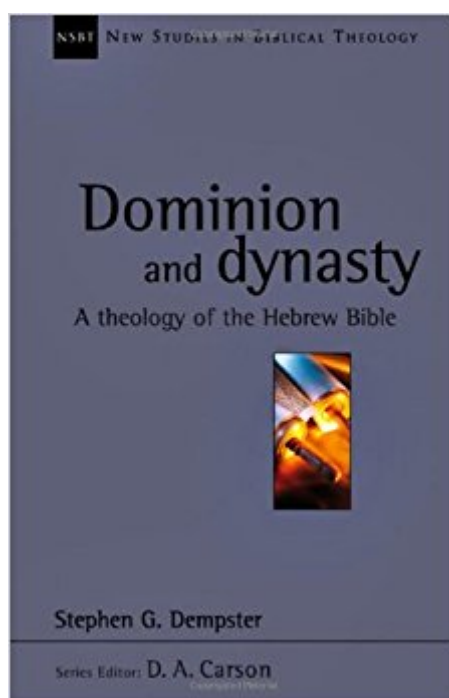


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Dominion And Dynasty: A Theology Of The Hebrew Bible (New Studies In Biblical Theology)



Synopsis

Christian theologians rarely study the Old Testament in its final Hebrew canonical form, even though this was very likely the Bible used by Jesus and the early church. However, once read as a whole, the larger structure of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) provides a "wide-angle lens" through which its contents can be viewed. In this stimulating New Studies in Biblical Theology volume, Stephen G. Dempster argues that, despite its undoubted literary diversity, the Hebrew Bible possesses a remarkable structural and conceptual unity. The various genres and books are placed within a comprehensive narrative framework which provides an overarching literary and historical context. The many texts contribute to this larger text, and find their meaning and significance within its story of "dominion and dynasty," which ranges from Adam to the Son of Man, from David to the coming Davidic king. Addressing key issues in biblical theology, the works comprising New Studies in Biblical Theology are creative attempts to help Christians better understand their Bibles. The NSBT series is edited by D. A. Carson, aiming to simultaneously instruct and to edify, to interact with current scholarship and to point the way ahead.

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Customer Reviews

"Dempster's reading of the story line of the Old Testament is fresh, provocative, helpful--and doubtless will prove to be the stuff of many sermons and lectures. His closing chapter points to some of the links that bind the Old and New Testaments together, an obviously urgent goal for the

Christian preacher and teacher." (D. A. Carson, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois)

Dempster is the Stuart E. Murray Professor of Religious Studies at Atlantic Baptist University in New Brunswick, Canada. He is a contributor to the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (IVP) and *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* (Apollos).

In the last ten years there have been many Biblical Theology books and articles that may not use the label "New Covenant Theology," but nevertheless have much in common with it. Stephen G. Dempster (Atlantic Baptist University, Canada) has written such a book with his recent *Dominion and Dynasty*. Dempster firmly believes that there is one divine author behind the many human authors, which leads him to seek the unity of the text of the Old Testament. In the introduction, he covers foundational methodological issues. The reader must approach Scripture on its own terms, and this is properly done by constantly exposing oneself to the text by reading and re-reading Scripture, tracing themes throughout the canon, and noticing inter-textual links. Next, Dempster addresses the issue of whether the Old Testament can be viewed as a Text or text(s). The author is convinced that when one approaches the Tanakh from a literary standpoint, it should be viewed as a unified Text. Due to the size and diversity of the Tanakh, many historical critical scholars deny unity and thus never see the big picture and thus fail to grasp the whole. Dempster also argues that the order of the books is very important, opting for the order of the Hebrew canon, which is the oldest and is almost certainly the order in which Jesus read his Bible. Dempster then surveys various approaches to Old Testament theology. His approach will be a literary approach looking for unity as he follows the chronological storyline of the Hebrew canon. Chapter two is a preview of the storyline. Dempster sees the twin themes of dominion and dynasty (geography and genealogy) as uniting the Bible. He writes, "Genesis and Chronicles are the beginning and ending, and the middle is carried with a narrative storyline into which many and various poems, much legislation, lists, building instructions, tribal boundary records, reports of visions and prophecies and many small stories have been appropriately placed. The narrative continues until it is interrupted by a substantial block of poetic commentary from the prophet Jeremiah through to the book of Lamentations, after which it resumes with Daniel and concludes with Chronicles" (46). Chapter Three begins the tracing of the storyline. Genesis is obviously foundational to the rest of the canon, so Dempster spends ample time unpacking its themes, and reflecting on its literary structure. The first chapters are filled with royal overtones, with humans "created as rulers of the earth,

representing the mighty name of God throughout the world" (62). The kingdom of God begins on the first pages of Scripture with humans on earth ruling and representing the divine rule. There is rule (dynasty), and every ruler must have land to rule over (dominion). The author simply walks through the book of Genesis for the remainder of the chapter, noting the unified themes along the way (creation, humanity, the fall, the importance of seed and land, the Abraham narrative, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Judah). Chapter Four continues the storyline from Exodus to Deuteronomy, with the introduction of Moses. There is still a clash between "seeds;" "The firstborn son of the Pharaoh was destined to rule but instead it is the firstborn son of Yahweh who will have dominion" (99). Israel, God's son (Ex 4), is spared by the blood of the lamb, but Egypt's firstborn is taken. Israel escapes by crossing the Reed Sea, while their enemies are drowned. The goal of the exodus was to relocate Israel in the land (dominion) of promise in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. God makes a covenant at Sinai, and Israel, as God's redeemed people, is to be a kingdom of priests manifesting God's rule to the world (103). God makes provision for His presence through the building of the tabernacle, and reveals Himself to Moses, emphasizing his divine freedom, grace, and mercy. Leviticus continues the theme, emphasizing sacrifice and holiness. God's people are to receive sacrificial forgiveness, then obey the ethical imperatives to holiness. Their rule is to represent His rule. Numbers is a very pessimistic book, and although Israel is a hard-hearted people, God is gracious and remains faithful to the covenant. Deuteronomy serves a transitional book, concluding the Torah and introducing the history books. There are two very important Deuteronomic laws pertaining to two sets of individuals within the nation: kings (Deut 17) and prophets (Deut 18). Dempster argues that the kingship theme is picking up on the importance of dynasty. God's king is to copy the Torah, read it regularly, and consequently rule in humility and the fear of God. Deuteronomy emphasizes the importance of obeying from the heart (30:11-14), something Israel is unable to do. Dempster writes, "It is almost as if another covenant is needed, one in which the heart is transformed to conform to the demands of the law" (121). Even though Moses was a unique and special prophet, he dies outside of the land, being cursed so that Israel could be blessed. Dempster continues his synthesis in chapter five with the former prophets. Israel continues its journey of unbelief and hard-heartedness. Land is still a very important motif, as they conquer under Joshua's leadership. Judges shows again and again that Israel lacks the heart that is inclined to keep the Torah. Judge after judge fails to lead the people to submit to Yahweh alone. They are in desperate need of a permanent righteous leader, the king who lives according to Deuteronomy 17. Dempster walks through the Samuel/Saul narratives and notes that Saul was doomed from the outset, lacking the heart needed to lead the people in Torah obedience. David

becomes God's man. Dominion and dynasty are reiterated in the covenant with David (2 Sam 7), which is itself built off of the Abrahamic covenant. Jerusalem is the "land" and David's son is the "seed". God says he will build David a house, "which has a dual meaning, denoting on the one hand a building in a specific location and on the other hand a dynasty" (142). It would seem that Solomon would be the promised coming ruler, but he violates the Deuteronomic legislation as well. The author argues in chapter six that the latter prophets are a suspension in the storyline for commentary and reflection on the narrative thus far. The message of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah is largely negative, but exile is not the final word. Both promise a new covenant--that "will work" unlike the old. "A Davidic king with a Torah heart will match a new people with the same" (167). Isaiah promises a coming king and servant who will bring about a new world order (dominion and dynasty). Dempster sees the Twelve as a unified message completing the prophetic commentary by emphasizing Israel's sin, God's judgment, and hope after judgment. Chapter seven continues the break with poetic commentary from the Writings. Ruth tells of the divine goal in history concerning geography and genealogy. Dempster says that from the start, the Psalter contains eschatological expectation for the Messiah's rule over the entire earth. Universal language is rampant, and David emerges as a key figure, even after his death! In chapter eight, Dempster resumes the narrative storyline with Daniel to Chronicles. Daniel envisions the son of man and his everlasting dominion. Esther gives us an Israel-shaped history. In Ezra-Nehemiah, Dempster argues that although Israel has returned to the land, they are still in exile. God's promises are not being fulfilled. Exile will not be over until Israel's Messiah comes. The author writes that Chronicles is last in the Tanakh, and thus ends on an eschatological note. God has not revoked his promise to Abraham. There have been setbacks, but hope for Israel remains. The book ends with a short chapter on "Typology and New Testament Reflections." He believes that typological features in the Bible emerge naturally when the Bible is viewed as one book with a coherent message. Jesus is a new David who will bring about an end to the exile. Dempster succeeds in achieving the purpose of Dominion and Dynasty. One cannot finish this book without understanding the significance of reading the Old Testament as a coherent narrative with a divine author. His argument in each chapter is clear, logical, sustained, and always tied to the text. This is a big picture book though. Dempster rarely gets into specific details, but this is actually very helpful. Many commentaries lose the forest for the trees, especially in the Old Testament. Christians are increasingly biblically illiterate and don't know the first thing about the Old Testament, or about how the Old Testament is a story that finds its climax in the New Covenant ratified by the cross-work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Dominion and Dynasty is a great resource to help pastors and students grasp the big picture of the Old Testament, and understand its

structure. There is not much to say by way of criticism. This is an extremely helpful and insightful addition to biblical theology. Doubtless, some will accuse Dempster of being reductionistic. There are many more themes that unite the canon, but Dempster has made a strong case for geography and genealogy as the twin themes that unite the Bible. One wonders why Dempster didn't include blessing since the promise made to Abraham includes land, seed, and blessing. Also, it wouldn't have taken much time or length to elaborate a bit more on the Kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus. However, this omission is justifiable since his aim was to focus on the Old Testament and the theology therein. Overall, this is a very stimulating read. It is a useful addition to the library of any thoughtful student, pastor, or scholar, but may be too heavy for the average lay person. While not everyone will agree one hundred percent with all of Dempster's exegesis and synthesis, his work cannot be ignored. I have been informed, challenged, and edified by his assessment of the Old Testament's coherent storyline. I have also been reassured there is indeed one divine author behind the many human authors of the Old Testament. Dempster's depth of insight makes it hard to disagree with him, and he has done the church a favor with this insightful work, and it should not be ignored by those with a desire to further their own knowledge of the Old Testament.

I thoroughly enjoyed Stephen Dempster's book. It was required reading for one of my seminary courses re: the Old Testament. The title of Dempster's book, *Dominion and Dynasty*, is the theme that he explores throughout his work. He shows how each OT book develops those twin themes of dominion and dynasty. Now, the brilliance of Dempster's study lies in his approach, which focuses on the canonical order of the OT books in the Hebrew Bible rather than our English ones.

Dempster's work contains many profound theological and literary insights re: each OT book and its relationship with other OT books in the Hebrew Bible. By the time I finished reading this book, I found myself desiring to have an English OT exhibit the order of the Hebrew canon. Personally, I think the order of the latter makes much more sense of the OT's theology, its literary genres, and historical sweep.

Here's a small extract of something I wrote about this book: Regarding Dempster's thesis, he accomplishes his purpose of finding the pattern that reveals the overall message of the Hebrew Bible, yet not without some points I wish he would either correct or expand. First, it could be argued that by starting his work with the theme of dynasty and dominion in mind Dempster is guilty of what he criticized at the beginning: imposing a particular theme to the Hebrew Bible to then read it trying to find how it fits that theme. Although I would agree the theme of dominion and dynasty is

contained in the Hebrew Bible, the reality is that it contains many different themes that might as well be the focus. Secondly, many of Dempster's connections or "typological patterns" seem rather forced to the text while others are clear enough. It is one thing to see how the story of the Levite's concubine in Judges echoes to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, pointing that Israel had become like those cities (32), but another is to say that Moses' "salvation from the water" echoes Noah's salvation from the flood (94). I would have liked to see some sort of rules or parameters that would compels us to see these parallelisms or typologies even when Scripture makes no mention of them. On the other hand, he mentions that the kingdom of God "will eventually triumph over all earthly kingdoms" (222) but the context in which he mentions it is affirming what Keil's says that "the Jewish nation cannot perish" (222). Let me explain: Dempster deals with the Davidic dynasty in which there is hope for the Israelites and ultimately for the world, but he does not deal with the fact that even when the Hebrew Bible see a glorious future for Israel, the New Testament interprets ultimately in the Church. Yes, Dempster mentions very briefly this transition of the kingdom and the people of God from one nation to a multitude of nations (233) but does so at the end of the book and in only four pages. This levels my only real complaint with the book: there is little work on demonstrating through the New Testament that his thesis, theme and arguments are correct. It is understandable that he only dealt with the Hebrew Bible (after all, it is a Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible) but nevertheless the book would have been extremely profitable by having a more lengthy approach of proving his thesis with the New Testament. His style, after the first chapter, is clear and concise. The reader is able to follow his thought flow and at the same time be aware of previous points made by the author. This is very important for me because it is easy to lose readers in thoughts and ideas if a clear thought flow is not expressed or blurred. Yet, Dempster is able to halfway through the book make a reference to something from the first few chapters and the reader would still know what the author is talking about. The book engages the readers to the point of encouraging them to "steep" into the Word to delight in the overall message while also connecting the details. This work is significant for the theologian who wants to understand the message of the Bible better; is significant for the New Testament theologian who has assumed the Old Testament storyline; and also finally significant for believers who have reduced the Old Testament to prophecies and moralistic stories.

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