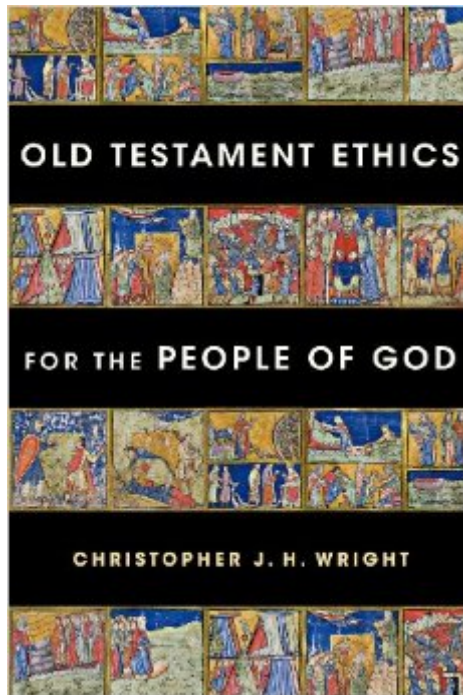


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Old Testament Ethics For The People Of God



Synopsis

Nothing confuses Christian ethics quite like the Old Testament. Some faithful readers struggle through its pages and conclude that they must obey its moral laws but may disregard its ceremonial and civil laws. Others abandon its teaching altogether in favor of a strictly New Testament ethic. Neither option, argues Chris Wright, gives the Old Testament its due. In this innovative approach to Old Testament ethics--fully revised, updated and expanded since its first appearance in 1983 as *Living as the People of God* (An Eye for an Eye in North America) and including material from *Walking in the Ways of the Lord*--Wright examines a theological, social and economic framework for Old Testament ethics. Then he explores a variety of themes in relation to contemporary issues: economics, the land and the poor; politics and a world of nations; law and justice; society and culture; and the way of the individual. This fresh, illuminating study provides a clear basis for a biblical ethic that is faithful to the God of both Testaments.

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Customer Reviews

Let's get one thing straight from the beginning--Old Testament Ethics for the People of God by Christopher J.H. Wright, is a massive endeavor that is both breathtaking in scope and brilliance. It is difficult to evaluate a book that has been called "...a magnum opus" by David L. Baker. Nevertheless, I will attempt to undertake a brief review of this book. The book breaks down into three main sections. Section one, entitled "A Structure For Old Testament Ethics" lays the groundwork for

the entire book. Wright believes OT ethics should be viewed from three different, yet dependent lenses: the theological, social and economic. Wright devotes a chapter to each lens and covers each one well enough that it prepares the reader for his next section. The next section, the real 'meat of the book' if you will, is entitled "Themes in Old Testament Ethics." As one might expect from the title, Wright explores the ethical ideas of various themes within the Old Testament, applying the various lenses to each situation. Each chapter felt pregnant with meaning for today, as Wright covered the topics of ecology, economics and the poor, the land, politics and the nations, justice and righteousness, law and the legal system, culture and family and the way of individuals. While a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this review, there were several major ideas that kept resurfacing throughout. First, Wright draws the readers attention to the communal aspect of ethics. Ethics were not just focused on the individual but the community. Second, all OT ethics are formed the presupposition that the whole Earth is the Lord's. Third, Wright reminds the reader that one of the major purposes of OT ethics was to reveal the nature of Yahweh to the nations.

Old Testament Ethics for the People of God explores the worldview of Israel as a nation. Wright reconstructs this worldview through "their beliefs, stories, and worship" (19). Also, Wright consistently employs a "broad matrix of self-understanding" to "pinpoint three major focal points" (ibid) or angles "the theological angle ("The LORD, as the God of Israel"), the social angle ("Israel themselves as an elect people in unique relation to the Lord"), and the economic angle ("The land Israel believed the Lord had promised and given to them") (ibid). This grid underlays all discussions of the Old Testament ethics in this book. Part one explores this grid in-depth and how it provides structure to the Old Testament ethical laws. He contrasts situational ethics of our day with Israel fundamentally theological ethics (23). What I appreciated most in this section was that Wright connects all ethics back to the person and work of God. For instance, "How we behave depends on what or whom we worship" then as now. So for Israel, ethical behaviour was defined by the identity of this God, their God, Yahweh, "the LORD our God", [sic] the Holy One of Israel" (25). He makes this point when discussing the shema (46). I am the Lord your God is fundamental in understanding the ten words that follow. A different god means a different ten words, and different imperatives for ethical living. He also spends a lot of time talking about God's redemptive action in delivering Israel from Egypt as foundational for understanding the giving of the law and the ethical expectations. The gospel (God's action in redeeming Israel) always comes before the law (34-35). God acts unequivocally for us. We respond in worship and obedience. Wright explains: The sequence of events in the biblical story is very important.

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