Reading the Bible in the Right Direction

Hermeneutical Considerations for Evangelism and Reconciliation in The Land

By Tim M. Sigler

Many people are confused the first time they open a book written in Hebrew. When viewing the spine of the book, and moving the spine to the left, the title cover isn't there. It's on the opposite side! From a Western perspective this means the front is the back and the back is the front. This is because Hebrew is read from right to left rather than left to right. I'd like to propose that this illustrates the confusion that can exist in biblical interpretation when we read the end of the story first instead of reading the Bible the way it was revealed—beginning with Genesis and proceeding to Revelation.

Some argue that since the New Testament provides God's inspired interpretation of the Old, we should read the New Testament first, and only then turn to the Old in order to avoid missing its ultimate message, which is revealed in the person of Jesus. One ministry suggests the following approach for beginners: read the Gospel of Mark first since it is brief and can be read quickly, then go on to John for its simplicity and clarity. From here, simply continue to Acts, which is action-packed and picks up the story where the Gospels left off, and proceed then to the next book, Romans. "Once you've got these under your belt, you can jump into some of the narrative stories of the Old Testament."[1]

It might sound obvious, but there's something to be said in favor of reading the first testament first. Reading the Old Testament first does not neglect or subordinate the value of the New. Rather, it allows the reader to appreciate the New Testament more when it is viewed *with* its divinely communicated and logically necessary preparation and foreground. This approach does *not* a read all that the New Testament says about Jesus back into the Old Testament. Rather, it appreciates the gradual development of

[1] http://cms.intervarsity.org/studentsoul/item/start-reading-bible.

many biblical themes that culminate in the person and work of Jesus the Messiah. Just as volume II assumes that the reader understands volume I with any other written work, so the authors of the New Testament assume a knowledge of the Old Testament as prerequisite for appreciating their message of Jesus as Israel's promised Messiah. Of course, once a reader completes volume II, he will better understand volume I—but volume II is not to be placed as a grid over volume I before it has been read. Once Scripture is read in the order God revealed it, we should interpret the entire Bible in light of the entire Bible.[2]

A colleague of mine likes to use the wedding cake metaphor (see Scripture/wedding cake graphic). You don't cut right into the middle of the cake, but enjoy and appreciate each layer for the role it is intended to play. Just because the bride and groom crown the cake doesn't mean we eat the top layer first. In many cases, these cake tops are stored away frozen for later enjoyment on the one-year anniversary. The cake top is held up by its base and is more secure because of its foundation. Similarly, the anticipation of messianic figures throughout Israel's history, and the expectations raised by Israel's prophets, uphold the Bible's culminating message of Jesus as the Messiah. Only with the foundation of the Old Testament firmly established are we properly prepared to appreciate the crowning of the cake with the Messianic groom and His bride—consisting of Jews and Gentiles whom He has chosen for His own.

Trevor McIlwain of New Tribes Mission reached a similar conclusion. As he sought to disciple new believers and share the gospel with unreached tribal people in the Philippines, he began teaching through the Gospel of John. However, he became increasingly aware that his audience could not understand and appreciate John's message. He was failing to communicate. McIlwain recounts,

[2] This approach shares themes with what is often called "intertextuality," and, though it is described variously by different users, my suggestion is that we begin reading at the beginning of the biblical story line and proceed to the end rather than beginning with the New Testament and reading it as a grid over top of the Old. Then all of Scripture interprets all of Scripture, with interrelated allusions and quotations throughout the testaments. But the basis or foundation is always that which was first revealed. Our interpretations are also shaped by those who share an appreciation for these same texts and influence traditional ways in which they come to be understood (our reading communities). But as helpful as such traditions are, they are not authoritative.

> Starting with great enthusiasm, it soon became apparent that my hearers were not ready for an expositional study of John. They could not understand any of the verses containing direct references or allusions to people or stories from the Old Testament because they had never been taught the basic Old Testament historical sequence of events as one complete story.[3]

This failure led him to seek a more "effective means of conveying the Gospel clearly" by presenting "it the way God revealed it in Scripture—progressively, and in context of His dealing with mankind throughout history."[4] Since God's dealings with mankind were mostly in the context of His dealings with ancient Israel, McIlwain claims that this progressive history of God's revelation is "the basic difference between the Hebrew-Christian faith and all other world religions."[5]

Allowing the Old Testament to pave the way for the New allows God to set the curriculum in the way we study, interpret, and apply the Bible. Put another way, reading the New Testament backward into the Old (along with the later development of church traditions) has been called "a Christian approach." (See chart from Goldsworthy p. 55) But why wouldn't proponents want to call it "messianic"? Could it be that they don't want it to sound too Jewish? This is my concern with Graeme Goldsworthy's model as presented in his book *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible*. He claims,

> In doing biblical theology as Christians, we do not start at Genesis 1 and work our way forward until we discover where it is all leading. Rather we first come to Christ, and he directs us to study the Old Testament in the light of the gospel. The gospel will interpret the Old Testament by showing us its goal and meaning. The Old Testament will increase our understanding of the gospel by showing us what Christ fulfills.[6]

I'll agree with Goldsworthy that interpreting the Bible this way is very "Christian"—but

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[3] Trevor McIlwain, *Firm Foundations: Creation to Christ* (Sanford, FL: New Tribes Mission, 1991), 31.

[4] McIlwain, *Firm Foundations,* 37.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1991), 55.

only in the historical sense of the word (i.e., that's exactly what was done throughout most of Church history). But I disagree with the path the majority of the Church has taken throughout this history[7]—a path which largely excluded God's continual love for the Jewish people,[8] intentionally distanced itself from biblically Jewish patterns of worship,[9] and culminated in various forms of Christian anti-Semitism that are still present in much of Christian theology today.[10] (See my hermeneutical spiral that begins with Genesis on one side and spins out toward Revelation on the other side while hitting all the other parts of Scripture before getting there.) Perhaps starting with Genesis and allowing its promises to Abraham and his offspring to stand unbroken would help Christians to have the ongoing love for the Jewish people that is recorded in the New Testament—despite Israel's overwhelming rejection of Jesus as the Messiah (Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34; Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1-3; 11:1). There is much to gain in our understanding of the entire Bible when we read it in the right direction.

How Does Reading in the Right Direction Help Us Better Understand the Bible?

[7] This is not a new observation. Many have critiqued the Church's anti-Jewish bias. For example, see Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (NAC Studies in Bible & Theology; Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2007); Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origins and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Rome, Italy: Instituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000); William Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate* (New York: Jason Aaronson, 1993; revised, Rowman & Littlefield, 1995). Many of the documents of this sad history are available at the cyber-archive Dialogika (http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/primary-texts-from-the-history-of-the-relationship#list).

[8] For example, Chrysostom negatively influenced many early believers through his passionate sermons filled with hateful rhetoric and charges of deicide, such as the following claim that "the martyrs have a special hatred for the Jews since the Jews crucified him for whom they have a special love. The Jews said: 'His blood be on us and on our children' the martyrs poured out their own blood for him whom the Jews had slain [*sic*]. So the martyrs would be glad to hear this discourse." *Orations against the Jews,* VI:I:7.

[9] For instance, Justin Martyr discouraged Jewish and Gentile believers from participating in the forms of worship God gave to Israel. "For we too would observe the fleshly circumcision, and the Sabbaths, and in short all the feasts, if we did not know for what reason they were enjoined you, namely, on account of your transgressions and the hardness of your hearts." http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html

[10] In an effort to improve Jewish-Christian relations, Pope John Paul II addressed participants at a Vatican symposium on October 31, 1997, as follows: "In the Christian world . . . erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament relative to the Jewish people and their presumed guilt circulated for too long, engendering sentiments of hostility toward this people." http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/321-jp2-97oct31. A number of troubling examples of such erroneous interpretations are outlined in Maurice Casey's critique of one of the most authoritative theological dictionaries of the last century. "Some Anti-Semitic Assumptions in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*," *Novum Testamentum* 41:3 (1999): 280-291.

1. Reading in the right direction recognizes Israel as Israel, not the church.

When one begins with Genesis and continues reading through the plotline of the Bible, there is not a hidden asterisk hinting that Israel would one day mean something other than Israel. The first testament is the basis for the second, and in both testaments God reiterates His plan to use Israel, the Jewish people, as those through whom He would bless all the families of the earth.

Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, in their otherwise very helpful work, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, argue that the New Testament "applies to the Church many OT passages that originally applied solely to Israel (see esp. 1 Peter 2:4–10)."[11] This statement by itself is correct, but their expansion on it is problematic. They state:

> In fact Paul specifically quotes from God's initial covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:3b)—"All nations will be blessed through you" (Gal. 3:8)—as part of the "gospel," which foresaw Gentiles coming to faith in Christ. So it seems highly incongruous to take the first half of the verse out of Genesis and assume that "Israel" still means a literal Jewish nation. Although it is popular among conservative American Christians to cite Genesis 12:3a ("I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse") as a reason for supporting the current state of Israel, legitimate principles of application would seem to require that the "you" in this text now refers to the Church of Jesus Christ. In other words, God will bless those who support Christian causes and will not bless those who attack them.[12]

The authors contend that one should not interpret "Israel" *literally* as the Jewish people, thus eliminating the divine encouragement to bless the Jewish people today. But are we able to so quickly wrest away from ethnic Israel these promises of God's blessing? And why would we want to unless we are reading the New Testament back into the Old—

[11] William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Revised and Updated; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 496. I have happily used this work as a required textbook in my hermeneutics courses for over a decade, and I appreciate their overall contribution very much. But I take issue with this particular point.

[12] Ibid.

and that through the lens of a history of Christian tradition known as supersessionism (the view that the Church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people)?

R. Kendall Soulen correctly identifies a core problem of supersessionism. The problem is in the way many Christians understand the Bible's overall message. In describing what he calls "structural supersessionism," he discusses the big picture of the biblical plotline. "The standard model [within Christian theology] is structurally supersessionist *because it unifies the Christian canon in a manner that renders the Hebrew Scriptures largely indecisive for shaping conclusions about God's purposes to engage creation in universal and enduring ways*."[13] He summarizes how this view boils down the biblical storyline: "The standard [supersessionist] canonical narrative turns on four key episodes: God's intention to consummate the first parents whom God has created, the fall, Christ's incarnation and the inauguration of the church, and final consummation."[14] What is the problem with this? According to Soulen (and I heartily agree), it "completely neglects the Hebrew Scriptures, with the exception of Genesis 1–3!"[15] Such an approach to tracing the biblical plotline is very selective. Michael Vlach ties this approach "to the supersessionist concept of 'New Testament priority' in which the NT is viewed as superseding the original meanings of OT passages."[16] We can avoid this mistake by reading the Bible in the right direction. As Soulen suggests, doing so *'renders the Hebrew Scriptures to be largely* decisive *for shaping conclusions about God's purposes to engage creation in universal and enduring ways.'* This is why we start in the Old Testament—establishing God's plan to bless the nations through Israel—and never depart from God's own explanation of His plan as it unfolds to include both Israel and the nations in the New Covenant.

2. Reading in the right direction celebrates both Jews and Gentiles in God's redemptive plan.

Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard make their claim about Genesis 12:3 modestly when

[13] R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 31.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 17.

they *un-apply* the promises of Genesis to ethnic Israel and *reapply* them to the Church. Note their carefully-chosen and nuanced wording: "legitimate principles of application *would seem to require* . . ." (emphasis mine). But maybe legitimate principles don't *require* this at all. Galatians 3:8 states, *And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand,* saying, *"In you all the nations shall be blessed."* Certainly, the promise to Abraham is part of the gospel as these authors claim. But that gospel is the good news of Gentile *inclusion*—not of Jewish *exclusion* or replacement. While it is true that God's promise to bless Abraham and his offspring (a promise reiterated to Isaac and Jacob) is extended to apply to the Church today as both Jews and Gentiles are united through faith in Jesus as Messiah (Gal. 3:29), this promise is not un-applied to ethnic Israel. And this application does not make Israel the Church, even by application. We cannot state that "God will bless those who support Christian causes and will not bless those who attack them"[17] with the same force that we can claim the promise to Abraham and his offspring. That would be a much farther movement away from the original meaning and application of Genesis—a movement the New Testament does not make but that some early Church Fathers did.

When the Bible is read in the right direction, Jesus is seen both in the development of and as the culmination of the biblical story line with all of its imagery, promises, prophecies, and allusions given to Israel. This biblically focused picture of Jesus that develops through this perspective sees him more clearly through a bloodstained doorpost than through a stained glass window. This later approach to understanding Jesus through Christian tradition can be appreciated, but it is not authoritative. The images of Jesus in Christian art may be inspiring, but they are not inspired. For these reasons, it is important to push ourselves further back, beyond the Jesus of church tradition, to the Jesus of Scripture—and the Scripture that Jesus read and quoted—which we might call the Older Testament. *"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."* (John 5:39)

[17] Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 496.

But this perspective does not merely see the Old Testament as a series of proof texts that can be referred to on the rare occasion when one wants to find support for a New Testament truth, or as something to be read only after reading the New Testament. This is an insult to God's own plan of self-revelation. And this is why the first testament is the primary place to look for His plan of redemption — a plan which includes sending His Messiah to the Jewish people and offering salvation through His Jewish ambassadors from Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world. But it does not culminate there. This redemptive plan also holds out a future for unbelieving Israel, as this same Messiah will return once more with salvation for the Jewish people through whom God blessed the nations—not to Rome, Geneva, London, New York, or New Guinea, but to Jerusalem. Viewing Jesus through the lens of certain Christian traditions may see the culmination of God's plan as moving away from Jerusalem and toward the front steps of a church building or cathedral as the ultimate symbol of the divine plan. But the Bible sees Jews and Gentiles from every tribe and language worshiping the lamb around the throne promised to David in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 5:9). Before Him we will all bow and give allegiance in joyful submission. *And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him*. (Rev. 22:3)

It must be pointed out that the New Testament not only emphasizes the Jewish origin, roots, and identity of the early church, but also the ongoing presence of believing Jews as Gentiles were added to the ranks. Revelation, as the closing book of the New Testament, cites the Old Testament more than any other New Testament book—and it does so with great appreciation for God's continued love for both Jews and Gentiles. Twelve thousand Jews from each of the twelve tribes of Israel will make up the 144,000 whom God protects during the tribulation period (7:4; 14:1-3). While it is correct to note that Revelation has the redeemed worshipping around the Lamb's throne from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (5:9), the emphasis is not on Jewish exclusion but Gentile inclusion. In fact, the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, has twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel written on them (21:12). And the wall of the city has twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles written

on them (21:14). This imagery celebrates both the inclusion of Gentiles and the ongoing place of the Jewish people in God's redemptive plan.

3. Reading in the right direction appreciates the Jewishness of Jesus and the gospel.

When Paul explains the gospel in the opening comments of his letter to the believers at Rome, he introduces Jesus in a way that many gospel tracts fail to do today. He immediately links Jesus to the prophecies of the Old Testament and to the Messianic line God promised through King David.

> *Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*. (Rom. 1:1–4)

When asked the straightforward question, "What is the gospel?" many modern followers of Jesus will respond by discussing the saving message of the gospel, the life-changing power of the gospel, or the personal benefits of the gospel. Few will follow Paul's lead in connecting the gospel to God's redemptive plan as revealed in the first testament— a plan that involved raising up a descendant of David. But this is exactly what Paul did when introducing the gospel to which he was committed. He did not view Jesus' emergence from the line of David as insignificant historical trivia (e.g., Question: from what tribe was Joshua the son of Nun? Answer: Ephraim, see Num. 13:8, 16).

Paul emphasized the historical importance of Old Testament prophecy that connected Jesus to David. When one reads the first testament first, it is clear that just as there is a priestly tribe (Levi), there is also a kingly tribe (Judah, see Gen. 49:10). Israel's first king, Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, was chosen by the people and thus flawed from the start. But *God* chose King David, who came from the line of Judah. To David God promised, "your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16). Those who looked

for God's salvation awaited a descendant of David who would serve as God's anointed leader. No one could be the messiah except a son of David.

For this reason, Matthew introduced his Gospel with the words, *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham* (Matt. 1:1). And on four different occasions in his Gospel when people recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, they cried out for salvation with words like "Son of David, have mercy on us!" (9:27; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9). Those who were less certain about Jesus' true identity asked, "*Could this be the Son of David*?" (12:23). But one thing was clear throughout all of Matthew's account—God would only bring salvation through a descendant of David.

Unfortunately, many Christians today seem to overlook Jesus' identity as the son of David and His connection to the Tribe of Judah and the Jewish people as a whole. It seems no longer relevant that He was the long-awaited Messiah of Israel who came as the fulfillment of many prophecies. Rather, He is happily portrayed in Christian art as the non-ethnic international Jesus of no particular flavor, or the ethnic Jesus of color that suits a given local constituency, or even as the politically useful image of Jesus as a Palestinian.[18]

Reading the Bible in the right direction focuses on the Jewishness of Jesus because this is the Bible's own focus. Jesus was not being rude or racist to the Samaritan woman when He explained, "*You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews*" (John 4:22). It was God's plan to bless all the families of the earth through the One Matthew introduced as *the Son of David, the Son of Abraham* (Matt. 1:1). As some of us like to say, "If Jesus isn't the Jewish Messiah, He isn't anybody's Messiah."

4. Reading in the right direction recognizes God's faithfulness in preserving a Jewish remnant in every age and anticipates the restoration of the Jewish people.

[18] Reference to the following news item does not suggest agreement with its views: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/12/jesus-palestinian-jewish-christmas.html#

Scripture is clear that God did not choose Israel because of her own greatness in number or spiritual commitment. But he did choose Israel nonetheless:

> *For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.* (Deut. 7:6-8)

The Jewish people did not forfeit God's promises to the patriarchs or their standing as His chosen people by disobeying the Torah in the Old Testament, or by refusing to believe in the Messiah in the New Testament. Rather, God always preserved a remnant among His people through whom His promises would continue. Paul assured his readers about God's continued dealings with the Jewish people. "*Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace*." (Rom. 11:5) Reading the Bible in the right direction causes us to affirm that God's plan for the Jewish people is not only in the past tense but in the present and future as well.

This Jewish remnant does not exist merely as a reminder of the way in which God once worked in the history of redemption—it also points toward a glorious future. Many Christians did not appreciate or anticipate this hope of restoration for the Jewish people. The destruction of the temple, dispersion from the land, and demonization of Jews by some within Christendom led many to conclude that God had abandoned the Jewish people. But a number of voices began to suggest a rediscovery of God's ancient promises to Israel. Well before the establishment of the modern State of Israel, preachers such as Charles Haddon Spurgeon read the Scriptures against the majority within Christianity and proclaimed in 1864, "There is to be a political restoration of the Jews."[19] Based upon his study of the Scriptures, he preached, "Israel is now blotted out

[19] http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols10-12/chs582.pdf.

from the map of nations; her sons are scattered far and wide; her daughters mourn beside all the rivers of the earth. Her sacred song is hushed; no king reigns in Jerusalem; she brings forth no governors among her tribes. But she is to be restored; she is to be restored 'as from the dead.'"[20] Similarly, in 1878, well before the beginnings of Jewish immigration known as the aliyah movement, William E. Blackstone's famous book *Jesus Is Coming* predicted, "Israel is to be restored."[21]

How could these men have hoped that there would ever be a regathering of Jewish people to the land of Israel? I believe they recognized God's faithfulness in preserving a Jewish remnant in every age and anticipated the restoration of the Jewish people because they read the Bible correctly—not replacing the Old Testament with the New, but reading the Old on the path toward the New. And history confirmed that their outlandish predictions were correct. This approach to reading the Bible must govern our own approach to understanding the current realities among Jews and Arabs in the Land today.

5. Reading the Bible in the right direction protects us from the arrogance against which Paul warns.

The Apostle Paul warns the Gentile believers at Rome as follows:

> *For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those*

[20] Ibid.

[21] This is the title of chapter 15 in his book that sold millions of copies and was translated into 48 languages. See also Jonathan Moorhead, "The Father of Zionism: William E. Blackstone?" *JETS* 53 (2010): 787-800. Blackstone influenced such preachers and evangelists as D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey.

> *who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?* (Rom. 11:16-24)

What is mainly a "Gentile church" today—and largely devoid of appreciation for God's choice of or ongoing special love for the Jewish people—can benefit from Paul's warning in vv. 21-22. A mere outward profession of Christ or connection to Christendom will not pass the bar of God's judgment. Jesus assured His followers that there would be surprise and disappointment at the judgment. "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven . . .*" (Matt. 7:21). Elsewhere, Paul warns both Jews and Gentiles of misplaced confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:1-3). Certainly, these will not stand in the day of judgment. But here in Romans 11:20-21, he cautions Gentile believers against "sinful pride and arrogant superiority"[22] over both unbelieving and believing Jews, lest they also should be "cut off." Douglas Moo's comments are instructive here:

> Gentile-Christian boasting over Jews is probably not the result of anti-Semitism generally, but of a mistaken reading of the course of salvation history. These Gentile Christians appear to have concluded that the unprecedented degree in which the doors of salvation were open to Gentiles after the coming of Christ meant the closing of those same doors to Jews. At the same time, these Gentile believers were apparently convinced that they belonged to a new people of God that had simply replaced Israel. Those [Jews] who believed, they apparently assumed, could become part of *their* community and on *their* terms (see 14:1–15:13). It is to this kind of attitude that Paul responds in vv. 18b-22.[23]

It is impossible to read the Bible correctly without appreciating what God has done, is

[22] Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 703. But see his helpful comments on the whole periscope; pp. 696-710.

[23] Ibid., 703-4.

doing, and will do with and for the Jewish people, as well as how God will cause the Jewish people to once again be a blessing on the earth. Paul here reminds all believers that God's redemptive plan is not about us—whether we are Jewish or Gentile. God's plan in salvation history has always been to bring glory to Himself through his dealings with mankind—in Israel's history, the Church's history, and ultimately through the coming again of Messiah.

These hermeneutical considerations provide us with a context and starting point for Evangelism and Reconciliation in The Land.

Anything less, fails to tell the story of the gospel the way it is communicated in Scripture. It is important to note that various objections can and will be raised to these hermeneutical considerations for evangelism and reconciliation in the Land. However, these hermeneutical considerations are not optional components of the biblical metanarrative that can be swapped out for other more culturally acceptable or politically correct parts of the story. These Scripturally derived principles are not dependent on the righteousness, justice and equity of any government of the modern State of Israel anymore than the personal salvation of the believer is based on our faithfulness to God. Additionally, these considerations do not ignore the need to acknowledge the plight of Palestinians at the hands of certain Israeli governmental policies as well as those of their own political leaders. Whatever one might be able to do in promoting the gospel among Arabs, it is impossible to bring them to saving faith in a Jesus who is disconnected to the biblical metanarrative—the promised Messiah of Israel and the nations.

Like two people trapped in a miserable marriage where they have grown to hate one another through years of mutual mistreatment, the only hope for any healing and reconciliation is the laying down of one's life on the altar of sacrifice, dying to self, and casting ourselves on the mercies of God who judges righteously. When both parties acknowledge this need for self-sacrificial change, there is even more hope. While this is seldom the choice that embittered partners make, it is the prescribed path found

repeatedly in the Scriptures. Reconciliation is impossible apart from this risky business of self-sacrifice. There is little hope for healing between Jews and Arabs in the foreseeable future while holding tightly to our desires for justice. But there is a great hope and future in store for those who selflessly risk their own desires for peace and safety to love their enemies with the love of Messiah. It is these daring souls who are having the greatest impact for gospel ministry in the Land of Israel and beyond. Who should complain when Israeli congregations send their pastors carrying supplies for the aid of Iraqi refugees in Jordan or Palestinian villages threatened by ISIS? Or when young Israeli Arab believers join the Israeli Defense Forces and explain that it is their faith in Jesus that causes them to love those who are expected to be their enemies? The Jews and Muslims I know who are enjoying the greatest interpersonal peace and mutual love are those who focus less on the hardline political aspirations of their most fanatical countrymen and turn their focus to loving their neighbor irrespective of their ethnicity or citizenship.

The value of the hermeneutical approach here presented is that it seeks to let the Bible tell its story on its own terms. It does not ignore the historical context and grammatical specifics in given passages. It seeks for the author's intent found in the text. And it does not spiritualize Old Testament passages by importing New Testament concepts through the lens of supersessionist traditions within church history. Reading the Bible thusly enables us to see biblical concepts grow and develop, beginning with the Old Testament and continuing through the New—yet without forgetting the Old. This approach agrees heartily with the following sentiment: "To ignore the Old Testament is like making a new friend and never asking about his past."[24] Reading the first testament first trusts God to set the curriculum the way He wants it. He introduces us in His perfect timing to the concepts He wants us to have about Him, His world, ourselves, our sin, our need of Him—and His plan to restore humanity and the world to Himself through His Son, the Messiah. This whole-Bible approach gives the gospel its proper context. This gospel is all we have to offer in promoting evangelism and reconciliation in the Land—

[24] http://www.compellingtruth.org/why-read-Old-Testament.html

and when we appreciate all God has given in this gospel, we find it to be all that we need. After all, this gospel is the power of God to salvation for all who believe.

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