

Theology of the Old Testament

Introduction

What is the theology of the Old Testament? What did God reveal to Israel concerning His plans and purposes? What was the theological knowledge and outlook of a first-century Jew, a Jew of Jesus’ day? These are the questions this article will consider.

Jewish Theology

God revealed His plans and purposes for Israel and the nations through His covenant promises to Israel and His revelations through the nation’s prophets. Thus, Jewish theology began with the Abrahamic covenant and progressed through the other covenants: the Palestinic (Land), Mosaic, Sabbatic, Davidic, and New.¹ God’s major prophetic revelations also began with Abraham and extended through Malachi to John the Baptist, Jesus, the Twelve, and finally, Paul. These prophecies added details of God’s plans and purposes for the people of Israel.

Jewish Theology in a Nutshell

Psalm 2 contains a summary of Jewish prophetic theology. Everything else is detail. Jewish theology encompassed two key events: the Wrath of God (the Day of the Lord) and the Kingdom of God.

Psalm 2	Comment
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<p>¹ Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing?</p> <p>² The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying,</p> <p>³ “Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!”</p>	<p>vv. 1-3 reveal God’s intent for His Messiah to reign (1st and 2nd advents) and His rejection by both Jews (peoples and rulers) and Gentiles (nations and kings of the earth).</p>
<p>⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.</p> <p>⁵ Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying,</p>	<p>vv. 4-5 show God’s disdain and wrath against those who reject His Messiah (cf. Acts 13.38-41).</p>
<p>⁶ “But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.”</p> <p>⁷ “I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.</p> <p>⁸ ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.</p> <p>⁹ ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron, you shall shatter them like earthenware.’”</p>	<p>vv. 6-9 reveal God’s setting up His Messiah to rule from Jerusalem (Zion), His declaration of the Messiah’s Sonship (i.e., resurrection, cf. Acts 13.30-33), His giving His Son the nations for an inheritance, and the nature of the Messiah’s rule.</p>

¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. ¹¹ Worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!	vv. 10-12 reveal God's warning to the nations to worship and revere His Son, so as not to anger Him. This refers primarily to His 2nd Advent.
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Jewish Theological Concepts in Psalm 2 Extended in Other Passages	
The Wrath of God on the Earth (The Day of the Lord: The Tribulation)	The Kingdom of God on the Earth (Messianic Kingdom: Christ Rules as King)
Isaiah 2.20-21, 24.19-23, 34.1-3; Jeremiah 30.5-7; Zephaniah 1; Joel 2.1-11, 30-31; Zechariah 14.1-7	Isaiah 2.2-5, 9.6-7, 11.1-16; Jeremiah 23.3-8, 30.8-24; Ezekiel 36.21-38, 37.1-28; Zechariah 14.8-11

The Messiah was the principal actor of these events. The primary revelation about the Messiah the prophets had disclosed was about His reign as King in the kingdom of God on earth (Zechariah 14.9). In the Gospels, one can gain tremendous insight into Jewish theology by reading Luke 1-2. The testimonies of Zechariah, the priest, Mary, the mother of Jesus, Simeon, the righteous Jew, and Anna, the prophetess provide great insight into what godly Jews understood about God's plan.

By means of the Messiah's rule God would fulfill His covenant promises to Israel and elevate them to be the premier nation on earth (Deuteronomy 28.1, 13). Israel in the kingdom will be a large country occupying the boundaries God gave Abraham. The nation will cover most of the Mideast (from the Nile to the

Euphrates to the Red Sea to the Mediterranean—Exodus 23.31; Ezekiel 47.17-20; Genesis 15.18; Numbers 34.6, 11-12; Deuteronomy 11.24; Joshua 1.4.). This promise was the hope of believing Jews in the time of Jesus (Luke 1. 30-33, 46-55, 67-79, 2.27-32). Much more vague were prophecies concerning the Messiah's suffering. Especially cryptic was how He would deal with the problem of sin. Only one passage dealt with this aspect of His work: Isaiah 53. The Jews had no understanding of the meaning of this passage (and still do not).² For them, the animal sacrifices offered by the priesthood of Israel were reality, not shadows. They had no idea of a greater truth beyond them.

Shortest Course of Jewish Theology

The shortest, most succinct course in Jewish theology is Isaiah 61.1-2. In two verses (really one) Isaiah laid out the principle elements of Jewish theology. Isaiah 61 reads:

¹ *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners;*

² *To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn,*

Isaiah 61.2 Succinctly Summarized God's Theological Program For Israel and the Nations ³	
a) To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord	1st Advent (Christ solves the problem of sin)
b) The day of vengeance of our God	God's Wrath (Tribulation) against His enemies
c) To comfort all who mourn	2nd Advent and Establishment of Messianic Kingdom on Earth

Verse 1 elaborates upon verse 2a. It outlined the Lord's first

advent. Jesus confirmed this prophecy and quoted it in his visit to the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4.16-21). What was striking about the Lord's reading (which His listeners noted) was that He only quoted verses 1-2a. He did not quote verse 2b and 2c. In other words, He stopped in the middle of the verse. The reason He did not read the entire verse was that He knew verse 2b and 2c composed two large-scale and separate parts of Jewish theology which would be fulfilled later.

Verse 2b described God's wrath, the "day of vengeance of our God," i.e., the Day of the Lord. In His response on the mount of Olives to His disciples question about end-time events the Lord called this time the "Tribulation" (Matthew 24.15-16 cf. Daniel 9.27, 11.31, 12.11).

Verse 2c, "to comfort all who mourn" refers to the Messianic kingdom which will last for 1,000 years on the earth. In this kingdom God will smooth out life's inequities (Isaiah 40.3-5; Matthew 6.10). The Lord will reign over the earth as King (Zechariah 14.9) and it will be a time of unprecedented peace and righteousness (Isaiah 11.1-9). God will fulfill all His covenant promises to Israel and Israel will be the premier nation of the world (Deuteronomy 28.1, 13).

Conclusion

While Jewish theology is simple and brief in its basic conceptions, it is replete with detail. We have many hundreds of passages devoted to it (most of the Old Testament, the Gospels, and all non-Pauline writers).

Christian theology (things that pertain to the Church, the body of Christ), is wholly found in the writings of Paul. The reason for this is God did not reveal the Church in the Old Testament, in Jesus' earthly ministry, or to the Twelve. He revealed it to Paul alone. Paul called the principal elements of Christian theology "secrets" ([μυστήριον](#)) because that is what they were. God had kept them secret until He revealed

them to and through Paul.⁴

¹ See the author's study, [Covenants of Israel](#), for more information on them.

² See Acts 8.26-39. The Ethiopian eunuch, a Jew who served as Secretary of the Treasury for Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, was returning home after having gone to Jerusalem to worship. As he traveled, he read Isaiah 53. He did not understand it. The Lord directed Phillip to him who explained the passage. The Ethiopian Jew was not dumb. His ignorance revealed this Scripture was not understood by educated Jews.

³ What is obviously missing in this theology is the Church, the body of Christ. God did not reveal the Church, the body of Christ until He saved and commissioned Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles. Thus, all *Christian* i.e., Church theology begins with Paul and comes from him alone.

⁴ For more information on these "secrets" see the author's other articles, especially, [Paul's "Mystery"](#).

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