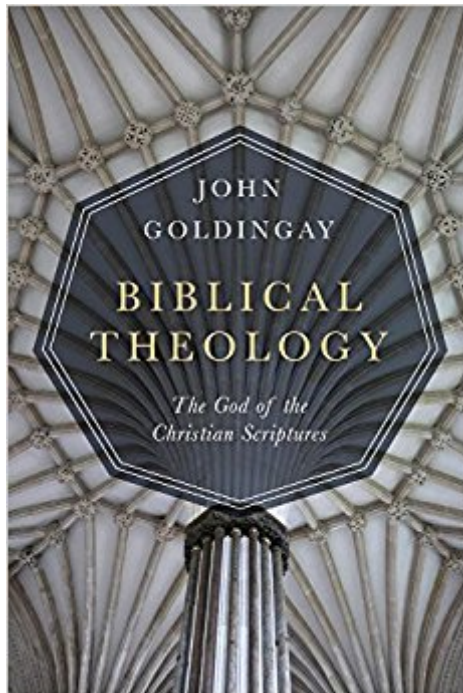




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Biblical Theology: The God Of The Christian Scriptures



Synopsis

Imagine someone who has spent a lifetime listening deeply and attentively to the full range of Scripture's testimony. Stepping back, they now describe what they have seen and heard. What emerges is a theological cathedral, laid out on the great vectors of Scripture and fitted with biblically sourced materials. This is what John Goldingay has done. Well known for his three-volume Old Testament Theology, he has now risen to the challenge of a biblical theology. While taking the New Testament as a portal into the biblical canon, he seeks to preserve the distinct voices of Israel's Scriptures, accepting even its irregular and sinewed pieces as features rather than problems. Goldingay does not search out a thematic core or overarching unity, but allows Scripture's diversity and tensions to remain as manifold witnesses to the ways of God. While many interpreters interrogate Scripture under the harsh lights of late-modern questions, Goldingay engages in a dialogue keen on letting Scripture speak to us in its own voice. Throughout he asks, "What understanding of God and the world and life emerges from these two testaments?" Goldingay's Biblical Theology is a landmark achievement—hermeneutically dexterous, biblically expansive, and nourishing to mind, soul and proclamation.

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Customer Reviews

"There are Old Testament theologies and New Testament theologies but very few biblical theologies. Yet, for Christians, the two testaments belong together. What Christian readers of Scripture need is biblical theology. So, while most scholars stay within their areas of specialization,

John Goldingay boldly crosses all the boundaries scholars erect between different parts of the Bible and gives us what we need: a 'digest of the Scriptures,' as he calls it. His independence of mind ensures that his discussions are unpredictable and interesting. His lively and accessible style will make this a valuable resource for a wide readership." (Richard Bauckham, emeritus professor of New Testament, University of St. Andrews)"What theological building might be constructed out of reading the scriptural materials? With characteristic enthusiasm, John Goldingay spends little time speculating on the shape of the building or probing what rights its prospective tenants have: he simply marches in and starts rearranging the furniture. Attentive readings offer fresh layouts and color schemes. The result is a book that is often happy to say what we do not know, imaginative in speaking of what we may know, and insistent in the call to turn and turn again to Scripture to shape all our knowing." (Richard S. Briggs, lecturer in Old Testament, director of biblical studies, Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham University)"Those who study theology from the Bible up find themselves in tension with the classic systematic categories but rarely have the courage to venture into a full-scale theological scanning of the Bible's universe. John Goldingay is not only equipped for such a challenge, but has met it in a thunderous vision of nothing less than a biblical theology—â€”one that unabashedly asks what the Bible says about God and human life. In an organic set of fresh categories, Goldingay offers the reader a new vision for theology, one that I hope will replace the crusty systematics that have silenced so much of the Bible's story." (Scot McKnight, Julius R. Mantey Professor of New Testament, Northern Seminary)

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 *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*, *Key Questions about Interpretation*, *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 holds membership in the Society of Biblical Literature and the Society for Old Testament Study, and 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*.

Pick up most versions of systematic theology and it becomes quickly obvious that the writer is

balancing both system and theology. Normally they loosely follow the categories laid out by the Apostles' Creed, with excursions into this corner or that. They also, consciously or not, draw along with them theological concepts from ages past, using specialized language and assumptions. But recently John Goldingay, associate pastor at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Pasadena, David Allan Hubbard Professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary and seasoned author, has taken a stab at breaking out of the traditional confines of a systematic theology in his new 608 page hardback, *Biblical Theology: The God of the Christian Scriptures*. This brick of a book has been penned with pastors, parish priests, and professors in mind. *Biblical Theology* is concerned with answering the question: "What understanding of God and the world and life emerges from the First and New Testaments (13). The author sees Sacred Scripture as not flowing out of a single, coherent tradition, but unfolding from plurality of traditions. Further, Goldingay explains that there are two primary ways of theology in Scripture, the one comes as story and the other unpacks the implications of the narratives in a more didactic fashion, and so *Biblical Theology* will interweave these two ways. The author's aim is to "avoid reading into the Scriptures the categories and convictions of postbiblical Christian theology" and therefore allow the Scriptures to test our thinking (17-8). The author follows a path that begins with God's person, moves to God's insight and steps over into God's creation. Then he comes to God's reign, turns to gaze at God's anointed and discusses God's children. And lastly, he works over God's expectations and ends with God's triumph. Throughout the work, Goldingay does not disappoint the reader, in that he makes good on his promise to interact with Scripture, drawing from both the First Testament and the New. He spends pages networking biblical stories, themes and passages from both Testaments, showing how they interrelate and interlock to paint a multicolored portrait. And yet the work does not cast aside scholarly insights from others, but draws from Dunn, Wright, Hayes, McClendon, Volf, and a whole army of others. Though this is somewhat hyperbolic, it felt as if Barth showed up in referential footnotes at almost every turn. Certain favored theological subjects of various branches of Protestantism received rewriting, reworking or remitting. The two that stick out are justification and atonement. For example, *dikaiosis* "does not involve a legal fiction. It does not mean treating someone as in the right when they are not. It means treating them as within the covenant people" (313). And then with regard to atonement the author affirms expiation, purification, restitution, emancipation, and subjugation, but

seems to leave propitiation off to the side somewhere, especially penal substitution. Or maybe the author includes it, but so softens it that it is nearly unrecognizable. In his own words, another person *“cannot be punished for you; that doesn’t work. But another person can make compensation for you, if you then identify with the offering they have made”* (332). *“Biblical Theology”* is a big, bustling and broad work. It would be essential acquisition for a seminary library, and would make a great dialogue partner in certain seminary classes. Though it may not usurp standard theologies that ministers and mentors depend on, nevertheless it will be a respectable resource to bump one’s thinking up against when wrestling through various biblical subjects. Though I didn’t always agree with the author, I still found engaging with the work useful, and recommend it. Thanks to InterVarsity Press for providing, upon my request, the free copy of *“Biblical Theology”* used for this review. The assessments are mine given without restrictions or requirements (as per Federal Trade Commission’s 16 CFR, Part 255).

John Goldingay teaches Hebrew Bible at Fuller Theological Seminary. Before that, he taught at St. John’s Theological College, which is in Nottingham, England. Overall, I agree with what the description of the book on the inside flap says about it, with some reservations. To quote from the description: *“While taking the New Testament as a portal into the biblical canon, he seeks to preserve the distinct voices of Israel’s Scriptures, accepting even its irregular and sinewed pieces as features rather than problems. Goldingay does not search out a thematic core or overarching unity, but allows Scripture’s diversity and tensions to remain as manifold witnesses to the ways of God. While many interpreters interrogate Scripture under the harsh light of late-modern questions, Goldingay engages in a dialogue keen on letting Scripture speak to us in its own voice. Throughout he asks, ‘What understanding of God and the world and life emerges from these two testaments?’* Here are some comments on this description, based on my own reading of the book: *•The early part of the book has more of a Hebrew Bible emphasis, while drawing occasionally on the New Testament. This was particularly the case when it was discussing God’s attributes. In talking about the atonement and justification, there was a balance of emphasis between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. The book came to have more of a New Testament focus, though, as it discussed such issues as the church and being in Christ. •In exploring biblical diversity, the book focuses more on*

themes than on sources and authorship. If you want a book that, say, discusses the Deuteronomist and the Holiness Source, their distinct ideologies, and how they reacted to their historical contexts, then this book will disappoint you. But this book does probe different perspectives and complexities in the Hebrew Bible and, on some level, in the New Testament. For instance, its discussion on God seems open to the insights of open theism (which disputes that God can know the future), while noting biblical passages that coincide with a more traditional view of God. Overall, in interacting with the Hebrew Bible, the book tends to note diverse concepts, without attributing those concepts to specific biblical authors. Its interaction with the New Testament diverged from this tendency, though, as it discussed concepts and thoughts that appear in the synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John, and Paul's epistles.

Overall, the book recoils from artificial attempts to harmonize complexities and tensions. In many cases, it allows tensions to stand. On the one hand, that allowed Goldingay to be refreshingly honest about what the Bible says, as opposed to harmonizing it forcefully and seeking to conform it to orthodoxy. On the other hand, there were times when coherence got sacrificed. For example, Goldingay notes that the Greek word often translated as "justification" in the New Testament usually does not occur in a judicial context, so he pursues another interpretation of justification, one that focuses on God's covenant commitment. Yet, in other places, Goldingay's discussion of justification tends to fall back on judicial language. On the atonement, Goldingay appears to reject penal substitution, while also embracing it. My impression is that Goldingay wants to create an alternative model, but he finds that the model is inadequate in accounting for all of the biblical data, so he falls back on conventional models. At the same time, Goldingay does well to show that conventional models, themselves, have limits and are not the only way to interpret biblical passages. His discussion of justification and the atonement may be inconsistent, but it was rich as it highlighted different dimensions of these topics.

Goldingay's discussion of Paul and the law was remarkably coherent, as Goldingay integrated Paul's pro-Torah and anti-Torah (if that is the right term) sentiments into a coherent package.

Although Goldingay explores the diversity of Scripture, the book does read as a narrative of God's activity in the world. And, in some cases, the book takes a rather harmonizing approach. For instance, in addressing pro-Temple and anti-Temple voices, Goldingay states that God was initially hesitant to dwell in a Temple, then became gun-ho Temple once Solomon built it. In terms of Christology, the book seems to privilege or emphasize the voices that believe in Jesus' pre-existence, or divinity. Goldingay argues that 1 Timothy 2:15's statement that women shall be saved through childbearing is

consistent with justification by grace through faith alone, as he argues that good works are an expression of faith. My impression is that Goldingay was searching for coherence. This may go back to what I said above about the dearth of source criticism in this book: Goldingay may recoil from seeing the Bible as a composite of different human voices, preferring instead to regard it as a divine revelation that is ultimately coherent, notwithstanding its tensions.

Whether Goldingay's big picture is ultimately coherent is a good question. On the one hand, Goldingay seems to portray God as one who has forsaken wrath, due to the work of Christ. On the other hand, Goldingay's God still appears to judge people's behavior. Perhaps Goldingay's narrative can only be as consistent or coherent as the Bible allows!

Here are some other thoughts about the book, unrelated to the book's description:

- I liked how Goldingay phrased things. Personally, I tend to recoil from Christian exclusivism, the idea that everyone needs to convert to Christianity to avoid going to hell. Goldingay managed to phrase exclusivist or potentially exclusivist concepts in an appealing manner, however. Rather than saying that non-Christian religions are wrong, Goldingay says that the Bible is clear that there are things that non-Christians need to know. Regarding Jesus's statement that he is the way, truth, and life (John 14:6), Goldingay states that "Dying is his way to the Father, and his dying is the only way they will get there" (page 547). Goldingay seems to express agnosticism about the eternal destiny of adherents to other religions, but he effectively conveyed that Jesus's death was necessary to provide people a way to the Father.
- Goldingay's discussions of communitarianism stood out to me. Goldingay, with some empathy, noted the individualism of Western culture, while saying that people are still part of a community, whether or not they desire or recognize that. Later, Goldingay contrasts the early Christian church with the voluntary societies of its ancient context: according to Goldingay, the church was intentionally organized to be like a family, not a voluntary society that people can join and leave as they wish; that discussion was unnerving, yet informative. In a few places, Goldingay seems to say that relationships in church should take precedence over natural family relationships. That last concept rubs me the wrong way. Not only does it sound rather cultish, but it also strikes me as unrealistic in the Western world, where people are rather individualistic. If I ran into financial trouble, for example, I would expect my family to be more helpful than any church! Still, the sentiment that the church is a family, one that should take precedence over natural family connections, does appear consistent with certain passages of Scripture (Matthew 12:46-50).
- The prose of the book is accessible, yet reading the book required

focus and concentration. I did not want to miss any gems, and there were many! As a result, reading this book could be time consuming and even exhausting. Still, it was worth the effort, on a spiritual and an intellectual level. I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher. My review is honest!

As a pastor who strives to be, at some level, an armchair pastor-theologian, I love this book. Biblical Theology has both scholarly rigor and accessibility to thinking Christian persons who are not necessarily theologically trained. With many books that I read, I skip over the introduction. With this book, reading the introduction is a must. It carefully explains the author's intent and goals with the whole book, and in doing so is essential in understanding why Goldingay does what he does. He is not seeking to do a systematic theology, through which we draw out specific Scriptures to fit theological categories. Instead, he is seeking to draw out the main themes about God and humanity from the Scriptures themselves, allowing different strands with different emphasis to stand next to one another instead of conflating them into a systematic belief system. Thoroughly grounded in Scripture as story, Goldingay shows how different strands of thought weave together to describe God's story in relationship to us. As you read through the chapters in this theology, you will see that the focus is on the personhood and action of God. This is not a theological anthropology. It is a book designed to paint a lengthy, thoughtful, and beautiful word picture of the God of the Scripture, a God that Goldingay clearly knows and loves himself. I recommend this book for folks that like to think, to read deeply, and to know God more intimately. It may be challenging reading for some, but it will be rewarding reading for all.

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