

THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

In this volume, Katharine J. Dell offers a guide to the nature and character of the Book of Proverbs. She explores its key messages and major theological themes, notably God as creator and Wisdom as mediator, standing at the center of a profound theological relationship between God and humanity. Dell provides an overview of scholarly evaluations of these writings, which explore its literary forms, subdivisions, content, purpose, and social contexts. Summarizing important modern debates, she also examines the intertextual and canonical relationship of Proverbs to other biblical books, the afterlife of Proverbs in wisdom material from the Apocrypha, Qumran, and the New Testament, and the place of Proverbs in the history of interpretation. Her book will help readers to understand the nature and character of the Book of Proverbs. It also enables them to assess its key messages and to see its wider context within the canon of scripture and its relevance within the history of interpretation.

Katharine J. Dell is Professor of Old Testament Literature and Theology in the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge and Fellow in Divinity at St. Catharine's College, University of Cambridge. An internationally recognized expert on the wisdom books of the Old Testament, she is the author of volumes on Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes and recently editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Wisdom Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) and *The Biblical World* (Routledge, 2021).

OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

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THE THEOLOGY OF THE
BOOK OF PROVERBS

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For Douglas and James

Contents

<i>General Editors' Preface</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xvi
INTRODUCTION	1
1 WISDOM IN PROVERBS: THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE	12
2 SCHOLARLY EVALUATIONS OF PROVERBS: A SELECTIVE OVERVIEW	29
3 THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE: THE THEOLOGY OF PROVERBS 1–9.	57
4 THE THEOLOGY OF THE OLDEST PROVERBIAL MATERIAL	84
5 ECHOES OF EGYPT: THE THEOLOGY OF PROVERBS 22:17–24:22; 30:1–14; AND 31:1–31.	103
6 FOLLOWING LIFE'S PATH: THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS AS A WHOLE	116

7	SPEAKING TO A WIDER AUDIENCE: THE THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCE OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS IN THE CANON	146
8	OFFERING SAGACIOUS ADVICE: THE ONGOING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.	168
	CONCLUSION.	189
	<i>Further Reading</i>	193
	<i>Author Index</i>	201
	<i>Scripture Index</i>	203
	<i>Subject Index</i>	209

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 an 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 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.

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Preface

My thanks go to Brent A. Strawn and Patrick D. Miller† for the original invitation – now also to Stephen B. Chapman, who has since joined the board – to write this contribution to the Old Testament Theology series for Cambridge University Press. This volume is somewhat overdue, but hopefully it will have been worth the wait! I apologize to the editors and to the Press for the delay, though further delays happened after my submission that were beyond my control. It has been a pleasure to revisit the Book of Proverbs and to pull together ideas, old and new. I am grateful to the University of Cambridge for a period of sabbatical that has enabled me to bring this book to completion and for the many opportunities along the way for shorter pieces of work that have contributed to this greater whole. I am particularly grateful to my three recent Ph.D. students who have worked on Proverbs and kept my thoughts alive, refreshed, and challenged: Suzanna Millar, Arthur Keefer, and Nicholas Widdows. I also thank Emily Page whom I understand offered helpful support to the editors. My thanks go to my family to whom this book is dedicated, and I make a special mention of my cat, Tabitha, who sat on my knee for much of the writing process.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
<i>AThR</i>	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BKAT	Biblische Kommentar, Altes Testament
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BThSt	Biblich-theologische Studien
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CB	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by William W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2003
<i>EAJT</i>	<i>East Asia Journal of Theology</i>
<i>EncBri</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Britannica</i>
<i>EvTh</i>	<i>Evangelical Theology</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

xvii

HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JANESCU	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (Press)
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTISup	Journal for Theological Interpretation, Supplements
KEH	Kurzgefasstes Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
NCB	New Century Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SB	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SCM	Society for Christian Ministry
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>

SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Study Monograph Series
SPAW	<i>Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften</i>
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
THOTC	The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.</i>
ZBKAT	Zürcher Bibelkommentare Alten Testament
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>