

John Goldingay. *Reading Jesus's Bible: How the New Testament Helps Us Understand the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. 262 pages, soft cover, \$ 24.00. ISBN 978-0-8028-7364-4.

In chapter 1 ('Introduction' of the book under discussion), Goldingay states his basic conviction that both the Old and New Testaments are essential for understanding each other: '... we learn to read the OT by reading backwards from the Gospels, and – at the same time – we learn how to read the Gospels by reading forwards from the OT' (p. 1). Goldingay then points out that the term *Old Testament* does not occur in the New Testament, which rather refers simply to the 'Scriptures'. Since 'Old' can be understood (and often is) in the sense of something that is past and completed, Goldingay prefers to use the term 'First Testament' (p. 2).

Goldingay mainly concentrates on the Gospel according to Matthew, where he finds his framework for reading the First Testament in light of the New Testament. From Matthew he derives five ways of reading the First Testament (p. 3): (1) Jesus is the climax of the story that the First Testament is telling; (2) Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises made in the First Testament; (3) The images, ideas and words of the First Testament help us to understand Jesus; (4) The First Testament shows the nature of a relationship with God, which is then lived and taught by Jesus; and (5) The moral teaching of Jesus has its foundation in the First Testament.

The book then follows and elaborates on each of these five reading directives in chapters 2 through to chapter 6. Each chapter starts with one or more texts from Matthew, proceeds to other passages in the New Testament, and then turns to the Old (First) Testament. Each chapter then closes with some questions for discussion. These questions set out to summarise the main points of the respective chapter to suggest relevance to the reader's own congregational or spiritual life.

Chapter 2 ('Story') speaks about the story that begins in the First Testament and finally finds its climax in Jesus (pp. 5-60). Goldingay argues that

neither of the two Testaments begins with teaching doctrines about God or the spiritual life of believers. Rather, they open by telling a story about what God has done. This then leads naturally to more concrete teachings. The story, which the New Testament tells at its beginning, is linked to the First Testament story (p. 5). Together, the First and the New Testaments can be understood as 'Act One' and 'Act Two' of 'the Bible's drama' (p. 8). Goldingay argues that the biblical writers are referring to 'historical events'. However, they select, order and rewrite these historical stories in such a way as to communicate their theological perspectives of these stories. When reading these texts, it is therefore vital to not 'let one interest exclude the other' (p. 10). They must be understood as 'narratives based on facts, but incorporating divinely inspired reflection and divinely inspired imagination' (p. 12).

Goldingay then asks how this helps to understand the First Testament 'in its own right' (p. 39). The First Testament presents many different stories, but they must all be understood as parts of one larger story, a 'narrative arc', that 'runs through Genesis – 2Kings as a whole' (p. 40) and then continues in Chronicles to Ezra-Nehemiah. Goldingay understands this second part of the story as 'an alternative version of the story from Genesis – Kings' (p. 52). It 'tells the story of how steps were taken to put things right' (p. 55).

Chapter 3 ('Promises') speaks about the promises made in the First Testament which find their fulfillment in Jesus (pp. 61-103). When the New Testament declares that a special promise is fulfilled in Jesus, this is not primarily meant to prove the truth of the First Testament. The main point of the New Testament is to show how to understand Jesus and how to understand the First Testament as well (p. 63). This means that the prophets are a 'resource' for us 'in understanding who Jesus is' and Jesus helps us to understand the prophets (p. 66). Goldingay argues that we must therefore understand the prophets in both ways: 'in light of their meaning in their context' and 'in light of the way Jesus confirms them and fills out their significance' (p. 74). We cannot anticipate many of the central aspects of Jesus (e.g. his suffering, death and resurrection after three days, his being born from a virgin or living in Nazareth) from the Prophets alone. However, after these things have happened, we can find passages in the First Testament that help us to understand them (p. 77). Goldingay speaks about an 'interpretive process' that 'works backward' (p. 79). After these arguments from the New Testament, Goldingay then considers the Prophets in themselves (pp. 96-103), showing how these texts can be understood in light of the New Testament.

Chapter 4 ('Ideas') speaks about the ideas, images and words of the First Testament which help us to understand Jesus (pp. 104-169). Goldingay considers many words and images used in the New Testament and shows their biblical background in the First Testament. In so doing, he demonstrates how important the understanding of the First Testament is for understanding the New

Testament. This is true for the entire New Testament, but especially the book of Revelation, where there is ‘hardly a verse without an allusion’ to the First Testament (p. 153).

Goldingay then turns to ‘The Theology of the First Testament in the New Testament’ (pp. 158-169). Again, he shows the lines running from the First to the New Testament. He discusses the themes of ‘God’ (pp. 159-160), ‘The World’ (pp. 160-162), ‘Humanity’ (pp. 162-163), ‘Israel’ (pp. 163-165), ‘The Nations’ (pp. 165-166) and ‘The Future’ (pp. 166-168). This discussion can, of course, be only rather brief, but succeeds in demonstrating how the First and the New Testament can indeed be understood as two parts of one Bible.

Chapter 5 (‘Relationship’) turns to the ‘nature of a relationship with God’ (pp. 170-207). Goldingay starts by analysing the story of Jesus’ temptation in Matthew 4:1-11. He argues that: ‘The story implies that people reading the Gospel need also to acquire a knowledge of the Torah good enough to enable them to evaluate suggestions from demonic agencies, whether or not well disguised’ (p. 174). He applies the hermeneutical principles inherent in this story to the reading of the First Testament (pp. 171-172). Then, he turns to the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1-16) and again applies his findings to the First Testament (pp. 176-184). Then he discusses texts in Ephesians, Revelation and Hebrews that speak about the relationship with God (pp. 184-190) and finally turns to the ‘dynamics of life with God in the First Testament itself’ (pp. 191-207).

In chapter 6 (‘Life’) Goldingay looks at the moral teachings of Jesus and how the First Testament provides the foundation of these teachings (pp. 208-247). According to him, Jesus is ‘fulfilling’ or ‘filling out’ the First Testament: ‘What Jesus does is fill out or spell out the implications of the Torah and the Prophets’ (p. 210) in the same way as the prophets themselves did with the Torah (p. 215). After discussing different passages and topics, he then turns to ‘The First Testament’s Ethics in Its Own Right’ (pp. 217-247). As in chapter 4, this can also only be a brief survey. It serves to extend his argument of the unity of both Testaments, and how the understanding of the New Testament helps one to understand the First Testament.

Chapter 7 (‘Conclusions’) is – as was chapter 1 –very short (pp. 248-250). Goldingay summarises the five topics he discussed, showing the interdependency and unity of the First and the New Testaments. He then concludes that: ‘In light of the importance the New Testament attaches to the First Testament, it is odd that the church does not read it much’ (p. 249). His admonition at the very end of the book is therefore: ‘Yes, take up and read’ (250).

Goldingay makes a strong point to demonstrate the value that a comprehensive understanding of the Old Testament has for our understanding of the New Testament, and vice versa. The diversity and breadth of the biblical

passages and topics discussed constitute a major strength of the book. Many exegetical insights are made, which demonstrate the connectedness of Old (First) and New Testaments. The comprehensive scripture index at the back of the book is therefore very helpful. However, the diversity of biblical passages is also, at the same time, partly a weakness. It is sometimes difficult to follow the thread of the argument because of the extent of various passages dealt with. Furthermore, it also tends towards repetition.

It seems that Goldingay sets out to cover *all* passages, words and subjects related to his topic. This again can be very helpful, especially with the index of subjects at the end of the book. However, it is also clear that the presentation cannot proceed at the same time with sufficient depth. Goldingay therefore frequently refers to his Old (First) Testament Theology for further studies.

A final remark: It is not very clear for whom this book is designed. On the one hand it presumes a reader with some previous theological knowledge, but for an academic audience, references to the Greek and Hebrew words are missing as well as interaction with other theological positions. The church layperson, on the other hand, may find many interesting ideas in the book, but may be overwhelmed by the quantity of textual references, concepts and ideas discussed. A thorough understanding of Old and New Testament history is also necessary in order to fully understand all arguments.

Nevertheless, the book appears to fill an important gap in Old and New Testament studies. Unlike the usual procedure, it does not argue from the Old to the New Testament, but starts with the New Testament instead, looking back at the Old. In so doing, it offers some quite new and stimulating insights and helps to understand and defend the unity of the one Bible. Therefore, one can truly say with Goldingay: ‘Yes, take up and read’.

Prof Dr Hans-Georg Wüch, Lecturer and Academic Dean at the Theologisches Seminar Rheinland, Raiffeisenstr. 2, D-57635 Wölmersen, Germany; Professor extraordinarius at the Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, University of South Africa (Pretoria), *E-Mail*: Hans-Georg.Wuench@tsr.de. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2018/v31n2a310>.
