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978-1-108-47550-1 — The Theology of the Books of Haggai and Zechariah

Robert Foster

Frontmatter

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THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOKS OF HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH

Tucked away at the end of the Minor Prophets, the Books of Haggai and Zechariah offer messages of challenge and hope to residents of the small district of Yehud in the Persian Empire in the generations after the return from Babylonian exile. In this volume, Robert Foster focuses on the distinct theological message of each book. The Book of Haggai uses Israel's foundational event – God's salvation of Israel from Egypt – to exhort the people to finish building the Second Temple. The Book of Zechariah argues that the hopes the people had in the prophet Zechariah's days did not come true because the people failed to keep God's long-standing demand for justice, though hope still lies in the future because of God's character. Each chapter in this book closes with a substantive reflection on the ethics of the major sections of the Books of Haggai and Zechariah and their implications for contemporary readers.

Robert L. Foster is Lecturer in Religion and New Testament at the University of Georgia. He is the author of *We Have Heard, O Lord: An Introduction to the Theology of the Psalter* (2018) and is a member of the editorial board of *Horizons in Biblical Theology*.

OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

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This series aims to remedy the deficiency of available published material on the theological concerns of the Old Testament books. Here, specialists explore the theological richness of a given book at greater length than is usually possible in the introductions to commentaries or as part of other Old Testament theologies. They are also able to investigate the theological themes and issues of their chosen books without being tied to a commentary format or to a thematic structure provided from elsewhere. When complete, the series will cover all the Old Testament writings and will thus provide an attractive, and timely, range of short texts around which courses can be developed.

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ZECHARIAH

ROBERT L. FOSTER

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In memoriam, Roy F. Melugin, 1937–2008

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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 stripes. 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 frameworks 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 (1) the ongoing discussion of biblical theology in confessional and nonconfessional modes as well as in postmodern and canonical contexts, (2) the theological exchange between Old Testament scholars and those working in cognate and disparate disciplines, and (3) the always-pressing task of introducing students to the theology of the discrete canonical unit: the biblical books themselves.

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Preface

The Books of Haggai and Zechariah, tucked as they are in the back of the Book of the Twelve, are two of the most neglected books in the Old Testament. The Book of Haggai barely registers with its two chapters, and though the Book of Zechariah is more substantive, for some reason it fails to capture the attention not only of many Christian or Jewish lay readers, it often fails to attract the attention of Old Testament scholars, though the past decades have seen a more robust production of scholarship on the book. For me, over the decades I have pondered what I consider to be the genius of these prophets and the scribes who treasured and expanded upon their traditions, whose theological interpretations of the experiences of the people living in Yehud during the Persian Period eventually garnered their books a place in the canon.

In fact, my interest in these two books dates back to a rather mediocre paper I wrote on these two books in a course on Old Testament theology taught by John T. Willis at Abilene Christian University. Eventually, one of the more enigmatic passages in the Old Testament, Zechariah 11:4–17, became the subject of my master's thesis and later an article published in the *Journal of*

Biblical Literature.¹ Several years later, I authored another article on the theology of the Book of Zechariah that followed the rhetorical development of the whole book, an article that serves as the foundation for a (now further developed) large portion of this book.² And I have continued to teach it in public settings, most often in churches, which always generates a good deal of interest in the gems that arise from these much neglected books.

The production of this book mainly occurred during the past six years at the University of Georgia (UGA). I have some formidable colleagues in biblical studies who, each in their own way, have encouraged my work: Wayne Coppins, Dick Friedman, and Baruch Halpern. Tyler Kelley, an outstanding PhD candidate at UGA, read the first edition of this manuscript in its entirety and offered excellent criticism, for which I offer my thanks. I am grateful to have experienced “the full Strawn” effect in the careful editing by Brent Strawn. His words pushed me to greatly improve the final manuscript, but the reader already knows that any problems that remain are all my own.

I dedicate this book to the memory of Roy Melugin, who, in his later careers was Research Professor of Hebrew Bible at Brite Divinity School in Ft. Worth, Texas, and whom I met originally while in my MA program at Abilene Christian University as I drove over to attend the Southwest Biblical Studies Colloquy that he spearheaded. First in my time at Abilene and later while working on my PhD at Southern Methodist University, Roy was an untiring source of encouragement to my work. He once drove

¹ Robert L. Foster, “Shepherds, Sticks, and Social Destabilization: A Fresh Look at Zechariah 11:4–17,” *JBL* 126 (2007): 735–753.

² Robert Foster, “Undoing the Future: The Theology of the Book of Zechariah,” *HBT* 34 (2012): 59–72.

the 45 minutes or so from Ft. Worth to Dallas to visit me in my home and hear more about my working theory on hermeneutics. Though I expressed my gratitude to him on several occasions, I regret that I could not offer him this tribute during his years living among us. I am grateful for the opportunity to honor Roy's memory, a fine scholar whose life's work was deeply involved in the prophets and biblical theology, and who was equally a gentleman to me and to so many. זיכרונו לברכה.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHQ	<i>Biblia Hebraica Quinta</i> . A. Shenker et al., eds., Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004–
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BS	Biblical Studies
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CC	Continental Commentaries
CSCD	Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
GUS	Gorgias Ugaritic Studies
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Study edition. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HdO	Handbuch der Orientalistik

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
NCB	New Century Bible
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDB</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTT	Old Testament Theology
SBLRBS	Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
THOTC	Theological Old Testament Commentary
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>