



## EXCERPT

IVP Academic

### *Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour*

April 16, 2019 | \$28, 288 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5224-6

How might we learn ethics from the Old Testament? Trusted guide John Goldingay urges us to let the Old Testament itself set the agenda. Topically organized with short, stand-alone chapters, this volume takes readers through the Old Testament's teaching about relationships, work, Sabbath, character, and more, featuring Goldingay's own translation and discussion questions for group use.

## John Goldingay, Your Guide Through Old Testament Ethics

In thinking about the Old Testament and ethics, two questions may be uppermost in our minds. One is the way the Old Testament may support us in connection with issues that are important to us—questions such as justice or the conservation of creation or same-sex marriage or caring for migrants. The other is the way the Old Testament raises problems for us—questions such as polygamy or the annihilation of the Canaanites. With the first sort of question, we have set the agenda and we are seeking to let the Old Testament say something about what is important to us. With the second sort of question we think we know what is right and we are seeking to let the Old Testament off the hook when it doesn't fit with our understanding. In this book I will pay some attention to both those interests of ours, but I want my readers to get more interested in a different sort of question. I focus more on what is the Old Testament's own agenda and how it raises questions that we have to respond to.

A friend of mine has suggested to me that Christian ethics has become primarily about principles ("We stand with Jesus on the side of love, justice, and liberation"). It's assumed to be obvious what love, justice, and liberation imply. But the risk is that the outworking of those principles comes mainly in accepting and encouraging the commitments of other progressive people. And the danger is that our thinking and lives are thus substantially shaped by the culture we live in, by our social context. We are inclined to assume that our way of thinking must be broadly right. But we need to have our way of thinking confronted. Jesus implies that what we call the Old Testament is an important resource in this connection.

Some Pharisees once asked Jesus what he thought about divorce. "What does it say in the Torah?" Jesus replied. On another occasion he declared, "I came to fulfil the Torah and the Prophets." Paul said something similar: "the proper requirement of the Torah is fulfilled in us as we live according to the Spirit." On yet another occasion Jesus told some people, "You need to work out what the Prophets mean when they say 'God wants mercy not sacrifice.'" (Those are paraphrases of sayings in Mk 10:3; Mt 5:17; 9:13; Rom 8:4.) Jesus and Paul imply: if you want to know what's right and if you want then to walk according to the Spirit, you need to know what the Torah and the prophets say. Or if you want to test whether you are actually walking according to the Spirit, you need to use the Torah and the Prophets to check the way you walk.

One consideration that makes it tricky to discern the implications of the Torah and the Prophets as a whole is that the Old Testament wasn't all written in one go. It issued from the work of many different people over the best part of a thousand years, two or three thousand years ago. It comes from cultures different from those in which modern Westerners live. It can thus seem remote. It can seem to accept things that we wouldn't expect God to accept. The situations the Torah and



**Alisse Wissman**, print publicity  
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or [awissman@ivpress.com](mailto:awissman@ivpress.com)

**Krista Clayton**, broadcast and online publicity  
800.846.4587 ext. 4013 or [kclayton@ivpress.com](mailto:kclayton@ivpress.com)

INTERVARSITY PRESS | [ivpress.com/media](http://ivpress.com/media)





## EXCERPT

IVP Academic

### **Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour**

April 16, 2019 | \$28, 288 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5224-6

*"Like a great tour guide, Goldingay skillfully leads his readers through the ethically problematic pages of the Old Testament, covering the usual topics (compassion, justice, nations) as well as the less typical yet perhaps more timely topics (contentment, animals, migrants). This book is infused not only with massive quantities of Goldingay's fresh translation of Scripture but also with his brilliant (and sometimes quirky) textual and theological insights."*

**David T. Lamb**, Allan A. MacRae Professor of Old Testament at Missio Seminary, author of *God Behaving Badly*

the Prophets were addressing were different, and God needed them to say different things in different contexts. In giving us guidance about what's right, the Old Testament isn't systematic, and it isn't organized by topics. Part of the challenge and the richness of the Old Testament is its colorful variety. Yet in due course these writings became one book. So how can it become a resource to us?

In observations such as the ones I have already noted, Jesus himself offers several suggestions. One arises out of that comment at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, that he didn't come to annul the Torah and the Prophets but to fulfill them (Mt 5:17). In other words, he came to fill them out. How did he do so? When he goes on to say, "You've heard it said . . . but I say to you," he gives a number of examples. For instance, he implies it's possible to latch onto the commandment that prohibits murder and ignore the warnings the Old Testament gives about anger. He fulfills the Torah and the Prophets by pointing out things the Old Testament says and also things it implies that people might be inclined to avoid. To give another example, the Torah says, "Love your neighbor," and the context in Leviticus makes clear that it has in mind the neighbor who you don't get on with, but maybe Jesus knew of people who thought that as long as you loved your nice neighbor you could hate your enemy. Jesus fulfills the Torah by bringing out its implications.

A further guideline arises from another question he was once asked. What's the most important of all the commands in the Torah? It was a question that Jewish theologians liked to debate, though there was really little doubt about the answer. It's the command to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength (Deut 6:5). Like some other Jewish teachers, Jesus wanted to augment it with another command from the Torah: loving one's neighbor deserves to be set alongside loving God (Lev 19:18). Jesus then adds that the entirety of the Torah and the Prophets depends on these two commands. It's a significant comment in connection with thinking about Old Testament ethics. When you wonder about the point of an individual rule in the Torah, for instance, or when you're thinking that a particular command by God seems an odd thing for God to require, it's always worth asking, How is this command a working out of either love for God or love for neighbor?

A third insight emerges from that discussion of divorce (Mk 10:1-12). The Pharisees noted that the Torah allows divorce. Ah, says Jesus, the Torah allows divorce because you're hard-hearted. If you look back to the way things were at creation when God made the first man and woman and they got together, you can't imagine that divorce was intended to be part of the picture. But (he implies) God recognizes that some men do throw out their wives, so he provides a rule that regulates the way this grim event happens, and he offers the wife some protection. So paradoxically, there is another way in which the Torah expresses love for one's neighbor. It both lays out God's creation ideal and vision, and it makes allowance for the fact that we don't live up to it.

These three guidelines from Jesus will be important as we look at Old Testament ethics: ask how the implications of the Old Testament's teaching need to be spelled out, ask how its teaching expresses love for God or love for neighbor, and ask how far it is laying down creation ideals and how far it is making allowance for our hard-heartedness.



**Alisse Wissman**, print publicity  
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or [awissman@ivpress.com](mailto:awissman@ivpress.com)

**Krista Clayton**, broadcast and online publicity  
800.846.4587 ext. 4013 or [kclayton@ivpress.com](mailto:kclayton@ivpress.com)

INTERVARSITY PRESS | [ivpress.com/media](http://ivpress.com/media)





## EXCERPT

IVP Academic

### ***Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour***

April 16, 2019 | \$28, 288 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5224-6

*"Goldingay opens a window to the Old Testament that has the potential to shape not only ethics but our understanding of the ancient Hebrews' culture and experience of God. Like a good rabbi, at times Goldingay seems to raise more questions than he answers, which makes the book both challenging and stimulating. Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour offers a new lens through which to encounter the Old Testament."*

**Shannon Lamb**, assistant regional director, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA

There's another piece of Old Testament background to these three guidelines. The Old Testament contains lots of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not," especially in the first five books. The title "the Law" for these five books is a misleading translation of the word *Torah*, which means "instruction" or "teaching." And it's generally misleading to think of its individual sections of teaching as "laws," as if they were like Western state law or canon law. A concrete indication of that fact within the Old Testament itself is that one can find little match between the prescriptions the Torah lays down and the way Israel actually handles offenses such as murder, idolatry, and adultery. It seems that it's not the case that Israel knows it's supposed (say) to execute murderers, idolaters, and adulterers, and fails to do so. Even faithful, Torah-keeping leaders don't treat the Torah as a statute book. They know they are not supposed to be literalistic in interpreting these "laws."

This phenomenon would be more puzzling were it not for the fact it features among other Middle Eastern peoples. When a king lays down a set of statutes, it doesn't mean they become the basis of legal practice. They are rather a collection of indications of the kind of moral and social norms that the king claims to be committed to. The Old Testament operates on a parallel basis. "Laws" that prescribe execution for murder, adultery, idolatry, and a long list of other acts are markers of the kind of religious, moral, and social commitments that God expects his people to accept. They are indications of how serious these offenses are. They comprise teaching on theological ethics in the form of laws. Understood this way, the Torah becomes more obviously useful for an understanding of Old Testament ethics. It turns out that asking about the ethical significance of the rules in the Torah is a form of study that corresponds to the Torah's own nature.

—From the introduction



**Alisse Wissman**, print publicity  
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or [awissman@ivpress.com](mailto:awissman@ivpress.com)

**Krista Clayton**, broadcast and online publicity  
800.846.4587 ext. 4013 or [kclayton@ivpress.com](mailto:kclayton@ivpress.com)

INTERVARSITY PRESS | [ivpress.com/media](http://ivpress.com/media)





BIO

IVP Academic

## ***Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour***

April 16, 2019 | \$28, 288 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5224-6

# **John Goldingay, Author of *Old Testament Ethics***

*"What a winsomely fresh book! There is the freshness of John Goldingay's own direct translation of the text and the way he lets the Old Testament speak for itself by getting us to actually read so much of it for ourselves (fancy that for a fresh idea!). And then there is that vintage Goldingay style—straightforward and simple yet often quizzical and unexpected, humorous at times yet serious in intent, making us think afresh (whether or not we agree). We are invited into the world of Old Testament Israel as curious guests from the twenty-first century and end up asking more challenging questions about our own cultural and ethical assumptions than about theirs (which is the way it should be with the Bible). We see familiar old stories and characters in ways that perhaps we never thought of before and read unfamiliar texts that perhaps we never even noticed (or wincingly avoided). This book is what it says—a guided tour, designed to stimulate a desire to go back and enjoy exploring the terrain more fully."*

—**Christopher J. H. Wright**, Langham Partnership, author of *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*

**John Goldingay** (PhD, University of Nottingham; DD, Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth) is professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, but lives in Oxford, England. He was previously principal and professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at St. John's Theological College in Nottingham, England.

His books include

- *An Introduction to the Old Testament*
- *A Reader's Guide to the Bible*
- *Reading Jesus's Bible*
- *Do We Need the New Testament?*
- Commentaries on *Psalms, Isaiah, and Daniel*
- *Biblical Theology*
- A three-volume Old Testament Theology series
- A seventeen-volume Old Testament for Everyone series
- A translation of the entire Old Testament called *The First Testament: A New Translation*.

Goldingay is a Church of England minister, and now that he is back in England likes walking by the Thames, rediscovering English food, worshiping in Christ Church Cathedral, and relearning British English.



**Alisse Wissman**, print publicity  
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or [awissman@ivpress.com](mailto:awissman@ivpress.com)

**Krista Clayton**, broadcast and online publicity  
800.846.4587 ext. 4013 or [kclayton@ivpress.com](mailto:kclayton@ivpress.com)

INTERVARSITY PRESS | [ivpress.com/media](http://ivpress.com/media)

