

Volume 1, Issue 2 (December 2024)
ISSN 3049-9704

Journal of Religion

and Public Life



OCRPL

Oxford Centre for
Religion and Public Life



BOOK REVIEW

John Goldingay, *Torah and Ethics: First Testament Law and Its Implications*

(Cambridge, UK: Grove Books Ltd., 2024).

Rollin G. Grams¹

In *Torah and Ethics*, John Goldingay provides a brief study of 28 pages arranged in six parts:

1. Introduction
2. The Significance of the Torah for Jesus
3. Deuteronomy
4. Exodus
5. Leviticus
6. Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy: The Torah

Goldingay explains that the Pentateuch is *torah* in the sense of teaching, not simply law. It includes both story and regulations or biddings that are integrally related to one another. The story of God's creation, humanity's going wrong, God's forming a people to fulfil creation's project, His freeing people to serve Him, and His setting them on a journey not yet reached is full of ethical implications complemented by the Torah's regulations.

Emphasising the abiding significance of the *Torah* in the New Testament, Goldingay notes that Jesus responded to Satan's temptations by applying Israel's narrative to His own life (Matt 4.1-11). He came to fulfil the Law and the Prophets and called on His followers to do the same—over against others who did not. He challenged people to conform to the deeper intentions of God in creation rather than accommodate to a sinful existence (e.g., divorce in Matt 19.1-12). Further, He affirmed the Law as an expression of love for God and one's neighbour (Matt 22.39).

Goldingay's chapter on Deuteronomy points out that Israel's relationship to God (Deut 5-11) was the basis for the rules of chs 12-26. They were a rebellious people who needed to walk in all God's ways (Deut 10.12-13), be in awe of (fear) Him, love Him (Deut 6.5) and serve Him. They must discipline their minds, follow God's ethical teaching and be exclusively devoted to Him. Since the rules in Deuteronomy sometimes include contextually relative material or accommodations to human waywardness, use of its teaching for ethics calls for discernment between creation ideals and contextual rules, Jesus Himself pressed the laws to further depths and interpreted them in light of our love of God and others.

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A second collection of rules, Exodus 19-24, is part of God's covenant with Israel. It follows the story of God's making Israel His own people in chs 1-18. Goldingay explains that rules about slaves must be understood culturally in terms of handling debt and of young people working with families rather than selling their labour. He emphasises that the laws of the covenant functioned more as a framework for ethics and community life than as literal requirements.

In Leviticus, instructions about ethics in chs 17-27 follow instructions about worship (devotion to God) in chs 1-16. The book is concerned with holiness, which is partly about conforming our lives to God by 'living in love and generosity' and partly about restraining from wrongdoing. Holiness is particularly about 'being different from the everyday and ordinary' with respect to sacred time, space, acts (sacrifices) and people (priests). God's people are to be holy as He is holy (19.2) in family life (sexually, ch. 18) and in community (ch. 19).

The different ethical codes in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy reflect different periods, contexts, emphases and sorts of people. Affirming a common academic understanding in our day, Goldingay says, 'Exodus comprises the earlier regulations for a simpler society, Leviticus contains priestly law, and Deuteronomy contains later teaching to which God had led other theologian-scribes' (p. 27). Jesus came to implement, not abolish, the Torah. Torah was given not to achieve a relationship with God but within an already established, covenant relationship with God based on His creation and deliverance. The Law remains relevant for God's people, who are not freed from its regulations but who, as persons living by the Spirit, fulfil its aims.

As an overview of the Torah and its relevance for Israel and God's people today, Goldingay has been remarkably successful for the book's brevity. The work is easily accessible for laity, including for secondary school students. He describes the contents of these law codes in broad outline and identifies certain key features. He addresses ways in which the Law should be read in its own historical and canonical contexts and interpreted by present-day Christians. Readers will want to read the Old Testament texts alongside this work to appreciate it more, and some will want to dig further into the details of actual regulations and the New Testament's use of them.

Goldingay's suggested further reading will be helpful for further study. I would also recommend further reading on *torah* in the Old Testament in the narrative books and Psalms by Gordon Wenham to continue the study of the First Testament's relevance for Christians today.

Disclosure Statements

The author has not reported any potential conflict of interest.

The author has not reported the use of generative AI in the research for and preparation of this paper.

This research received no specific funding.