



Do We Need the New Testament?: Letting the Old Testament Speak for Itself
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“Reflecting on new perspectives on the life of Jesus, issues of Psalm 137, the role of church and state and their ethics, and the hermeneutics of theological interpretation, the reader will enjoy the questioning and provocative mind of John Goldingay as he takes up his laptop to challenge much of today’s conventional Christian wisdom.”

– **Richard S. Hess**, Earl S. Kalland Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages, Denver Seminary

When did the Old Testament become insufficient?

Yes, of course, we do need the New Testament, but why? Why is the Old Testament not enough? By asking that question, I am reversing the one Christians ask under their breath, the question whether we need the Old Testament, or whether the New Testament isn’t enough.

Two bishops once met in a bar (I expect it wasn’t actually a bar, but it makes for a better story). The bishops were called Polycarp and Marcion. When Marcion asked Polycarp if he knew who he was, Polycarp replied, “I know you, the firstborn of Satan!” We know about their meeting from the writings of another bishop, Irenaeus; all three lived in the second century A.D. and were originally from Turkey. Marcion had come to some beliefs that were rather different from those of “orthodox” bishops such as Irenaeus and Polycarp. Among other things, he believed that the teachings of Jesus clashed irreconcilably with the picture of God conveyed by the Jewish Scriptures – what we call “the Old Testament,” but that title hadn’t yet come into use (neither was there yet a “New Testament”). While Polycarp likely had in mind Marcion’s more general beliefs, someone like me who is passionate about the Old Testament may be forgiven for a high five in response to this greeting. Indeed, I am tempted to sympathize with the views of Cerinthus, another Turkish theologian about whom Polycarp himself passes on a story. Cerinthus was too enthusiastic about the Torah; among other deviant views, he taught that believers in Jesus were obliged to keep the law, otherwise they could not be saved. Polycarp describes how John, the disciple of the Lord, was one day going to bathe at Ephesus. He saw Cerinthus there and rushed out of the bathhouse without bathing, exclaiming, “Let us fly, lest even the bathhouse fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.”

Many Christians are sensitive to the issue Marcion raises. For discussion at the final class in each course I teach, I invite students to tell me the major questions they still have. At the close of the course on the Pentateuch, in particular, they regularly ask about fitting together differences between the Pentateuch and the New Testament. When they try to specify the differences, a handful of concrete examples recur:

- Turning the other cheek over against an eye for an eye
- Loving your enemies over against killing your enemies
- Being peacemakers over against being war makers
- Jesus acting in love over against God acting in wrath
- Worshiping without outward rites over against worship that emphasizes sacrifice
- A chosen people based on their choice over against a chosen people based on ethnicity

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BOOK EXCERPT

John Goldingay (PhD, University of Nottingham; DD, Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth) is David Allan Hubbard Professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary. He was previously principal and a professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at St. John's Theological College in Nottingham, England. His books include *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*, *Key Questions about Interpretation*, *Models for Scripture*, *Do We Need the New Testament?* and commentaries on Psalms, Isaiah and Daniel. He has also authored the three-volume *Old Testament Theology* and the seventeen-volume *Old Testament For Everyone* series. Goldingay also serves in pastoral ministry as an associate pastor at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Pasadena. He serves on the Task Force on Biblical Interpretation in the Anglican Communion and the editorial board for the Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies.

- A relationship with God based on grace over against one based on law
- Concern for the whole world over against concern for Israel alone
- Real access to God over against purely bodily access
- God's teaching written into our minds rather than written only on stone
- Jesus treating women as equals rather than as subordinate to men
- All things being clean over against rules concerning clean and unclean

In this book I will consider questions such as these, and also aim to reverse the direction of the questioning and consider some of the ways in which the Old Testament interrogates us.

It's common to speak in terms of there being a "problem" about the relationship of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The difficulty in solving the problem lies in large part in the way it is formulated. You could say that the problem lies in people thinking there is a problem or in the way they formulate the problem, in assuming an exaggerated assessment of the difference between the faith and life envisaged by the two Testaments. Indeed, there are several different facets to the two Testaments' relationship. Further, one might observe that the differences within each Testament are as marked as the differences between them: for instance, the differences between the story in Genesis–Kings and the Prophets, or between the expectations of the Torah and of the Prophets, or between Ecclesiastes or the Song of Songs and pretty much everything else in the Old Testament, or the differences between the Gospels and the Epistles, or between Paul and James, or between Revelation and pretty much everything else in the New Testament. Conversely, the continuity between the Testaments lies (for instance) in the way the Old Testament story continues in the New Testament story, the teaching of the Prophets continues in the teaching of Jesus and of the Epistles, and the promises of the Prophets continue in the promises in Revelation.

My passionate enthusiasm for the Old Testament makes me want to turn the "problem" of the relationship of the Testaments on its head, and the first chapter of this book seeks to do so. The other chapters then give more detail on the considerations lying behind the assertions in the opening chapter.

In general, I am focusing on the two Testaments' own account of their story, without seeking to get behind that version to ask whether what actually happened was different or to seek to establish that at every point it does tell us what actually happened. My aim is to discover what the Scriptures themselves have to say.

– Taken from the introduction

