

A REVIEW ARTICLE

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Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narratives Ethically*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.

This *is* a book to read and study. Gordon Wenham has provided a study of Old Testament ethics that strikes the balance, as well as any book could, between “law and grace,” or the demands of the covenant, as equalized by God’s fatherly compassion toward his children.

1. Summary of Wenham’s Argument

Wenham epitomizes his thesis at the outset:

Obviously the behaviour of the chief actors [of the Old Testament narratives] in many instances falls miserably short of the ideal, and they often suffer in some way for their mistakes. Yet it is clear too that they are not deserted by God despite their sinfulness. So there is a paradox in Old Testament narrative ethics: on the one hand God is terribly demanding, he looks for nothing less than godlike perfect behaviour, yet on the other, despite human failings, he does not forget his covenant loyalty to his people, and ultimately brings them through the suffering that their sin has brought about. Old Testament ethics are therefore as much about grace as about law: they declare that God, the all-holy, is also God, the all-merciful (p. 4).

Later on, Wenham adds that Isaac’s deathbed blessing of Genesis 27 is an episode that is most revealing in the way it brings out the viewpoints of the different actors. Moreover, “it is also one of many in the Old Testament which show the depth of its moral insight and its avoidance of simple black-and-white judgements. It deals with a world where there are few perfect saints and few unredeemable sinners: most of its heroes and heroines have both virtues and vices, they mix obedience and unbelief” (p. 15). Complementary to this “real life” assessment of the Old Testament saints is Wenham’s equation of “perfect” with “blameless,” as per the example of Noah (p. 30).

The opening chapter establishes the categories of “implied author” and “implied reader,” which serve as fundamental categories for Wenham’s approach to the Old Testament narratives. To be illustrated by two particular books, Genesis and Judges, Wenham seeks to argue that ethical readers should aim to discover the views of the implied author, and this requires them to engage with his ideas and to share his stance on many issues. To become a sensitive reader involves understanding the implied author’s outlook and adapting oneself to the implied reader. Accordingly, the reader is not concerned with the process of composition, but with what the implied author is communicating by telling the narrative. This involves careful study of the final form of the different books to determine the message that they were attempting to communicate to their implied readers.

Wenham then turns to the rhetorical function of Genesis. This is a chapter chock-a-block with insights into the first book of the Bible, including its relation to other Old Testament narratives. The “ethics of Genesis” revolve around monotheism (which functions as a persistent critique of Near Eastern theology) and the human being as the image of God. Over against the Babylonian creation and flood myths, Genesis envisions God as the provider for human needs, not the other way around, with mankind providing “care and feeding for the gods.” Thus, in Genesis a far more positive view is taken of man in the order of creation, with Adam and Eve represented as his image. In the context of the

ancient Near East, the king was regularly called the “image” of the gods; but Genesis democratizes the idea—“every human being is a king and responsible for managing the world on God’s behalf” (p. 25).¹ The patriarchal narratives confirm that the task of subduing the earth is fully operative even in the aftermath of Adam’s fall. Genesis thus presents *a mixture of realism and idealism* in discussing the creation mandates, including marriage and procreation, both of which have their happy and not so happy sides.

After Genesis comes the rhetorical function of Judges. Again, the commentary on the structure and theology of the book is richly insightful and rewards careful reading. As to the atmosphere of Judges, it is quite different from Genesis. The latter begins with the triumphant account of God creating the world in six days and ends with Joseph confidently looking forward to his burial in the promised land. By contrast, Judges opens with the ineffective efforts of the Israelite tribes to conquer the land and concludes, after a dreadful civil war, with the gloomy reflection: “every man did what was right in his own eyes.” Moreover, whereas Genesis has a fairly positive attitude towards the past, Judges has a much darker one. For Wenham, most of the stories in the book seem to be told to shock the reader or at least make the reader ask himself what the characters in the stories ought to have done. In other words, the narrative embodies a set of values and ethical norms that the reader must somehow tune into if he is not to read the stories “against the grain,” i.e., in ways that are contrary to the message that the author intended to convey. According to Wenham, in Judges “we have fewer clues than usual in the Old Testament to give away the author’s assumptions, and this coupled with its portrayal of non-normative behaviour makes it one of the most difficult books in the canon to interpret from an ethical perspective” (p. 45).

With some qualification, Wenham is sympathetic with classifying Judges as part of the “Deuteronomistic History,” i.e., the books from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings, which recount the history of Israel from the conquest to the exile. His reservation is that a recognition of deuteronomistic elements in the book does not make it simply one volume within that history, because deuteronomistic ideas pervade the Old Testament as a whole. Even so, read in this way, Judges is seen to exemplify the ideals of the book of Deuteronomy, particularly its message that disobedience to the law leads to divine displeasure and suffering for the nation.

The “ethics of Judges” consist in fidelity to Yahweh. The two prologues of the book, 1:1-2:5 and 2:6-3:6, predict what the rest of the book will describe: Israel has broken the covenant by not expelling the Canaanites and will go further by worshipping their gods; in turn, the Canaanites will become Israel’s adversaries. But this gloomy scenario is prefaced by a ray of hope: “I will never break my covenant with you.” “Despite the repeated tales of Israel’s faithlessness that are about to begin, God’s loyalty to Israel is not in doubt. So although the book’s horizon becomes ever darker as the story progresses and it ends with the blackest of episodes, God’s promise gives hope of new and better days” (p. 50). “As in Genesis human sinfulness does not nullify God’s graciousness. Israel may break the covenant, and suffer for it, but God will still hear their prayer when they repent. God’s readiness to answer prayer runs through the book of Judges and relieves its otherwise gloomy message” (p. 58).

¹ The image lies at the heart of Old and New Testament ethics. Wenham takes the nature of the image to be “elusive” (p. 25). However, in a recent paper, “The *hasde dawid* of Isa 55:3—A Response to Hugh Williamson,” Professor Peter Gentry of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has shown that “image,” in the setting of the ancient Orient, was a behavioral concept: *the king conducted himself like his god*. This makes perfect sense of Adam as God’s image—he and Eve were made to replicate God’s activity in the world. Among other things, after the flood, man is allowed to avenge the murder of fellow humans just because he is God’s image (Genesis 9:6).

This fidelity versus idolatry theme has particular application in the case of the judges and the would-be king Abimelech. In all but one instance, Othniel, the various savior-judges fall short of wholehearted allegiance to the Lord and foreshadow the time when a king “after God’s own heart” would ascend the throne of Israel. Judges portrays Israel becoming progressively more lax in its Torah-observance and ever more prone to disunity between the tribes. In the epilogue, both trends reach a climax with outright idolatry among the Danites and a civil war that could have destroyed the nation. “The reader is driven to conclude: this must not continue, if the nation is to enjoy harmony at home and peace abroad. A new way of life under new leadership is required, if Israel is to survive in Canaan” (p. 69).

In sum, “as in the book of Genesis the heroes of Judges are by no means sinless: yet despite the book’s portrayal of their many faults it still affirms that God in his grace may use them to fulfil his purpose” (p. 69).

Wenham next turns to “Ethical Ideals and Legal Requirements.” In this chapter, he proceeds to argue that obedience to the rules is not a sufficient definition of Old Testament ethics, but that much more is looked for from members of the covenant people. Ethics is more than keeping the law, or, to put it in biblical terms, righteousness involves more than living by the Decalogue and the other laws in the Pentateuch. Thereafter follows a sketch of the importance of virtue, community values, and the imitation of God for an understanding of the values of the biblical narrators.

The ensuing discussion is based on the premise that while laws generally set a floor for behavior within society, they do not prescribe an ethical ceiling. Therefore, the study of legal codes within the Bible reveal only the limits of the tolerance of the law-givers and may not be an index to what they approve of as ideal conduct (p. 80). In the Old Testament, what takes us to the heart of the ethical ideal is the avoidance of idolatry and the love and worship of the only God. In his words, the Bible goes beyond legal sanctions and negative commands, because its ethico-religious ideal is wholly positive:

Israel is enjoined to love the LORD with all her heart, soul and strength. To walk after, cleave to, and to love him. Though it has been correctly pointed out that these are the actions required of loyal treaty partners, and that love and fear of God is expressed chiefly through keeping his commandments, it is wrong to reduce love to obedience. It is obedience, but more than obedience. This covenantal loyalty is also the attitude looked for within a family, between children and parents, and between spouses. Israel’s loyalty to and affection for her God should mirror his love for her. In the Psalms there are glimpses of the human spirit reaching out towards this goal (p. 81).

Wenham maintains that the first commandment illustrates what he calls the “gap between law and ethics” (p. 82). The law merely punished extreme forms of disloyalty to God, i.e., apostasy and idolatry, and prohibited actions such as intermarriage that might lead to the ultimate religious disloyalty. But fearing, loving, cleaving to the Lord was not fulfilled just by avoiding the worship of other gods. The ethico-religious goal was far deeper and more embracing: it involved both loyalty to God and an enjoyment of his presence.

Wenham’s gap between law and ethics is illustrated by sexual ethics. The law itself discriminated against women and created an environment in which marriages were easily terminated on the part of the male. However, just looking at the law gives a misleading view of what actually went on in ancient Israel and does not show how the biblical writers in fact hoped for a much higher standard of sexual ethics than the law insisted on. After a brief survey of materials, Wenham surmises that in the realm of marriage there was a gap between the ideals or hopes of the implied writers and the lesser demands of the law.

As this chapter continues to unfold, Wenham discusses the issue of “character and virtue,” both of which consist in obedience to the declared will of God as the cardinal religious and ethical ideal. Such is illustrated by Noah and Abraham. As regards the latter, Wenham insightfully observes that the patriarch’s career begins and ends with “two dramatic and costly examples of his absolute obedience to God’s commands, his leaving home and his sacrifice of his only son” (pp. 87-88). He then suggests three main criteria for determining that a character’s behavior is regarded by the implied author as virtuous: (1) The behavior pattern is repeated in a number of different contexts; (2) The character trait is exhibited in a positive context; (3) outside the narrative material of the Old Testament, the legal codes, Psalms, and wisdom books often shed light on the various attitudes toward virtue and vice. However, even when the focus of the stories is on individual examples of piety, the communal dimension of biblical ethics, especially family solidarity, remains foundational.

In sum this chapter argues two propositions. One, the ethical expectations of the Old Testament are higher than the legal rules. Simply keeping the laws is insufficient. It is not enough to avoid worshipping other gods—the Lord wants Israel to love him with her whole heart, mind, and strength. Likewise, it is not good enough not to commit adultery—the Old Testament expects husbands and wives to love, care for and protect each other. Two, By portraying the biblical repeatedly acting in certain ways, the narratives are implicitly defining certain virtues and vices, encouraging its readers to imitate the former and avoid the latter. These virtues cannot be defined by law alone: rather the stories offer paradigms of behavior that apply in various situations.

Yet foundational to these two prongs of Old Testament ethics is the imitation of God. The vertical dimension of man imitating God has its effects in man’s treatment of his fellow man. The historical narratives, especially Genesis, thus set out a very lofty ideal of human behavior. It does not show its heroes simply keeping the law in their individual actions or illustrating typical human virtues. Rather, it sets out a vision of human beings made in the image of God and thus obligated to imitate God in their dealings with one another and with other creatures. Sometimes the stories show, for example, the patriarchs acting in exemplary fashion: they not only keep the law and model virtue, but exhibit truly godly characteristics as those made in the image of God should. Sometimes they fall very far short. But most often their deportment is mixed, neither outstandingly virtuous nor catastrophic. Nevertheless, their mixed ethical achievement does not generate a sense of complacency in the reader. On the contrary, it serves as a reminder that God still keeps his promises and is loyal to his people despite their shortcomings.

Before turning to the New Testament, Wenham concentrates on the “Problematic Tales” of the rape of Dinah (Genesis 34) and the story of Gideon (Judges 6-8). After a thorough recitation of the various solutions to the problems, Wenham himself concludes that in the case of Dinah no one comes out of the episode very credibly on the Israelite side, let alone the Shechemite side. Even so, Jacob and his sons escape scot-free. “Here as in many other Old Testament stories God treats his people much more kindly than they deserve in order to demonstrate his faithfulness to his promises” (p. 119). As for the Gideon-episode, there are many aspects of Gideon’s character and actions that raise questions: like the other judges he is not meant to be imitated in every detail.

But he is a great example of how God can act through less than perfect people. The story of Gideon, like the rest of Judges, demonstrates God’s power over Israel’s enemies and their gods. It demonstrates the Lord’s faithfulness to his covenant despite Israel’s infidelity and his patience towards those whom he calls to lead his people despite their own wavering faith and obedience (p. 127)

The concluding chapter on “New Testament Perspectives” is based on the proposition that the New Testament, like the Old, is telling a story. Wenham ties into the

work of Ben Witherington, *Paul's Narrative World of Thought*.² According to Witherington, in Paul's vision of human history there are four major stories: (1) the story of a world gone wrong, i.e., the fall of Adam and the consequences described in Genesis 1-11; (2) the story of Israel in that world; (3) the story of Christ; (4) the story of Christians, including Paul himself, which arises out of all three of these previous stories and is the first full installment of the story of a world set right again. Paul's theology is set within the framework of this grand narrative which begins with creation and ends with Christ's second advent and the resurrection of the dead. For both Paul and his Jewish contemporaries, the story of salvation began with the call of Abraham. With him began the process of the retrieval of fallen mankind and the restoration of Eden. "When Paul thinks of the human beginnings of paradise regained, he thinks of that first great example of faith. Paul does not believe that there are several stories of God's redeeming work; there is essentially only one that leads from Abraham to Christ and beyond" (p. 130, quoting Witherington). Over against the Jewish appeal to the stories of Moses and David, says Witherington, Paul chose to concentrate on Adam and Abraham because of their more universal appeal to Gentiles.

Given this narrative character of Pauline theology, and that of the New Testament as a whole, it follows from the unity of God's historical purpose that there is a unity of ethic before and after Christ. Thus, it is likely that Paul, among others, expected the same principles to govern behavior of the people of God before and after Christ. This is buttressed by the way various parts of the New Testament appeal to the Old Testament as models for Christian behavior. Using Hebrews as an example, Wenham notes that the author presupposes not just a familiarity with the stories of the Old Testament, but that there is a continuity between those people and his readers. "They are part of the one people of God sharing in one story of salvation. That is why the achievements of the Israelites of the past should inspire the Christians of the first century" (p. 134).

The question is, How can this theological continuity be maintained in the realm of ethics? Does not the New Testament advocate a quite different stance in such matters as the food laws, marriage and divorce, and violence? In order to resolve the question, Wenham surveys the Old Testament laws pertaining to purity, holiness, and food. As for *purity*, in and through the multitude of regulations, the key principle is that God is the supremely holy being, and anyone who wishes to come into his presence must be holy too. *Holiness*, in the ritual system, stands opposite uncleanness. Since God is perfectly holy, the unclean are those opposed to God or who fall short of his perfection. Idolatry is one of the most severe forms of uncleanness: it pollutes the idolater, the land, and the sanctuary. Such pollution, he observes, is the opposite of the life of God. God himself is full and perfect life, so that death is the very antithesis of holiness. For this reason, corpse impurity ranks among the most polluting types of defilement.

If the quintessence of uncleanness is death, it becomes clear why corpses are regarded as so polluting. These apparently harsh regulations declare very loudly one aspect of God's character: he is life, perfect life, both morally and physically. He is opposed to death: those who willingly or even involuntarily embrace actions that lead to death separate themselves from God (p. 138).

The *food laws* fit into the broader framework of cleanness and uncleanness. The distinctions made in the food laws between clean and unclean foods match the divisions among mankind, between Israel the elect nation and the non-elect Gentiles. They served to remind Israel of her special status as God's chosen people. Just as God had selected just

² Witherington, *Paul's Narrative World of Thought: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Westminster: John Knox, 1994).

one people to be near him, so Israel had to be selective in her diet. Through this system of symbolic laws the Israelites were reminded at every meal of their redemption to be God's people. Their diet was limited to certain meats in imitation of their God, who had restricted his choice among the nations to Israel. It served also to bring to mind Israel's responsibilities to be a holy nation. As they distinguished between clean and unclean foods, they were reminded that holiness was more than a matter of meat and drink but a way of life characterized by purity and integrity. But these laws not only reminded Israel of her distinctiveness, they served to enforce it. Jews faithful to these laws would tend to avoid Gentile company, lest they were offered unclean food to eat.

This overview of the Old Testament thinking about purity and uncleanness allows us to assess the New Testament approach more clearly. The New Testament teaching fully underlines Old Testament view of uncleanness, but in other respects transforms it. Transformation, rather than simple abrogation, is the New Testament's handling of uncleanness caused by disease, bodily discharges, and food laws. Instead of keeping his distance from those afflicted with uncleanness, Jesus touches them, thereby making himself unclean. Thus he touches lepers, a woman suffering from a flow of blood, and even corpses, healing the former, and bringing the latter back to life (e.g., Mark 1:40-41; 5:21-43). In rather stark contrast with the Old Testament, Jesus inaugurated the new creation and the eschatological reign of God, when God drew near to the sufferers and healed them personally. His miracles had the effect of including within the people of God those who had formerly been outside.

Drawing on the work of N. T. Wright,³ Wenham maintains that the healing miracles are breaking in of the new order planned by the creator God, in which we glimpse something beyond the simple reconstitution of Israel, because when Israel was restored, the whole creation would be restored. This new creation, according to biblical and first-century Jewish thought, was to embrace not just Jews but all nations. Jesus' apparent disregard for the purity regulations signaled no disrespect for them, but rather was a declaration that their most fundamental values were being fulfilled. The purity laws bore witness to a picture of God who was the source of perfect life and wholeness: only those who enjoyed full and perfect health were judged fit to enter the temple and experience God's presence. But now, with the new creation inaugurated by Jesus, those healed were freed from uncleanness and were able to draw near to God.

These food laws reminded the Jews of their special status as the one people chosen by God. The clean (edible) creatures symbolized Israel, whereas the unclean (prohibited) foods symbolized the Gentile nations. But in the new creation, the people of God are comprised of all nations; hence, it is inappropriate for the food laws, which symbolized Israel's segregation, to be maintained. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus' critique of the food laws (Matthew 15:16-17; Mark 7:18-19) is immediately followed by the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman (describing herself as a dog, i.e., unclean), whose daughter, possessed by an unclean spirit, was healed by Jesus (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). Thus, the reappraisal of the dietary laws, like that of unclean persons, is not seen by the New Testament writers as contradicting the Old Testament so much as reaffirming the realization of its hopes with the coming of Christ and the inauguration of a new creation, in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile, and everyone, including the unclean, may be restored to fulfill God's purposes.

New creation is also the key to understanding such particulars as the New Testament's modification of the Old Testament regulations concerning marriage and divorce, especially in the revolutionary teaching of Jesus. In this respect Jesus' transformation of marriage is like his treatment of the purity code. On the face of it, there is confrontation and abrogation of the old rules, but at a deeper level there is a reaffirmation of

³ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

God's original creative purposes for the human race. The same goes for violence, which is anti-life.

In his Conclusions, Wenham underscores the pointedly eschatological character of Christian ethics. A Christian ethic is eschatological in two senses. On the one side, the reign of God has begun with the first advent of Christ. On the other side, the climactic phase of the kingdom is outstanding, and it is to this end that the Old Testament narratives continue to find their relevance.

The coming of the kingdom may be more apparent in the Christian era than it was before Christ, but it is still partial. The Church today, like Israel of old, still hopes and prays for the consummation. It still has to live in a world distorted by hardness of heart and not as it was in the beginning. It still lives in a world where sin and violence are endemic. Individual Christians and the Church are afflicted by both. They need the laws and narratives of the Old Testament to remind them of the creator's ideals and how to handle situations which fall short of these ideals. In this way the experience of the saints of the Old Testament has much to teach those of the New (p. 154).

The book ends with the two outstanding points developed by *Story as Torah*. First, the Old Testament witnesses to God's tolerance. The Lord urges Israel to love God and neighbor with all one's heart, soul, and might, and to be holy as he is holy (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; 11:45). But there is a great gap between these lofty ideals and the law. People were not punished for not loving God with their whole heart, only for brazen disloyalty expressed by active idolatry. Similarly, lack of love towards one's neighbors did not attract judicial sanction, only actions that seriously harmed them, such as theft, murder, or adultery. On such deeds the law came down very hard; but though God wanted his people to love him wholeheartedly and their neighbors as themselves, he put up with much less.

Closely related to the first point is the second: the narratives demonstrate God's faithfulness to his promises despite the unfaithfulness of his people. There are many episodes in Genesis where it is apparent that the patriarchs do not obey or show the faith they should; yet despite their slips, God remains faithful and indeed rescues them from the problems they create for themselves. This pattern is even more prominent in Judges.

God's character as it emerges in the stories of the Old Testament is thus pre-eminently marked by tolerance and faithfulness. That is why St Paul could assure his readers that "whatever was written in former days was written...that by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). Read sensitively they may still do the same today (p. 155).

2. Response

Wenham's book is a breath of fresh air in the study of Old Testament (and New Testament) ethics. The central theses of the volume, as summarized in the Conclusions, are of particular importance and relevance in today's climate, particularly as regards the justification/sanctification debate. And it is just here that Wenham strikes the all-important balance between the demands of the law and the tolerance of the law-giver. As quoted above, Wenham characterizes God as terribly demanding, looking for nothing less than godlike perfect behavior; yet despite human failing, he does not forget his covenant loyalty to his people. Old Testament ethics are, therefore, as much about grace as about law: they declare that God, the all-holy, is also God, the all-merciful (p. 4). This is a point well worth underscoring in view of the tendency of Reformed theologians to insist that the law functioned as a kind of "covenant of works" that had to be kept perfectly in order to remain

in covenant standing.⁴ Inevitably, “perfection,” in this scenario, is defined in the modern, not biblical, sense of “sinlessness.”

There is, to be sure, such a thing as perfection. But *biblically* speaking, perfection is a wholehearted commitment to honor the entirety of the Lord’s revealed will.⁵ Otherwise put, perfection is simply a David-like desire to seek God and follow his commandments with all one’s heart (Psalm 119:2, 10, 34, 69, 145). Perfection is exemplified by godly Zechariah and Elizabeth, “were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord *blameless*” (Luke 1:6). Luke hardly predicates sinless perfection of the elderly couple. What is in view the conformity of their lives to the will of God as the expression of their fidelity to him.

Since, then, perfection and covenant faithfulness are so closely linked, the comfort of a passage such as Romans 7:14-25 is that notwithstanding our many failures, there is no condemnation as long we as desire to remain within the covenant bond, true to Christ the Lord. In light of Wenham’s findings, readers—and particularly teachers—of the Old Testament will want to turn to its historical narratives to find examples not only of faith and perseverance but of godly living as well. As Wenham argues so persuasively, these narratives constitute a story *as Torah*. But to reiterate from above, we can be entirely grateful for the reminder that the Old Testament world is one in which “there are few perfect saints and few unredeemable sinners: most of its heroes and heroines have both virtues and vices, they mix obedience and unbelief” (p. 15).

The pastoral application of Wenham’s reading of Old Testament narrative ethics, therefore, is to the effect that a pietism that burdens the conscience unnecessarily by majoring on the observance of commandments and minoring on persevering faith is to be resisted at all costs.⁶ The problem with the various ancient Jewish enclaves was not that they were “legalistic” but *pietistic*. The strenuous law-keeping of these groups, that often went beyond what is written, was grounded in a pietism that too often has been replicated in the history of the Christian church. If the essence of sin is idolatry, it follows that the essence of righteousness is fidelity. God forgives our weaknesses; it is only apostasy that makes it impossible to be restored to repentance (Hebrews 6:4).⁷

Some readers may be surprised at Wenham’s claim of a gap between law and ethics. On a surface reading, it might seem implausible the historical narratives would present a “higher ethic” than the law itself. But it makes sense given his contention that law functioned as a civil code as well as an ethical code: civil law can be tolerant of behavior that an ideal ethic cannot. That an idea ethic is placed in the form of story rather than apodictic law is in keeping with the very character of Scripture as story. The story line of

⁴ E.g., T. N. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), passim; M. A. Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, eds. D. A. Carson, P. T. O’Brien and M. A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 435, 437; D. A. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Discourse,” *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates?* eds. M. Husbands and D. J. Treier (Downers Grove/Leicester: InterVarsity/Apollos, 2004), 71.

⁵ See my *‘The Obedience of Faith’: A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 2/38 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991), 45; and *Exegetical Essays*. 3rd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 361.

⁶ Still brilliant and relevant is J. D. G. Dunn’s “Rom. 7,14-25 in the Theology of Paul,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 31 (1975), 264-73.

⁷ See the excellent study of Scot McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions,” *Trinity Journal* ns 13 (1992), 21-59.

the Bible is the movement from creation to new creation, with the Christ-event as its central and pivotal occurrence. Or, as Witherington characterizes the theology of Paul, there is the story of a world gone wrong, the story of Israel in that world, the story of Christ, and the story of Christians.⁸ From beginning to end, Scripture is structured in terms of a meta-narrative (the big story), as subdivided by the various little stories. In other words, all the tributaries of salvation history flow into the mighty river of what God has done in history to effect a new creation out of the chaos of sin. To switch metaphors, this is the “big umbrella” of the divine speaking, first to the fathers by the prophets and now to us in his Son (Hebrews 1:1-2a).

With this study, Wenham has fully succeeded in whetting our appetites for more. The books of Genesis and Judges are but samples of Old Testament narrative ethics. It is hoped, in time, that he will give us a volume encompassing the remainder of the historical portions of the Hebrew Bible and their relevance for Christian living.

⁸ See more recently, M. J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); id., *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).