether Catholic priests or mainline Protestant ministers. Jewish scholars and scholars of other Christian traditions are every bit as prominent, as are scholars of non- or even anti-confessional stripe. In short, now is a time when “Old Testament Theology” must be conducted without the benefits of many of the old consensuses and certainties, even the most basic ones relating to epistemological framework and agreed-upon interpretative communities along with their respective traditions.
3. Finally, recent years have witnessed *a long-overdue rapprochement among biblical scholars, ethicists, and systematic theologians*. Interdisciplinary studies between these groups are now regularly published, thus furthering and facilitating the need for books that make the theology of scripture widely available for diverse publics.

In brief, the time is ripe for a series of books that will engage the theology of specific books of the Old Testament in a new climate for a new day. The result will not be programmatic, settled, or altogether certain. Despite that – or, in some ways, *because* of that – it is hoped that *Old Testament Theology* will contain highly useful

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GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

volumes that are ideally poised to make significant contributions on a number of fronts including (a) the ongoing discussion of biblical theology in confessional and nonconfessional mode as well as in postmodern and canonical contexts, (b) the theological exchange between Old Testament scholars and those working in cognate and disparate disciplines, and (c) the always-pressing task of introducing students to the theology of the discrete canonical unit: the biblical books themselves.

Brent A. Strawn

*Candler School of Theology, Emory University*

Patrick D. Miller

*Princeton Theological Seminary, Emeritus*

## *Preface*

Of all the Minor Prophets, Amos has been of the most interest in modern times. This is partly because he was evidently the earliest of the “classical prophets” of Israel, but also because his message of divine judgment on social wrongdoing has resonated with many modern readers. My own conviction is that Amos should be seen as Israel’s first theologian – the first to scrutinize critically the religious traditions of his people. Short as his book is, it fully justifies a place in the present series.

I have been interested in Amos since my student days. My doctoral thesis in 1974, entitled “The Relation of God to Ethics in the Eighth-Century Prophets,” devoted considerable space to Amos, and I subsequently published a revised version of one chapter as *Amos’s Oracles against the Nations*.<sup>1</sup> I have often taught the book of Amos for students at Oxford, either singly or as part of general courses on the prophets. Some of the ideas in this book were presented in outline in a paper to the Oxford Old Testament Seminar that was later published.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Barton, *Amos’s Oracles against the Nations* (SOTSMS 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); reprinted in idem, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> John Barton, “The Theology of Amos,” in *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. John Day; LHBOTS 531; London: T & T Clark, 2010), 188–201.

I am indebted to the Theology Faculty Board in Oxford, which granted me a sabbatical term to work on this book, and to the staff of the Theology Faculty Library for a lot of help with bibliographical matters.

I am most grateful to the series editors, Brent Strawn and Patrick Miller, for their exceptionally careful work on my manuscript and for many suggestions for improvement. Please note that biblical citations are taken from the NRSV, unless otherwise indicated.

My wife Mary has been, as always, a great support while I have been working on this project. It is a great pleasure to dedicate the book to my father, Bernard Barton, on his 96th birthday. He continues to be interested in my work and will enjoy seeing a new book.

John Barton  
Oriental College, Oxford  
22 September 2010

## *Abbreviations*

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>AJSL</i>	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
<i>ANET</i>	James B. Pritchard, ed., <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> , 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969)
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
BCE	Before Common Era
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BS	Biblical Seminar
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CE	Common Era
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
<i>CurBS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments

<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LXX	The Septuagint
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>NTT</i>	<i>Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>TRE</i>	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
v(v).	verse(s)
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>