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978-1-108-47559-4 — The Theology of the Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah

Daniel C. Timmer

Frontmatter

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THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOKS OF NAHUM, HABAKKUK,
AND ZEPHANIAH

The books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah address problems in and around ancient Judah in ways that are as incisive and critical as they are optimistic and constructive. Daniel C. Timmer's *The Theology of the Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* situates these books in their social and political contexts, examining the unique theology of each as it engages thorny problems in Judah and beyond. In dialogue with recent scholarship, this study focuses on these books' analysis and evaluation of the world as it is, examining both human beings and their actions, and God's commitment to purify, restore, and perfect the world. Timmer also surveys these books' later theological use and cultural reception. His study brings their theology into dialogue with concerns as varied as ecology, nationalism, and widespread injustice. It highlights the enduring significance of divine justice and grace for solid hope and effective service in our world.

Daniel C. Timmer is Professor of Biblical Studies at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids) and Professeur adjoint d'Ancien Testament at the Faculté de théologie évangélique (Montreal). He is the author of *The Non-Israelite Nations in the Book of the Twelve* and co-editor, with Steed V. Davidson, of *Prophetic Otherness: Constructions of Otherness in Prophetic Literature*.

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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THE THEOLOGY OF THE
BOOKS OF NAHUM,
HABAKKUK, AND ZEPHANIAH

DANIEL C. TIMMER

Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids

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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 three 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

GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

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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 a 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 (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 prophetic books of the Old Testament do not make for easy reading. Even when they are as short as are Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, a fair appreciation of their messages requires the reader to reckon with interpretative challenges of all sorts. At the same time, these books present in relatively few words robust theologies that tackle problems that are perennial to human existence: the abuse of power, the myriad forms of sin and injustice in and around us, and the ever-present temptation to pride and self-justification at the expense of those around us.

Reading these prophetic books thus has the potential to be even more rewarding than it is demanding. The early twenty-first century, moreover, is a most opportune time to undertake this task. Many older paradigms inspired by the Enlightenment have been dethroned, making it easier for the reader to appreciate the unity of individual books and their relation to the canon of which they are part. At the same time, newer approaches have highlighted the involvement of the reader in the process of interpretation, and this promotes the contemporary reader's personal engagement with the text as both necessary and laden with significance. Finally, a renewed awareness of the integrity of the authorial voice brings both the reader and her or his methods into dialogue with an "other" that challenges one to look at oneself and one's world from another (often radically different) vantage point.

These welcome developments have facilitated my happy task of sketching the theologies of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah without compromising their urgency and conviction. At the same time, I have tried to make these books as accessible as possible to readers of diverse epistemological backgrounds. While these two paths might seem destined to diverge, an articulation of these books' theologies from within their authors' conceptual worlds makes possible an unlimited variety of productive conversations about the relationship between these books' theologies and contemporary readers and their worlds. With this dialogical hearing of the text in mind, I have situated discussion of these books in relation to ethical, conceptual, and theological discussions that impact human existence; our knowledge, values, and priorities; our use of the environment; our valuation of material wealth; and the degree of hope we place in the power of individuals or political and social structures to effect lasting change in individuals and societies.

Several other emphases support the endeavor to read the prophets theologically and responsively. First, the theological description of these prophetic books is closely tied to their literary and historical dimensions. While this helps prevent the imposition of extraneous concepts and frameworks on these ancient compositions, I hope that it also makes their theology more concrete, palpable, and comprehensible. YHWH's rejection of Babylon's grasping after absolute control as part of its program in the early sixth century is, in my judgment, far more interesting than abstract descriptions of God's sovereignty in history. Second, by regularly engaging with past and present secondary literature, I encourage the reader to evaluate both my arguments and those I review with a critical, generous spirit. (The impressive commentary of Thomas Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, NICOT

[Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021] unfortunately appeared too late in the process for me to make use of it.) Finally, each chapter offers a broad overview of the reception history of the book at hand, with a parallel focus on the theological contribution of these compositions to the Jewish and Christian traditions (and canons). These vantage points should also prove helpful in connecting the ancient text with contemporary concerns even as they force readers to wrestle with the (relative) authority of Scripture, its privileged status in later theological traditions, and its wider reception (or rejection) in past and present culture.

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The long gestation of this book is a testimony to the patience of Dr. Brent A. Strawn who, along with Dr. Stephen B. Chapman, shares responsibility for editing the *Old Testament Theology* series. I gratefully acknowledge Dr. Strawn's input, which has helped me improve this work in numerous ways. I happily express my debt to Dr. Jean Maurais and Dr. Dominique Angers, colleagues at the Faculté de théologie évangélique (FTE) in Montreal, for helping me obtain resources at a time when coronavirus-related restrictions made it impossible to use local libraries. In the same vein, Mrs. Laura Ladwig, Director of Library Services at the William Perkins Library, and Ms. Kim Dykema, then Assistant Librarian, tirelessly chased down articles and other resources that underlie this volume. My thanks are also due to Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS), and especially Drs. Michael Barrett and Jonathon Beeke (former and present Academic Dean, respectively), Joel Beeke (Chancellor), and Adriaan Neele (President), for making research and writing an integral part of the learning, teaching, and spiritual formation that are at the heart of the seminary's mission. I am also indebted to the students at PRTS, FTE, Evangelical Theological Faculty (Leuven), and Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson) whose questions, comments, and contributions enriched our shared exploration of these books over

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the past decade and more. Finally, I gratefully recognize the expert help of Nicola Maclean, Beatrice Rehl, Rosanna Barraclough, Joyce Reid, Dan Harding, and Veena Ramakrishnan at Cambridge University Press in preparing the manuscript for publication.

Much deeper gratitude goes to my wife, Andreea, for her indefatigable support, love, and encouragement. As a wife and mother she is a model of selfless love, persistence even when the winds are contrary, and constancy as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Our sons Nathan and Felix, so present in our daily lives, are daily reminders that we too have an audience. It is a great privilege to guide and accompany them on their way to adulthood – *je vous aime!* Finally, I express my gratitude to God for his grace to me in Jesus Christ that, as Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah demonstrate, gives unparalleled hope and joy even (especially!) when all other hopes fail.

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bible und ihrer Geschichte
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ANEM	Ancient Near Eastern Monographs/Monografías sobre el Antiguo Cercano Oriente
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
A Th R	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
ATJ	<i>Ashland Theological Journal</i>
AYBC	Anchor Yale Bible Commentary
BBC	Blackwell Bible Commentaries
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>

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BBRSup	Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium
BHQ	<i>Biblica Hebraica Quinta</i> . Edited by Adrian Schenker et al. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004–
BI	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BSAH	Blackwell Sourcebooks in Ancient History
BWA(N)T	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAT	Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament
CAT	Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ihn Hani, and Other Places
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CEB	Commentaire évangélique biblique
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CHJ	Cambridge History of Judaism
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by William W. Halo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2016
CTR	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>

<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>DDD</i>	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible.</i> Edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst. Leiden: Brill, 1995, 2nd rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999
<i>EBR</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception.</i> Edited by Hans-Josef Klauck et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009–
<i>ECC</i>	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
<i>EDB</i>	<i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible.</i> Edited by David Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000
<i>ExAud</i>	<i>Ex Auditū</i>
<i>FAT</i>	<i>Forschungen zum Alten Testament</i>
<i>FOTL</i>	Forms of Old Testament Literature
<i>FRLANT</i>	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>GMTR</i>	Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.</i> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, translated and edited by M. E. J. Richardson. Study edition. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2001
<i>HBAI</i>	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
<i>HBM</i>	Hebrew Bible Monographs
<i>HBS</i>	Herders biblische Studien
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HCOT</i>	<i>Historical Commentary on the Old Testament</i>

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<i>HdO</i>	<i>Handbuch der Orientalistik</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>History of Religions</i>
<i>HSM</i>	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HTKAT</i>	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.</i> Edited by George A. Buttrick. 4 vols. New York: Abingdon, 1962
<i>IEKAT</i>	Internationaler Exegetischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>IJST</i>	<i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>IRT</i>	Issues in Religion and Theology
<i>JAJS</i>	Journal of Ancient Judaism – Supplements
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JHebS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTI</i>	<i>Journal for Theological Interpretation</i>

<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
NA ²⁸	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . Edited by Barbara Aland et al. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1995)
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible (1985)
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTT	New Testament Theology
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OIS	Oriental Institute Seminars
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
ORA	<i>Orientalische Religionen in der Antike</i>

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OSJCB	<i>Osnabrücker Studien zur Jüdischen und Christlichen Bibel</i>
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTP	<i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983
OtSt	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
OTT	Old Testament Theology
PBM	Paternoster Biblical Monographs
PRSt	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
RevExp	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RHR	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
RINAP	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SANER	Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations
SB	Sources Bibliques
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SCS	Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SHS	Scripture and Hermeneutics Series
SJC	Studies in Jewish Civilization
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Monograph Series
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Monograph Series
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
SymS	Symposium Series

<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.</i> Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmut Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. Translated by John T. Willias et al. 17 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2021.
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UCOP	University of Cambridge Oriental Publications
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WW	<i>Word and World</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
ZECOT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament