

God's Spirit who convinces us that the Bible is holy Scripture.

'Noise'

Communication can be disturbed or disrupted by unwanted stimuli ('noise'). As God speaks in and through Scripture, the following dispositions prevent his word from being heard as he wants it to be heard: misunderstanding (as when Sarah is promised a child); psychological dispositions such as fear (as with Israel in the wilderness); previous personal experiences (as with Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus); selectivity (as with some scribes and Pharisees in the Gospels); forgetfulness (as with the disciples of Jesus).

A more fundamental element of 'noise' is the specific historical and cultural circumstances in which God's word is conveyed. Many of these circumstances are not experienced today, at least not in the Western world (e.g. animal sacrifices, levirate marriage, the offering of meat to idols). Because God has revealed himself in history (note the introduction to the Decalogue, Exod. 20:1-2), and because the biblical books were written by recipients of or witnesses to such revelation, Scripture has to be interpreted historically, using the best available historical methods. Historical judgments deal with probabilities and certainty is not always possible; as a result hearing Scripture as the word of God can be difficult.

Another element of 'noise' is the need to interpret Scripture. An acceptance of the claims of Scripture concerning its own truthfulness does not guarantee true interpretations. Human interpreters can make, and have made, mistakes. Thus the meaning of Scripture has been disputed in many important and less important areas.

On a more general note, as Scripture is a collection of many books written over a period of more than a thousand years by authors who wrote for different audiences and had different objectives, it is not surprising that some statements or viewpoints seem to contradict others. Some critics regard such apparent contradictions as a reason why Scripture cannot be, in an unqualified sense, the word of God. (For possible responses to this view, see above, and also "Unity and diversity of Scripture.")

Effects

What Scripture does follows from what Scripture is, which is in turn tied to who God is. Because Scripture tells the story of God, the Creator of the world and King of his people, working out the salvation of humanity, and because God has inspired that story, written by different people at different times, so as to make it his word, Scripture draws its readers into the story and so transforms them. All Scripture, as it is God-breathed, is valuable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness, so that God's people may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The exhortation of J. A. Bengel which used to be printed on the first page of the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, is still valid: *'Te totum applica ad textum rem totam applica ad te'* ('Apply yourself totally to the text, apply the matter of the text totally to yourself').

The Jewish-Christian belief in God the Creator and Saviour, upheld in the medieval and Reformation churches until the 17th century, shaped their convictions about revelation and inspiration. The Deists' view of God and the resulting focus on the primacy of human reason gave rise to biblical criticism in the 18th century. The Romantic view of religion in the 19th century was more concerned with human religious experience than with divinely revealed truths. It is more than probable that the pluralistic and panentheistic parameters of contemporary (e.g. New Age) thinking will increasingly influence the way Christians will view and use Scripture; all sincere religious utterances and experiences will be treated as of equal worth, and the voice (or voices) of the Bible as just one (or some) of many. In this context it is as important as ever to maintain the traditional Christian view that Scripture is the word of God.

See also: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY; HISTORY OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY; CHALLENGES TO BIBLICAL THEOLOGY; EXEGESIS AND HERMENEUTICS.

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E. J. SCHNABEL

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Biblical History

Introduction

This article surveys the entire Bible from a 'biblical-theological' perspective; that is, from a perspective according to which the whole Bible is seen as describing the progressive unfolding of God's purposes of salvation for humanity. Clearly the Bible is a collection of books written at different times in different historical contexts. But a basic unity of theme may be detected in the Bible; the individual books contribute to one unfolding narrative, and later books clearly refer back to earlier ones. Advocates of this perspective, like those of the 'salvation-historical' view of the Bible, believe that later parts of the Bible take the form they do in part by building on traditions relating to earlier stages (J. Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation*, pp. 66-96; L. G. Perdue, *The Collapse of His-*

tory, pp. 45-6.8). Further, in its tendency to use the outlines of the biblical account as its basic terms of reference in speaking about God, rather than, for example, relying on philosophical or abstract categories, their approach shares important features with that of 'narrative theology' (Perdue, *Collapse*, pp. 231-262).

From creation to new creation

In this section we give a 'broad-brush' presentation of the Bible's view of human history, and of God's unfolding purposes within that history. (If readers want more details on a particular biblical book, they should also read the article on that book.)

The Old Testament

Our treatment of the OT is structured around the narrative and prophetic books; the two

corpora have a similar biblical-theological perspective (on the prophets, see D. E. Gowan, *Theology of the Prophetic Books*, esp. pp. 1-10). For the relationship of the Psalms and wisdom literature to this account, see below.

1. Key points in the OT account. The OT begins by describing God's creation of the world, all living creatures and, in particular, the first man and woman, who are blessed by God and charged with ruling the world in obedience to him (Gen. 1—2). Genesis 3—11 describe the disobedience of the man and the woman and its consequences, finishing in Genesis 11:1-9 with a picture of a world very like that of today, one in which men and women are alienated from God and each other and unable to remedy their circumstances. But the account of the spread of humanity does not focus simply on the spread of human wickedness; God's promise to the first woman (Gen. 3:15) suggests that her descendants will include 'offspring' ('seed': the term is ambiguous as to whether an individual or many descendants are in view) who will undo the destructive consequences of wickedness, and the genealogies of Genesis 3—11 pick up this promise by focusing on a particular line of descendants, from Adam through Seth, Noah and Shem, who are associated with hope, righteousness and blessing (Gen. 4:25-26; 5:29; 6:9; 9:26-27). A further genealogy takes this line down to Abram (Gen. 11:10-26).

In Genesis 12 Abram is called to leave his land and is given a promise of descendants who will become a great nation; they will not only enjoy God's blessing but also be the means of bringing blessing to 'all peoples on earth' (vv. 2-3). The terms of this promise imply a reversal of the negative developments described in Genesis 3—11: a man whose descendants will restore the blessing promised to the first man (*cf.* Gen. 1:28); a nation which will be used by God to address the plight of the scattered nations (*cf.* Gen. 11:1-9). Genesis 3—11 and 12 thus relate to each other as 'problem' and 'answer'. The rest of the Pentateuch traces the partial fulfilment of this promise (D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* [Sheffield, 1978]). Abram's descendants become a multitude in Egypt (Exod. 1:6-7), are rescued from oppression in the Exodus, and, through Moses' mediation, enter into a covenant with God at Sinai, be-

coming a special nation, God's people Israel, who will acknowledge his kingship by obeying his laws, mirroring his holiness in their corporate life, and thereby acting as priests, revealing God's character to the nations and bringing blessing to them (Exod. 19:4-6; 20—23; Lev. 19:1-2; *cf.* Deut. 26:17-19). Israel's special relationship with God is reflected in their portrait in Exodus-Numbers; God is in their midst when they camp, and goes before them as they travel to the land he has promised them. By the time Moses addresses his last words to Israel in Deuteronomy, they are on the point of entering the land (Deut. 4:1-2; *cf.* Gen. 15:18-21). (On the Pentateuch see also W. J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, pp. 15-55.)

The process of occupying the land begins under Joshua (Josh. 1—12). After problems in the land in subsequent generations (Judg., esp. 2:6—3:6), the conquest of the land is completed by David, Israel's second king, when he captures Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6-10). Since his reign sees the fulfilment of many of the promises given to Abraham, it is fitting that David should receive a promise concerning a line of rulers who would descend from him, the terms of which echo the earlier promises (2 Sam. 7:9-16, esp. v. 12; *cf.* Gen. 12:7; 15:4). During the reigns of David and Solomon Israel enjoys the 'rest' in the land anticipated by Moses (2 Sam. 7:1; 1 Kgs. 5:3-4; *cf.* Deut. 12:10); God's rule over Israel is made manifest by the bringing up of the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6) and the building of a temple there (1 Kgs. 6—8); and Israel starts to attract the admiring attention of the nations around her, again as Moses had hoped (2 Sam. 8:8-9; 1 Kgs. 5:1-2, 7; 10:1-9; *cf.* Deut. 4:5-8). From this point, the figure of the Davidic king (for whom another title is 'Messiah' or 'Anointed One'; *cf.* 1 Sam. 2:10) becomes important. Various texts in the Psalms, for example, develop the significance of the king's role, linking it to the theme of God ruling the nations justly from Zion (see below).

There follows a long period of decline: the division of the kingdom under Solomon's son Rehoboam, as a result of Solomon's unfaithfulness (1 Kgs. 11—12); the growing disobedience of both northern and southern kingdoms (1 Kgs. 16; 2 Kgs., esp. 16, 21; Hos. 4—5; Jer. 2—3); the outworking of the covenant curses (Deut. 28) against both kingdoms through enemy invasion (1 Kgs. 14:25—

26; 2 Kgs. 5:1-2; 10:32-33; 15:29; 24:1-2), siege and famine (2 Kgs. 6:24-25; 17:5; 25:1-3); and finally exile to Assyria and Babylonia respectively (2 Kgs. 17:6-23; 25:11). The Jerusalem temple is destroyed, God's glory having already departed from it because of the defilement of the people (2 Kgs. 25:9; Ezek. 8—10).

The prophetic books which record warnings of coming judgment also contain prophecies of restoration after judgment: of God pardoning his repentant people (Hos. 2; Jer. 31:18-20; *cf.* Deut. 30:1-10; 1 Kgs. 8:46-51); of the two kingdoms reunited in a purified land (Is. 11:11-16; Jer. 3:18; 30:1-11; Ezek. 37:15-23; 48:1-29) and enabled to obey God in a new way (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 11:16-21; Zeph. 3:9-13); of Jerusalem and the temple rebuilt (Is. 54; Jer. 33:1-13; Ezek. 40—43) and God dwelling once again in the temple (Ezek. 43:1-4; 48:30-35); of a king from David's line who will rule the people justly (Hos. 3:5; Is. 11:1-9; Mic. 5:1-5; Jer. 23:1-6; Ezek. 37:24-28); of the nations coming to Zion to learn the ways of Israel's God (Is. 2:1-4; Jer. 3:17); and ultimately of a restored creation, as in Ezekiel's vision of a river flowing from the temple to revive the waters of the Dead Sea (47:1-12), or Isaiah's vision of a new heaven and new earth (65:17-25). Israel's restoration is sometimes described (metaphorically) in what appears to be resurrection language (Ezek. 37:1-14; *cf.* Hos. 6:1-3). It is important to stress that Israel's restoration is seen as part of a larger picture, the renewing of creation and the blessing of the nations, in fulfilment of God's purposes in calling Abraham.

One of the most extended restoration prophecies, Isaiah 40—55, introduces an individual described as 'the LORD's] Servant' (Is. 42:1; 49:5-6), who in some sense takes over the role of Israel (also denoted by the term 'servant' in these chapters: 41:8-10; 45:4), that of witnessing to God's power (43:10-13), when Israel in the misery of exile is too weak or stubborn to fulfil it (42:18-25; 48:1-11). This idea is especially clear in 49:3-6, where, speaking in the first person, the Servant declares that God said to him, 'You are my servant Israel' (v. 3), and that his appointed role is both to minister to Israel in exile (v. 5) and to be a 'light to the nations' (v. 6). In the most astonishing passage concerning the Servant, he is said, in language

reminiscent of the Levitical sacrificial texts, to die for the sins of God's people (53:5-6, 8, 11-12). The identity of this figure is uncertain, and not only because he is unnamed. In some respects he resembles a king or prophet, and he also shares a number of features with Moses, particularly Moses as portrayed in Numbers (so G. P. Hugenberger in *The Lord's Anointed*, pp. 105-140). However, his role is essentially unprecedented. The time-frame of Isaiah 49—55 is also unclear; these chapters seem to look beyond the return from exile to a time when Zion's glory will be fully restored (ch. 54), and the Servant's ministry and death may be located in this distant future (R. E. Watts, 'Consolation or confrontation? Isaiah 40-55 and the delay of the new Exodus', *TynB* 41, 1990, pp. 31-59).

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah record what actually happened next: that Cyrus king of Persia, having defeated Babylon, permitted the exiles from the southern kingdom and their descendants to return to Judah (Ezra 1:1-4); that many of them did so, rebuilt the temple and celebrated the Passover in Judah again (Ezra 3; 6:13-22); that under Nehemiah the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt in the face of opposition (Neh. 3—4, 6); that Jerusalem was re-inhabited (Neh. 11) and the walls dedicated with great joy (Neh. 12:27-43). These are significant achievements, yet a note of longing and disappointment is also sounded in these books. At the heart of the ceremonies described in Nehemiah 8—10 there is a long prayer of confession (ch. 9), which concludes with the Israelites lamenting their present situation; they remain slaves in the land God gave to their forefathers (v. 36), subject to foreign kings and 'in great distress' (v. 37). The books of Ezra and Nehemiah both conclude with chapters describing the sins into which some of the returned exiles fell: Sabbath violations (Neh. 13:15-22); failure to provide tithes (Neh. 13:10-13); and, most seriously, marriages with non-Israelite wives (Ezra 9—10; Neh. 13:23-28). It is clear that the events described in Ezra and Nehemiah fall well short of the hopes expressed by the 'restoration' prophecies.

Each of the post-exilic prophetic books concludes with passages which, in different ways, restate or develop the earlier prophecies of restoration (Hag. 2:20-23; Zech. 12—14, *cf.* ch. 8; Mal. 4), indicating that a complete fulfilment is still awaited.

The Psalms and wisdom literature. How may we relate the Psalms and wisdom literature, which together form a substantial portion of the OT, to the above account? We need to beware of flattening the distinctive perspectives of Psalms and wisdom in an effort to fit them into a biblical-theological framework (so Goldingay, *Approaches*, pp. 67-69). Nonetheless some possible connections may be suggested. (For much of what follows, see J. Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament*, pp. 200-239).

Most obviously, many psalms refer to incidents from Israel's history or in other ways reflect a biblical-theological perspective (Pss. 66 - 69, 76 - 78, 105 - 107, 147, 149). Other psalms take up and develop themes found in the historical books and prophets: for example, psalms which stress the role of Zion (Pss. 46 - 48, 65, 132) or the king (Pss. 2, 18, 45, 69, 72, 110) in God's purposes. In many psalms there are no such external references: for example, some of the more obviously personal psalms. However, the final form of the Psalter perhaps reflects a desire to link the more individual themes of these psalms with the national issues raised in other psalms. It may be intentional, for example, that some of the psalms which express questionings, complaints or petitions in relation to the national sphere (Pss. 44, 74, 89, 90, 132) are juxtaposed with psalms similar in tone in which personal issues are more prominent (Pss. 42, 43, 73, 88, 130, 131). The figure of David, to whom about half the psalms are ascribed, is another clear link with the rest of the OT.

Similarly, while it is true that the wisdom literature hardly refers to events and people from Israel's history (but note the references to Solomon in Prov. 1:1; 10:1; cf. 1 Kgs. 3 - 5, esp. 4:32), wisdom has significant theological links with that history. One of the foundations of wisdom is the created order and its regularities (e.g. Prov. 8), the same created order which (the narrative and prophetic books declare) it is God's intention to restore. The very fact that wisdom sets out the ethical response God expects from all humans implies that it also describes the ethical response God expects from his people Israel, who are to display his wisdom to the nations around: hence the overlap which has been noted between the concerns of OT law and those of wisdom (M. Weinfeld,

Deuteronomy 1-11, AB [New York, 1991], pp. 62-65). Finally, the questioning books like Job and Ecclesiastes handle issues (does God care? does God reward good and punish evil? is there a purpose to be discerned in life's ceaseless activity?) which also feature in the narrative books and prophets; though there the focus is more specifically the apparent frustration of God's purposes for Israel (in addition to Neh. 9:36-37, noted above, see Is. 63:7 - 64:12).

Important aspects of the OT account. (i) *Cross-textual allusions.* What was noted above about the Bible as a whole is also true of the OT alone; later books often allude to ideas in earlier books, and thus set what they say in a wider context. Zechariah 9:9-10 echoes Psalm 72 (esp. v. 17), which echoes 2 Samuel 7, which echoes Genesis 12 and 15; Jeremiah 4:23-26 alludes to the formless and dark state of the world before God set about the work of creation (Gen. 1:2) to suggest that Judah's history has run into the sands; Isaiah 26:16-18 picks up Genesis' idea of 'the line of promise' to similar effect. There are recurring themes: the promise to Abraham; covenant; the role of the king; the gift of the Promised Land (seen as a partial restoration of the blessings of the garden of Eden; cf. Deut. 8:7-9 and Gen. 2:9-14); Zion and the temple; the worship of God; sin and failure; the surrounding nations. Some later books clearly rework themes from earlier books; for example, Zechariah reworks themes from Ezekiel (I. Duguid, in *The Lord's Anointed*, pp. 265-280). Such reworkings, in which the 'ancestry' of ideas in later books is apparent, point to both consistency and development in God's purposes.

(ii) *What kind of restoration?* When the prophets speak of the return of all the tribes from exile, the repossession of the land, the nations flocking to a rebuilt and glorious Zion to learn from God, and so on, do they expect a literal fulfilment of their prophecies? In many cases there is no evidence that they do not; but in some texts it is possible that 'traditional' language (referring to entities familiar from Israel's past such as land, temple and tribes) is deliberately used in a hyperbolic way to suggest a non-literal fulfilment. Perhaps the clearest example is Ezekiel 47 - 48, which speaks of all twelve tribes dwelling in the land again, but in terms which appear, on closer examination, to be highly

unrealistic: the new 'land of Israel' will be more extensive than even under David and Solomon (47:13-20); the new 'tribal territories' consist of twelve strips of land running from east to west, with a thirteenth reserved for the Levites and the temple, and no exact boundaries specified (48:1-29; contrast the detailed boundary descriptions of Josh. 13 - 21). Is this Ezekiel's way of saying that Israel has a future that will be as glorious as anything from Israel's past, but will also be qualitatively different from anything Israel has experienced so far? In the prophecies of the rebuilding of Zion in Isaiah 56 - 66 the promised restoration and glorification of Zion (see esp. chs. 60 - 62) seems to recede further and further into an unspecified future in which the 'new heavens' and 'new earth' dominate the final scene (65 - 66). Are these prophecies also meant to imply that Israel's future will be splendid, but unlike anything in her past? If so, then already in these passages there is some progress towards the NT's radical transformation of the OT hope.

(iii) *Disappointment.* Restoration, in any case, is far from complete when the OT comes to an end. D. J. A. Clines, in two essays on Genesis-Nehemiah ('What happens in Genesis' and 'The Old Testament histories: a reader's guide', pp. 49-66 and 85-105 of *What Does Eve Do to Help?* [Sheffield, 1990]), goes so far as to describe the books Genesis-Nehemiah as a 'narrative of unmitigated disaster' (p. 66), and an account of 'fair beginnings and foul endings' (p. 93). This may not do justice to the OT prophets' continuing hope for the future, but it is hard to dispute as a statement of Israel's fortunes up to this point. Even the more positive chapters of Israel's history hardly represent a full reversal of Genesis 3 - 11. Genesis' ending is relatively sunny, but the last verses of the book express an intense hope for the future fulfilment of God's promises (50:24-26). Leviticus represents Israel as a people whose holiness is constantly threatened by sin and defilement, so that even the tabernacle needs to be cleansed annually (Lev. 16); God dwells in the midst of the people, but the people must be 'insulated' from God's presence by the tabernacle and priestly mediation (Exod. 26 - 29; contrast the position in Gen. 2). More generally, what has happened to the hope of 'all peoples on earth' being blessed through Abraham's descendants? Not even in

the reigns of David and Solomon has this happened, still less under the later kings. What sort of an 'answer', in short, has Israel's history provided to the problem of human sin?

Between the Testaments

These questions become more serious in the intertestamental years (surveyed in J. H. Hayes and S. R. Mandell, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity* [Louisville, 1998]). This period sees the land of Israel passing from the hands of the Persians into those of Alexander, the Ptolemies, the Seleucids and finally the Romans. But apart from the successes of the Maccabean revolt (167-164 BC) and the period of Hasmonean rule that follows (ended by the coming of the Romans in 63 BC), little happens that even approximates to a fulfilment of the OT restoration prophecies. Jewish writings of the period attest to a sense that, though the Jews have returned to their ancestral lands, they are hardly better off than if they had not; in effect the exile continues (so N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, pp. 268-70, citing the [Qumran] *Damascus Document* 1:3-11; Tobit 14:5-7; 1 Baruch 3:6-8; 2 Macc. 1:27-29; along with Neh. 9:36-37).

The New Testament

The following account follows the narrative framework of the Gospels, Acts and Revelation (the last, of course, is not exactly straightforward narrative). Many of the NT letters, however, share the biblical-theological viewpoint of the Gospels, Acts and Revelation (e.g. Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews), though the immediate focus of their arguments may be somewhat narrower: for example, observance of the OT law (Galatians), apostasy (Hebrews), or ethics (1 Corinthians, 1 Peter). We shall, therefore, also refer to the letters.

Key points in the NT account. All four Gospels begin their accounts of Jesus with clear backward links to the OT: Matthew by tracing Jesus' genealogy back to Abraham, highlighting David and the Babylonian exile as significant stages in the genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17); Mark by relating John the Baptist's coming, which he sees as 'the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ', to two prophetic restoration texts (Mark 1:1-4; cf. Mal. 3:1; Is. 40:3); Luke by presenting the births of John the Baptist and of Jesus as a demonstra-

tion of God's faithfulness to Israel (Luke 1:46-55, 67-79; 2:29-32); John by echoing Genesis 1 (John 1:1-9). Jesus' call for repentance in the light of the coming of the kingdom of God (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15) seems similarly to pick up OT ideas of God's rule over the nations (e.g. Pss. 96 — 99) and God's forgiving Israel and restoring their fortunes (e.g. Is. 40:1-11; Jer. 31:34; Zeph. 3:14-20). Are the OT prophecies of Israel's restoration to be fulfilled in Jesus? Perhaps so, but not in any straightforward sense.

Jesus seems consistently to repudiate the idea that God's coming kingdom will include Israel's being restored to a position of pre-eminence among the nations. His teaching and actions can be seen as an attack on nationalistic views of the kingdom: his emphasis on non-violent ways of bringing in the kingdom (Matt. 5:5, 7, 9); his teaching of love for enemies (Matt. 5:43-48), which extends even to generous behaviour towards Roman soldiers (Matt. 5:41); his calling into question practices which are based on a strongly nationalistic view of holiness (Sabbath observance, Mark 2:23-27; ceremonial purity, Mark 7:1-23), and his association with those commonly held not to share in this holiness (Luke 5:27-32). He fiercely criticizes the Jewish religious leaders for leading their people astray (Matt. 23:1-32). He attacks the temple (Matt. 21:12-17), the centre of the nation's life, and perhaps even hints at the abolition of Mt Zion's special status as God's 'holy mountain' (Matt. 21:21-22; cf. Pss. 46 — 48). He prophesies the coming of judgment upon Jerusalem (Luke 21:5-24), which will leave the temple a ruin (vv. 5-6). It is hardly surprising that he is executed. (For extended discussion of many of these and the following points, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*.)

Yet Jesus' actions are consistent with his claim that the kingdom of God is at hand: his avoidance of fasting, implying that Israel's misfortunes are over (Mark 2:18-22; cf. Zech. 8:18-19); his dispensing of forgiveness, also related to Israel's restoration (Mark 2:1-12); his calling of twelve disciples, with its implication that Jesus is restoring Israel (all twelve tribes) around himself; the healings, at one point presented as signs that the exile is at last coming to an end (Matt. 11:2-6; cf. Is. 35, esp. vv. 5-6). Finally, he acknowledges that he is the promised Messiah, though only

privately to the Twelve, and with the immediate qualification that he is going to die (Mark 8:27-33). A later saying seems to imply that he understands his role as similar to that of the Servant in Isaiah (Mark 10:45; cf. Acts 8:26-35; 1 Pet. 2:24-25), and thus points to his coming death.

Jesus' resurrection is the unexpected vindication of his claims, the event by which he is publicly declared to be the Messiah (Acts 2:22-36; 4:8-11; cf. Rom. 1:3-4). Like the Servant in Isaiah, Jesus takes his people's sins on his own shoulders and emerges on the other side of death (cf. Is. 53:5-6, 11-12). He thus secures Israel's redemption (Luke 24:17-27; Acts 3:17-26), opens the way of salvation (Acts 4:12; 5:31) and begins the renewal of the entire creation (Acts 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:17). Appearing to his disciples after his resurrection, Jesus charges them to take the message of repentance and forgiveness in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:47-48; Acts 1:8). When Jesus leaves them to go to the Father, his disciples are told that he will return (Acts 1:9-11); this hope is echoed in other parts of the NT (Acts 17:31; Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Thess. 4:13 — 5:10; Heb. 9:27-28). Thus the early church comes into being through the apostles' preaching, spreading out from Jerusalem around the Mediterranean world, until at the end of Acts Paul is preaching the message of Jesus in Rome (Acts 28:31).

In the account of the early church in Acts several OT ideas are developed and transformed. The command to 'make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you' (Matt. 28:18-19; cf. Rom. 1:5) takes up the idea of God ruling over the nations from Zion. The coming of God's Spirit at Pentecost, enabling people from many nations to hear the message of salvation (Acts 2:1-11), fulfils Joel's prophecy of the Day of the Lord (2:28-32); it is also a reversal of the Tower of Babel incident (Gen. 11:1-9) and a fulfilment of the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), creating the possibility of people from many nations joining together to acknowledge, rather than to contest, God's kingship (cf. Rev. 7:9-10). The apostles' healings continue those of Jesus (Acts 3:1-10; 5:15-16; 14:8-10; 19:11-12): both are signs of a new, 'contagious' holiness which works outwards rather than, like the holiness described in Leviticus, being con-

stantly under threat from sin. Clearly linked to this holiness is the welcoming of Gentiles into the church, and their endowment with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:1 — 11:18; cf. Eph. 2:11-13); the link between Gentile inclusion and the transformation of OT ideas of holiness is made explicit in Peter's vision before he meets the Roman centurion Cornelius, in which unclean animals, representing Gentiles, are declared 'clean' by God (10:13-15, 28). Paul, writing to partly Gentile churches in Corinth and Ephesus, declares them collectively to be 'God's temple' (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:19-22; cf. John 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-8), a designation which, given the OT associations of the temple, has far-reaching implications: the Corinthian Christians are indwelt by God (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:10-11); they are the locus of God's rule over the nations (cf. Ps. 47:8); it is through them that the nations can approach God (cf. Is. 56:7).

By the end of Acts, Jesus' charge to baptize and make disciples of all nations is far from accomplished. The later letters speak of some in the churches turning aside to false teaching (1 Tim. 1:3-11; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; Jude 3-4; Rev. 2:14-16, 20-25), rather as the Israelites in the generations after Joshua turned to idolatry. It is clear as the NT draws to a close that the story of the church is not over, or even necessarily close to its end. But the last book of the NT presents a vision in which, at the close of human history, the enemies of God are finally defeated (Rev. 19 — 20), and God and 'the Lamb' (Jesus) reign in a 'new Jerusalem' which is part of a renewed heaven and earth (Rev. 21 — 22). The presence in the city of 'the river of the water of life' and 'the tree of life' (22:1-2) recalls the beginning of the biblical account (Gen. 2:8-14), just as their presence in a city, a human creation (cf. Gen. 4:17) recalls subsequent human history, now taken up into the new creation. The last note sounded in the NT is one of expectation and longing for the return of the Lord Jesus (Rev. 22:12-21).

Important aspects of the NT account. (i) Continuity. On the one hand, the NT writers regard Jesus' life, death and resurrection and the mission of the early church as the fulfilment of the OT promises. This view is reflected, for example, in the copious OT quotations and allusions in the NT, in the 'fulfilment' passages in Matthew (Matt. 2:15, 17-18, etc.), and in the 'typological' approach

of Hebrews, according to which the work of Christ is prefigured in the OT (see the discussion of typology in C. J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, pp. 107-116). The church, continuing Jesus' work, is seen as taking over the task of OT Israel. This idea is implied in Paul's use of 'temple' imagery, noted above, and also in Peter's application to his readers of language used in Exodus to describe Israel's status (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. Exod. 19:4-6). Note also how in Revelation 21:10-14 the description of the new Jerusalem is reminiscent of Ezekiel's picture of the restored city of God (48:30-35) with twelve gates for the twelve tribes of Israel, but the twelve-fold foundation of the new Jerusalem is inscribed with the names of the 'twelve apostles of the Lamb' (Rev. 21:14). This verse seems clearly to imply that the prophetic hopes associated with the restoration of Israel are fulfilled through the apostolic (hence the church's) preaching of the message of Jesus.

(ii) *Discontinuity?* On the other hand, the NT writers seem to acknowledge that Jesus fulfilled the OT promises in an unexpected way, or at least not as the Jews of his day were expecting. This idea is expressed in John the Baptist's question to Jesus (Matt. 11:2-3); there are clear signs that Jesus is 'the one who was to come' (as Jesus implies in his response, vv. 4-6), but enough that is unexpected about Jesus to raise questions as well. Or again, resurrection was a familiar idea to the Jews of Jesus' day; in OT and later Jewish texts it is particularly associated with hopes of national restoration (Ezek. 37:1-14; Dan. 12:1-4; 2 Macc. 7; cf. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament*, pp. 320-334). But that one man should be resurrected apart from a general resurrection and the restoration of Israel was a startling development which entailed a radically revised understanding of God's faithfulness to his promises, particularly in respect to the nation of Israel. (Luke, Acts, Romans and Galatians all address this question in different ways.) For some, of course, Jesus was *too* unlike what was expected; many Jews of Jesus' day and later did not accept him as the promised saviour, a fact also acknowledged in the NT and addressed at length in Romans 9 — 11.

However, the startling and unexpected aspects of the NT message should not be over-emphasized. In a discussion of this issue C. J.

H. Wright (*Knowing Jesus*, pp. 70-77) uses the analogy of a boy whose father, in the period before motorized transportation, promises him a horse when he comes of age. By the time the boy grows up, the internal combustion engine has been invented, and the boy receives, not a horse, but a car. Has the father broken his promise? Most would say not; the car can do everything a horse could do and more, and expresses the father's love as clearly as the horse would have done. In a similar way, the restoration prophecies are not fulfilled literally, but the larger hope of which these prophecies were always no more than a part is realized: that of blessing for the nations and ultimately the renewal of the entire creation.

But is the biblical account history?

Is it historiography?

Implicit (and sometimes explicit) in many parts of the biblical account is the claim that the events narrated actually happened and that their having happened is significant. Thus, according to M. Sternberg, OT narratives everywhere claim the status of history (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* [Indiana, 1985], pp. 30-32). Similarly, Paul stakes his gospel on the historicity of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12-34).

Consideration of genre reinforces this conclusion. Thus, for example, K. L. Younger's study of Joshua 9 – 12 argues that the writer of Joshua constructs his account using language and concepts familiar to him from other ancient Near Eastern conquest accounts; if these accounts merit the title 'historiography', as they are usually held to do, then so does the account in Joshua (*Ancient Conquest Accounts* [Sheffield, 1990]). In a similar way, against earlier views that the Gospel writers' main concern was not the recording of traditions about Jesus, recent writers have stressed both that the Gospels fall into a recognized category of Hellenistic writing, the *bios*, or biography (R. A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels?* [Cambridge, 1992]), and that they were intended for wide circulation, precisely to the end that traditions about Jesus should become well known everywhere (R. J. Bauckham [ed.], *The Gospels for all Christians* [Grand Rapids, 1997]).

That does not mean that the Bible follows the conventions of modern historiography at

all points. To mention only two issues: the writers of OT narrative show little interest in the question of how one evaluates historical evidence; and the frequent references in both Testaments to divine agency as an explanation of historical events would be felt by many today to disqualify the Bible from the category of historiography, though conservative Christians will naturally contest this point (see V. P. Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, pp. 120-135).

On any understanding, of course, the Bible's account is highly selective, as all history-writing must be. Although Genesis 1 – 11, the prophetic oracles against the nations (Amos 1 – 2; Is. 13 – 23; Jer. 46 – 51; Ezek. 25 – 32; Hab. 2), Daniel and Revelation together provide an outline interpretation of human history, countless events of world history recounted in other sources (e.g. most of Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek and Roman history) are not mentioned in the Bible. Furthermore, the Bible offers particular interpretations of the events it does narrate, interpretations which must always have been controversial, from the claim that Israel's god is the one true God, to the claim that the crucified Messiah Jesus was the focal point of his purposes. But from another viewpoint the biblical account is universal in scope, describing a divine purpose, the fulfilment of which will be the culmination of all human history (a Saviour who can meet all human aspirations, a judgment to which all will be subject, and so on).

Is it historical?

Recent decades have seen a growing scepticism towards the OT's presentation of Israel's history. The basis for this scepticism may be questionable, whether it be the older-style source criticism (as in Wellhausen's hugely influential documentary hypothesis of Pentateuchal origins) or the more recent tendency to treat much of the OT as Persian- or Hellenistic-period propaganda (e.g. N. P. Lemche, 'The Old Testament – A Hellenistic book?', *SJOT* 7 [1993], pp. 163-193), but it is not always possible to mount a strong positive case for historicity. Often this case can be made only in the form of an argument concerning the general plausibility of the events narrated, as in J. K. Hoffmeier's work on Exodus (*Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* [New

York, 1997]) or A. R. Millard's debate with J. M. Miller concerning the biblical account of Solomon's reign (in L. K. Handy [ed.], *The Age of Solomon* [Leiden, 1997], pp. 1-56).

In the case of the NT, contemporary external sources are more copious and more directly relevant to the biblical account. A. E. Harvey has used the phrase 'the constraints of history' to characterize one approach to the historical Jesus; given what is known of Palestine in the first centuries AD and BC, the historian can make some well-grounded claims about what Jesus must have done and said in order for the NT writers to attribute certain deeds and words to him (*Jesus and the Constraints of History* [London, 1982]; cf. N. T. Wright, *Jesus*, pp. 125-144). It is hard to think of similar constraints that apply in the case of the OT, or apply to the same degree; there are usually fewer extra-biblical data. Even in the case of the NT, historical argument of this sort will take the historian only part of the way to faith in Jesus.

We began this section by noting the frequent claim of both Testaments, explicit or implicit, to be giving an accurate account of events; we could go further and speak of the implicit biblical claim to be giving a divinely inspired account of events (see W. A. Grudem, 'Scripture's self-attestation and the problem of formulating a doctrine of Scripture', in D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge [eds.], *Scripture and Truth* [Grand Rapids and Carlisle, 1992], pp. 19-59). It must be acknowledged that both claims are often unsupported by any external data and often controverted in contemporary scholarship. But there is another range of 'extra-biblical testimony' which many find convincing: the intuitive sense that the biblical interpretation of human history, along with the insights that the Bible provides into the human condition and the workings of one's own heart, yields the best 'fit with reality as one experiences it.

Conclusion

The biblical account gives us a narrative framework, a continuing story, in which we can, if we will, locate ourselves, and thereby find meaning in life (cf. C. E. Armerding, 'Faith and method in Old Testament study', in P. E. Satterthwaite and D. F. Wright [eds.], *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* [Grand Rapids, 1994], pp. 31-49). Like the speakers in Nehemiah 9, we may feel dissatisfaction that the end of the narrative still seems far off, but in the light of Jesus' resurrection we have better grounds than they for confidence that the narrative will in due course end triumphantly.

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P. E. SATTERTHWAITE