Chapter 2 has established an understanding of metaphor with reference to its identification, operation, and cognitive status. This chapter will explore the connection between metaphor and models with particular interest in biblical models. It will discuss the appropriateness of using anthropomorphic language to speak of God and the presence of anthropomorphic models in the Bible. It will also consider the issue of methodology in biblical theology. Finally, it will close with a summary statement of definitions and presuppositions which will guide the remainder of this study.

A. Metaphors and Models in Biblical Literature

The modern study of metaphor has not been content with investigating the meaning of individual examples of metaphor; it has sought to penetrate to a deeper level of thought where metaphors are generated, the level at which a set of metaphors cohere. Discussions about theoretical models among scientists have marked similarities to discussions about metaphor among philosophers of language and literary critics, with the result that their observations tend to be mutually informing. This section will formulate a definition of a model and discuss the power of models. It will point out the inadequacy of depending on a single model when seeking to deal with
transcendent realities and show the need for multiple models. It will close with a proposal for interpreting biblical models.

1. The Definition of a Model

The definition of a model builds on the definition of metaphor set forth in the previous chapter and begins with a recognition that some metaphors lie closer to the root of cognitive activity than others. Unlike individual metaphors, these more powerful devices tend to recur throughout a work of literature and must be interpreted with attention to the dynamics of intertextuality.

The common and fairly general term “metaphor” is freely used to refer to a wide spectrum of ideas ranging from an isolated linguistic idiom to a fundamental concept of thought which has the power to generate a whole set of related expressions. In this latter use, its meaning tends to overlap with the words “model” and “motif.” Because the semantic range of these terms is broad, their use is not consistent, even among writers who are united in their task of studying the ways in which biblical literature portrays God in terms of various roles such as “king” or “husband.”¹ The word “metaphor” can stand for this conceptual pairing of God and role, but must be distinguished from various expressions of the idea at the linguistic level. The term “motif” is common in literary circles and has been profitably applied to the study of the

Bible. Yet when employed in this sense, it too must be distinguished from its more general use. For example, Abrams defines “motif” in broad terms as “an element—a type of incident, device, or formula—which recurs frequently in literature” yet notes that it is sometimes used in the sense of a leitmotif and “applied to the frequent repetition of a significant phrase, or set description, or complex of images, in a single work.” When used to refer to a controlling image, “motif” overlaps with my application of the word “model.” No single term is free of ambiguity and the choice to use one particular word over against another carries with it the obligation to set forth a descriptive definition. So while recognizing the variety of ways in which the word “model” is utilized, especially in the field of science, I nevertheless intend to use it to denote the idea of pairing God and a specific role, following the lead of Max Black, Janet Soskice, Ian Barbour, Ian Ramsey, and Sallie McFague. The advantage of using the word “model” in this context is that it highlights the conceptual power of an image to generate a wide range of notionally coherent expressions.

a) Metaphor and Thought

The fruitfulness of modern research into the nature of metaphor is due

2 Note the use of the word “motif” in the titles listed in the appendix.

in large part to the recognition that metaphor is more a matter of thought than style. It is therefore helpful to distinguish between specific instances of metaphors as linguistic expressions and the underlying concepts they presuppose. Lakoff and Johnson have stimulated a line of inquiry into how thought itself is organized around “metaphorical concepts” which may lie hidden within the ordinary use of language.

Metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words. We shall argue that, on the contrary, human thought processes are largely metaphorical. This is what we mean when we say that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined.4

Their classic example is that a common expression such as “He shot down all of my arguments” is dependent on the metaphorical concept **ARGUMENT IS WAR**.5 A basic metaphorical concept like **TIME IS MONEY** can even organize a coherent system of metaphorical concepts which will have a coherent system of corresponding metaphorical expressions.6 The statements “Grandma seems to be withering away” and “Pierre-August Renoir flourished during the late nineteenth century” are both metaphorical expressions. But the freedom to generate such expressions suggests the presence of a conceptual metaphor in which people are understood in terms of plants. Such concepts often go unrecognized by those who use or coin metaphors and even though a


5 Ibid., 4. Their convention for expressing metaphorical concepts is to print the metaphor in small capitals.

6 Ibid., 9.
particular instance of poetic metaphor may be unique, the underlying conceptual metaphor may be extremely common.\(^7\) This understanding of conceptual metaphors is central to what I will call a “model,” an idea whose presence will usually be triggered by metaphorical or figurative language.

b) Models as Recurrent Images

The presence of models in the Bible has been recognized by interpreters who are sensitive to the literary features of Scripture.\(^8\) Shemaryahu Talmon published a seminal essay on the idea of the “desert” in the Hebrew Bible and provided a helpful definition of a biblical model, which he referred to as a “motif.”

A literary motif is a representative complex theme that recurs within the framework of the Hebrew Bible in variable forms and connections. It is rooted in an actual situation of anthropological or historical nature. In its secondary literary setting, the motif gives expression to ideas and experiences inherent in the original situation and is employed by the author to reactualize in his audience the reactions of the participants in that original situation. The motif represents the essential meaning of the situation, not the situation itself. It is not a mere reiteration of the sensations involved, but rather a heightened and intensified representation of them.\(^9\)

Talmon’s definition is programmatic in that it anchors a model within a historical or anthropological situation. To view God as a host, then, is to


\(^8\) See the appendix for a representative list of studies which deal with particular metaphors and motifs in biblical language.

summon the ideas and experiences of hospitality. Talmon also pointed out the re-use of a model which would imply that the model could be profitably evaluated against the background of synonymous and antonymous ideas.

Drawing on the discussion of models among scientists, Vern Poythress has placed what I am calling a model midway on a continuum of six kinds of analogy, calling it a “theme.”\(^\text{10}\) At the simplest level, there may be a one-line comparison such as “in green pastures he makes me lie down” (Ps 23:2) which compares the activity of God and a shepherd. Next, there may an extended analogy which is common to many parables of Jesus such as the kingdom of God being like a farmer sowing good seed in his field along with enemies who sow weeds (Matt 13:24–30; 36–43). When an analogy is repeated it acquires the status of a biblical theme such as God as King or Father. Beyond this level, however, an analogy may also be helpful in understanding a passage even though that analogy is not the governing analogy for the passage. The use of drama in Romans 7 would fit such a use. An analogy may even be useful in formulating particular doctrines or even an entire theological system, though these uses fall beyond the present consideration of models.

The notions of re-use, figurative language, and truth-value are salient features of biblical models. Using the phrase “metaphor-theme,” Black asserted, “A metaphor-theme [model] is available for repeated use, adaptation, and modification by a variety of speakers or thinkers on any number of specific

occasions”\textsuperscript{11} and “Every metaphor is the tip of a submerged model.”\textsuperscript{12} Preferring to use the term “motif,” Alan Groves has proposed a working definition of models which this study will adopt: “A motif is a recurring image, signaled by figurative language, that says something about one person, place or event in terms of another person, place or event. . . . It has both a rhetorical and revelatory (cognitive) dimension.”\textsuperscript{13}

The actual terms of a model such as “God” and “king” need not be explicit for the model itself to be present in a biblical passage. For example, there is no Hebrew word in the Bible for “host,” yet the model of God as Host can help explain the rise and meaning of the metaphorical invitation, “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and those who have no silver, come, buy and eat!” (Isa 55:1).

c) Intertextuality

Because a model is capable of generating metaphorical expressions across a range of contexts, clarifying the terms of the model may help to explain many related metaphors. For example, some knowledge of aeronautics is necessary in order to comprehend statements such as “Cool your jets!” and “My boss went ballistic” which both depend on the basic metaphor PEOPLE ARE


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 30.

AIRPLANES. But in the Bible, these contexts stand in relation to one another as parts of a whole and are mutually informing. With sensitivity to the literary development of a conceptual metaphor, Kittay and Lehrer noted, “The analysis of metaphor is actually facilitated by using a larger text and a set of related metaphors which form an extended metaphor rather than the isolated metaphorical word, phrase or sentence, for the more extended discourse is less underdetermined in this regard.”

Speaking directly of theological models for God, McFague stated, “A model is a metaphor that has gained sufficient stability and scope so as to present a pattern for relatively comprehensive and coherent explanation.”

The presence of an individual metaphor can thus signal an underlying model which becomes increasingly rich as its uses multiply. Soskice recognized this powerful intertextual dimension in the interpretation of potent metaphors. These metaphors retain their metaphorical nature but they have become more than simple metaphor—they are almost emblematic—and if one were to undertake a study, not of the use of metaphor as a conceptual vehicle in religious language, but of the specific senses of Christian metaphorical uses, it would, in a great part, be a study of gloss upon gloss, use and re-use of the figures which comprise an interweaving of meanings so complex that the possible readings are never exhausted.

Indeed, the model itself speaks not only of its primary subject but of the


entire tradition which holds that model dear. There is a reciprocal relationship between the model and its ultimate literary context. The model both contributes to the formation of that tradition and is itself informed by it. Soskice brought this observation to bear on the issue of biblical models for God.

In ways similar to the allusive techniques of any literary tradition, certain metaphors and models of God’s presence and gracious acts, models which often can stand as significant in their own right without historical glosses, have been used and re-used in the central texts of Christianity and in subsequent expositions of those texts. So, to explain what it means to Christians to say that God is a fountain of living water, or a vine-keeper, or a rock, or fortress, or king requires an account not merely of fountains, rocks, vines, and kings but of a whole tradition of experiences and of the literary tradition which records and interprets them.17

2. The Power of Models

Just as theorists commonly agree that metaphor is a cognitive device capable of dealing with truth and not just style, models are likewise able to disclose and suggest truth. Beyond this function, they also have an impact on the experience of their interpreters. Because of their wide-ranging power, the choice of which models to use in the service of understanding God is a matter of theological authority.

a) Models and Truth

One function of models is to disclose truth. Although Ricoeur refers to meaningfully-significant metaphors as “heuristic fictions” which lay the way for fresh insight, they are not necessarily untrue; they have to do with the logic

17 Ibid.
of discovery, not the logic of proof.\textsuperscript{18} So, while God is not an actual shepherd of sheep in the plain sense of the term, such a model can still function as a valid instrument for understanding the divine relationship to the faithful community. A stance of critical realism with respect to metaphor likewise recognizes the truth-value of models. Soskice affirms,

A model in religious language may evoke an emotional, moral, or spiritual response but this does not mean that the model has no cognitive or explanatory function. In fact the reverse is true; the model can only be affective because it is taken as explanatory.\textsuperscript{19}

Typically, Christians respond to the models of their religious tradition not because they take them to be elegant and compelling means of describing the human condition, but because they believe them in some way to depict state and relations of a transcendent kind.\textsuperscript{20}

The interpretation of a theological model as it surfaces in metaphors throughout the whole of biblical discourse is therefore an exploration into the very real nature of God, especially in relation to human beings. This position differs from that of McFague who denies any reality depicting value to religious models.\textsuperscript{21} So also, Thomas Fawcett robs metaphor of any power to make


\textsuperscript{19} Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language, 109.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 112.

\textsuperscript{21} Sallie McFague TeSelle, Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 44.
cognitive assertions. In the words of Soskice, he believes that “science requires models for explanation, religion values them primarily for their existential content. Science’s interests is in physical objects, but religion deals with spiritual being.”

Beyond their ability to disclose truth, models also aid in the exploration of new truth. Hence, a person can start with an understanding of a biblical model for God as it is evidenced by specific instances of metaphors and then use that knowledge as a launching point for further reflection. A biblical metaphor, then, suggests a model with heuristic importance. Black himself recognized this dimension as a valid implication of the interaction theory and pointed out, “A promising model is one with implications rich enough to suggest novel hypotheses and speculations in the primary field of investigation. ‘Intuitive grasp’ of the model means a ready control of such implications, [and] a capacity to pass freely from one aspect of the model to another.”

Barbour likewise pointed out the heuristic advantage which models provide.

Metaphors . . . may momentarily encourage us to see patterns which we might not have noticed (the process which Black termed ‘construing as’), but models systematically suggest distinctive ways of looking at things (for which I proposed the term ‘interpreting as’ in preference to Hick’s phrase, ‘experiencing as’). In using religious models we find new patterns in the

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world around us and in our lives.\textsuperscript{24}

This pedagogical function is especially prominent in biblical models, whether they appear as either standard or novel metaphors or even as extended stretches of discourse.\textsuperscript{25} By making a connection between two fields, a model can provide a sense of perspective. In the words of Kittay, metaphors provide a perspective from which to gain an understanding of that which is metaphorically portrayed. This is a distinctively cognitive role. Since perspectival implies a subject who observes from a stance, we can say that metaphor provides the linguistic realization for the cognitive activity by which a language speaker makes use of one linguistically articulated domain to gain an understanding of another experiential or conceptual domain, and similarly, by which a hearer grasps such an understanding.\textsuperscript{26}

Black likened one domain of a “memorable metaphor” as a lens through which to view the other, thus bringing the two into cognitive and emotional relationship.\textsuperscript{27} The result is a perspectival gain in meaning which defies paraphrase in prose. He remarked, “We can comment upon the metaphor, but the metaphor itself neither needs nor invites explanation and paraphrase. Metaphorical thought is a distinctive mode of achieving insight, not to be

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 149.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Black, “Models and Archetypes,” 236.
\end{itemize}
construed as an ornamental substitute for plain thought.” When dealing with biblical models which depict the transcendent God, Ramsey added that this power to reveal truth has “implications for theology which emerges as a purveyor of insight, a discipline which spotlights and calls attention to those qualifiers which, in all language, will be associated with models if that language is to be fully adequate to its topic.”

This is, after all, ultimately the way all knowledge grows. Poythress observed, “We learn by relating what is new to what is old. . . . The use of perspectives is a way of becoming self-conscious and deliberate about the use of analogies and in this way promises a systematic way of searching to advance knowledge.”

But models not only suggest new truth, they presuppose and promote a perspective on the world at large, serving as “organizing images.” Barbour claimed that models go beyond the realm of perception to help us notice particular features of the world.

In all these functions—the evocation of attitudes, the guidance of behaviour, the interpretation of experience, and the organization of perceptions—a metaphor is used only momentarily, whereas a model is used in a sustained and systematic fashion. In both cases, however, claims are made about the world and not simply about human feelings and attitudes.

28 Ibid., 237 (italics original).


30 Vern S. Poythress, Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 54.

31 Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 16.
The call to adopt a world view is similar to the change in orientation experienced by those who undergo Christian conversion. According to Macky, “Attitudes are changed, new commitments are called forth, a different orientation towards life arises, we become new people.”32 It is not surprising, then, that in the Hebrew language Scripture is called Miqra. In the words of Michael Fishbane, “Miqra, the Hebrew word for Bible, properly means ‘calling out.’ And what calls out from a text, what beckons and addresses a reader-hearer, if not its words? . . . Miqra is thus a ‘calling out’ to follow the lead of a text’s words, themes, and structures.”33

b) Models and Experience

The act of personally responding to the call provided by a model results in a life-experience that is informed to some degree by that particular model. Thus, models also serve to interpret and integrate experience at the personal and corporate levels. Barbour claimed,

32 Macky, Centrality of Metaphors, 258.

33 Michael Fishbane, Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts (New York: Schocken, 1979) 141. Fishbane is playing off an established use of the verb arq: as “to read” and the noun arqm: as public “reading” (Neh 8:8). The word “Mikra” is also used in modern writing as a synonym for “Bible,” though it has a wider semantic range. “Despite the existing variety of interpretations, Mikra primarily denotes the correct reading of the sacred words, as they have been handed down to us through the activities of numerous writers and copyists in the text of Tenakh [sic], usually called ‘the Old Testament’ by Christians.” (Martin Jan Mulder, “Introduction,” in Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, ed. Martin Jan Mulder with executive ed. Harry Sysling, CRINT 2:1 [Minneapolis: Fortress; Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1990] xxiii).
In biblical religion, these various images [of God as King, Judge, Shepherd, Husband, Father, etc.] form a model of God as a personal being, which is used in interpreting corporate as well as individual experience. ... Models not only direct attention to particular aspects of and patterns in experience but provide a framework within which a variety of types of experience can be integrated. A person with a theistic model will interpret his whole life as lived in the presence of God.34

This experience involves personal decision and involvement as well as emotional and valuational responses.35 The ability of models to deal with life is multifaceted. Terence Fretheim studied the theme of divine suffering with notable awareness of the role of biblical models.

They have a richness of association in human experience; they are true to life, revealing a certain fitness with respect to that experience. They have a capacity to capture, organize, and communicate our experience and understanding of God; to focus our thinking, feeling, and living. They can often be extended to capture many facets of an experience.36

It is not enough to simply affirm that models provide insight to transcendent reality for there is also a reverse flow of ideas. To say that “God is King” is to use an analogy based on human kings, but which is more “real”? If it be accepted that God ordained kingship, then we may properly say that righteous kings are described “theomorphically” based on God as the Original.37

Models also foster relationships in that “through them is consummated

34 Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 56.


37 Poythress, Science and Hermeneutics, 114.
the interchange between God and man.”38 This is not surprising since it is clear that the Bible does not present God in the abstract, as he is within himself, but as he stands in association with humanity as Monarch, Judge, Father, Husband, Rabbi, and Servant.39 Longman and Reid state that, although the Bible is about Yahweh, it “is not about Yahweh in the abstract; it is about God in relation to humankind. Furthermore, this relationship is not so much described as it is narrated. There is a historical dimension to biblical revelation. Thus, a proper biblical theology must take into account the subject matter of the Bible, the divine-human relationship, and the fact that the Bible’s message is told through time.”40 According to Ryken, metaphor “is a prime weapon in combatting a built-in tendency of religious subject matter, namely, its tendency toward moral and spiritual abstraction.”41 The language of systematic theology has historically avoided the metaphors of the Bible in favor of such abstractions, but Macky has observed that “our choice in speaking of God is not between metaphor and literal speech. Rather it is a choice between the authorized, concrete metaphors of the Bible that enable us to participate in a


relationship with God and the humanly-developed abstract metaphors of theology that keep us as spectators and are mainly valuable for marking out the limits of the more concrete metaphors. “42 Vischer was more direct and associated a preference for regarding God in abstract terms with the psychology of avoidance rather than respect. “We delude ourselves, however, if we think that it is genuine awe in the presence of the incomprehensible and unutterable mystery of the Godhead that drives us to this. In truth it is simply flight from the living God: we wish to avoid the personal encounter with him. “43

The narrative genre typical of so much of Scripture is especially suited to such a relational portrayal of God which is less common in abstract theological language which is often more concerned with divine attributes. Anthony Thiselton made the following observation: “Because actions and characters are unfolded through narrative-time which can be slowly focussed or made more urgent, the possibility of grasping personal identities arises in narrative more readily than in less temporally-oriented modes of understanding. “44

c) Models and Authority

The choice of models for God becomes an issue which is linked with one’s view of the locus of theological authority. While my investigation of God


44 Anthony C. Thiselton, New Horizons in Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 567 (italics original).
as Host may stimulate reflection on one’s current experience with God, it is fundamentally an explanation of the biblical message which is taken with full seriousness as the ground of Christian theology. In adopting this presupposition, I differ with Sallie McFague who views biblical models of God as case studies, or examples of how theology is done rather than what the content of that theology should be. She retains the adjective “normative” in regard to Scripture, but redefines it in the following way: “If we wish to take Scripture seriously and see it as normative, we should take it on its own terms as a model of how theology should be done, rather than as the authority dictating the terms in which it is done.”

With this move, she shifts the authority of theology from Scripture to experience and declares, “Our primary datum is not a Christian message for all time which becomes concretized in different contexts; rather, it is experiences of women and men witnessing to the transforming love of God interpreted in a myriad of ways.”

From this presupposition, she then went on to explore how God would be understood when modeled as Mother, Lover, and Friend. She argued that when God is seen as Father, the resulting model is patriarchal. Moreover, this model tends to suppress all other models and is therefore described as being idolatrous, anachronistic, imperialistic, triumphantal, irrelevant, oppressive, and even “opposed to life.”

The consequences of McFague’s methodology on

45 McFague, Models of God, 43.
46 Ibid., 44.
47 Ibid., ix.
biblical theology are indeed profound.

Given the fact that metaphorical concepts provide structure for thought, the change of theological models for God entails no less than a reinterpretation of the basic Christian message. In her investigation of the model “YHWH as Husband of His People,” Stienstra considered McFague’s contribution to our understanding of theological models together with her proposal to break with the models provided by the Bible and chose to disregard McFague’s line of thinking. She wrote, “If a theologian wants to proclaim a form of religion that has little if anything to do with the Hebrew and Christian traditions, this is his own choice and responsibility. But if we regard the Bible as a book that is worth interpreting and translating as such, we must decide to part company with such theologians, and proceed to analyse (and translate) our text(s) without further reference to their proposals.”

So, the set of models accepted within a tradition of thought is not just there for the presentation of ideas but is part of the tradition itself and to expand (or ignore part of) that set is tantamount to redefining that particular tradition. Barbour noted the authority of the community in this matter and stated, “A given community can use a variety of models in such interpretation, but its paradigm tradition sets limits on the range of acceptable models and


49 Nelly Stienstra, YHWH is the Husband of His People: Analysis of a Biblical Metaphor with Special Reference to Translation (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993) 66.
gives emphasis to those experiences whose interpretation it considers most important."  

But it is fair to note that Barbour does not approve of remaining within the framework of traditional Christianity so that when he considers alternative models for Christ and God, these models are usually heterodox.

Another way of supporting the need to remain with biblical models for God is by appealing to the claim that human knowledge stands in an analogous relationship to God’s knowledge which is original. This is what Cornelius Van Til meant when he claimed that we must “think God’s thoughts after him.”

3. The Value of Multiple Models

So far, the value of individual models has been discussed but it is also evident that models function together. A single model offers a single, cognitive perspective but since transcendent realities are complex and vaguely understood, multiple models are necessary in order to more adequately speak of God. The multiplicity of models in the Bible stands as an invitation to interpret them in concert. Poythress explained, “God is revealed in everything, and yet as the Creator he is unique, unlike anything in creation. We are forbidden to think that we could capture Him with a model. All that the Bible reveals about God and all the ways that it has of speaking, using many

50 Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 149.
51 Poythress, Science and Hermeneutics, 170.
analogies, are relevant and profitable. We are to use them all.”

This section will discuss the cooperative function of biblical models.

a) Models and the Richness of Truth

One cannot attempt to specify the relationship of truth-telling models to one another without reference to one’s own view of the nature of truth. Although Lakoff and Johnson have argued convincingly for the existence of conceptual metaphors (what I call models), they are less convincing in the claim that such a view necessarily leads to relativism. They argue for the existence of “truths” but no “truth.” While it may be admitted that for us, “truth is always relative to a conceptual system that is defined in large part by metaphor,” they state their opinion quite clearly: “We do not believe that there is such a thing as objective (absolute and unconditional) truth.” This claim is formally a presupposition rather than a conclusion.

The mere fact of multiple models does not in itself prove or disprove the existence of absolute truth. Poythress asserted, “The use of a multiplicity of perspectives does not constitute a denial of the absoluteness of truth. Rather, it constitutes a recognition of the richness of truth, and it builds on the fact that human beings are limited. Our knowledge of the truth is partial. We know truth, but not all of the truth.”

53 Poythress, Science and Hermeneutics, 117.

54 Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, 159 (italics original).

55 Poythress, Symphonic Theology, 45. With a similar sensitivity to the complexity of biblical truth about God, Ricoeur uses the word “polyphonic” to
which would be tantamount to making truth disappear. Rather, we aim to gain more truth and to set truths in more and more complex relationships to other truths. There is harmony, not contradiction, in truth.\(^\text{56}\)

Unless one subscribes to the view of God presented by process theology, it is clear that the Bible consistently appeals to the existence of one God whose nature remains the same. Yet, the Bible does not present a consistent portrait of God, nor should we expect it to.\(^\text{57}\) Just as God stands in many relationships with creation, humanity at large, and his people specifically, no single model is capable of representing such diversity.\(^\text{58}\) For example, the OT presents God as King, Husband, Shepherd, and Warrior. Each of these models have to do with leadership but still express valuable insights in their own right. On a different topic, Macky has shown how the Apostle Paul depicted the Eschaton through four different systems of symbols: military, organic, judicial and familial.\(^\text{59}\)

Not only does a multiplicity of models for God correspond to the richness of truth, it inhibits the adoption of unwarranted inferences. Models function together to screen out unintended or inappropriate implications that denote the manner in which the partial discourses of Torah, narration, prophecy, wisdom, and hymnody all converge to intend the single referent, God (Ricoeur, “Naming God,” 222).

\(^\text{56}\) Poythress, Symphonic Theology, 88.

\(^\text{57}\) Vawter claimed that if it did, the OT would be guilty of the sin of idolatry, “namely that we have sought to create God according to our own image and likeness” (“The God of the Hebrew Scriptures,” BTB 12 [1982] 4).

\(^\text{58}\) Longman and Reid, God Is a Warrior, 15.

could understandably be drawn from any single model. Referring to God as Father in total isolation from other models could easily lead to the biblically suspect conclusion that God is somehow unfairly biased against those outside of his “family.” Such an inference is held in check by the model of God as a just Judge. Ramsey summarized a general principle: “theology demands and thrives on a diversity of models.” 60 George Chryssides explained, “These [multiple] uses of discourse enable the believer to filter out appropriate sets of connotations which pertain on the one hand to God, and on the other to kings, shepherds, judges and fortresses, and it is by this process of filtering that the believer is able at least partially to understand the meaning of concepts which defy definition at a literal level.” 61 The Bible itself sets a precedent for this kind of activity in that the nature of the church as a community of believers is portrayed in terms of a temple and a human body. 62

b) Complementary Models

Models which refer to the same entity and are of the same logical type are by definition complementary. 63 Biblical models of God are therefore complementary in their reference to God if they all reflect human roles in

60 Ramsey, Models and Mystery, 60.


63 Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 77.
distinction to those models of God as a Rock or Fortress (Ps 18:2[3]).
Accordingly, the models of the kingdom of God as a net (Matt 13:47–50) and
the prophet as a watchman (Ezek 3:16–21) are not complementary.

Yet just because multiple models may be complementary does not mean
that they can be reduced or reconciled, even potentially. An illustration from
science is relevant. The wave model and the particle model underlie the
formalisms of quantum theory, yet cannot be unified, but continue to be used
as complementary models, despite their problematic status.64 In the words of
Niels Bohr himself, “A complete elucidation of one and the same object, may
require diverse points of view which defy a unique description.”65 Bohr said
that among other disciplines such as biology, psychology, and philosophy,
teology could also benefit from this observation.66 The OT contains multiple
models for Israel’s God without evidence of a drive to either unify them under a
“master model” or to let them stand on their own as mutually exclusive options
for understanding God. Walter Brueggemann noted the cooperative function of
these diverse biblical models.

The witnesses in Israel, moreover, do not undertake to harmonize or make
all the metaphors fit together. Rather, the rich range of metaphors often
stand in tension with each other, so that one metaphor may say what is left

64 Ian G. Barbour, Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary

65 Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 75, quoting Niels Bohr, Atomic
Theory and the Description of Nature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
1934) 96.

66 Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 75, with reference to Bohr,
Atomic Theory, 92 ff.
unsaid by another, so that one may correct another, or so that one may deabsolutize another. 67

Multiple complementary models can cohere with one another yet resist reduction. Lakoff and Turner’s comment with regard to poetic metaphor applies well to models which span the breadth of biblical literature.

This coherence among metaphors is a major source of the power of poetry. By forming a composition of several basic metaphors, a poet draws upon the grounding of those metaphors in common experience and knowledge. When that experience and knowledge cohere, the metaphors seem all the more natural and compelling. Complex metaphors grip us partly because they awake in us the experience and knowledge that form the grounding of those metaphors, partly because they make the coherence of that experience and knowledge resonate, and partly because they lead us to form new coherences in what we know and experience. 68

Metaphors in poetry often cohere with one another; death is often described as night, dark, cold, sleep, and rest—all common knowledge features of the source domain. The interpreter of biblical models should therefore be alert to the presence of complementary models. The picture of God as Host is complementary to that of God as Father who kills the fattened calf for the wayward son who has just come home (Luke 15:27).

A model may also contain sub-models, especially when the master-model depends on a particularly rich image, such as kingship which implies sovereignty, wealth, and military leadership among other traits. Nunnally’s study of the fatherhood of God at Qumran not only established this model’s pre-Christian influence on Judaism, but noted several entailments: judgment,
discipline, human responsibility, mercy, compassion, provision, protection, and guidance.69 Ricoeur referred to the ability of “root metaphors” to both assemble concepts and to radiate new ones.

One metaphor, in effect, calls for another and each one stays alive by conserving its power to evoke the whole network. Thus within the Hebraic tradition God is called King, Father, Husband, Lord, Shepherd, and Judge as well as Rock, Fortress, Redeemer, and Suffering Servant. The network engenders what we can call root metaphors, metaphors which, on the one hand, have the power to bring together the partial metaphors borrowed from the diverse fields of our experience and thereby to assure them from a kind of equilibrium. On the other hand, they have the ability to engender a conceptual diversity, I mean, an unlimited number of potential interpretations at a conceptual level. Root metaphors assemble and scatter. They assemble subordinate images together, and they scatter concepts at a higher level.70

There is therefore value in extending our fund of metaphors for God because in so doing, we push ourselves toward greater fullness and balance. Fretheim confessed, “This is one of my basic concerns: to lift up certain neglected metaphors so that our operative fund of them will be more congruent with the biblical witness and our experience of God in the world. While even a multitude of metaphors will not in itself guarantee this objective, their availability can provide greater balance in our understanding of God as they shed light on, and even correct, one another.”71

Like Fretheim, my concern in this dissertation is to pay attention to a


71 Fretheim, Suffering of God, 9.
neglected OT metaphor for God’s actions and attitudes. Most people have experienced the offering and reception of hospitality, yet I do not wish to exegete my personal experience of being a host or guest and then project it onto God. In itself, the Bible offers rich testimony to the manifold nature of God’s ways with people. Christopher Seitz discussed the recent efforts of some to diminish the prominence of biblical concepts like Father and Son, sanitizing the Bible of its masculine references to God. These images are inevitably replaced by others deemed more appropriate to modern sensitivities. However well-intended, these moves step outside the world of the Bible in favor of a revised edition of its basic narrative. Seitz wrote,

> Multiplying possible images for God by reflection on our human experience rather than the biblical text is the worst sort of consumeristic mentality, whereby more brand names, more channels, more options are better than less—especially when we get to do the choosing.  

4. The Interpretation of Models

Just as metaphors have “a source domain, a target domain, and a source-to-target mapping,” and each element is worthy of analysis, models can be analyzed too. Chapter 2 noted that the interpretation of metaphor involves drawing out the similarity and difference between the two domains in a rule-

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governed way, yet this activity ultimately fails to embrace the full sense of the metaphor which defies formal explication. Consideration of a metaphor’s meaning in a non-rule-governed way involves an aesthetically-sensitive use of the productive imagination. Likewise, models can receive formal analysis yet still leave room for exploration. Black observed,

A memorable metaphor has the power to bring two separate domains into cognitive and emotional relations by using language directly appropriate to the one as a lens for seeing the other; the implications, suggestions, and supporting values entwined with the literal use of the metaphorical expression enable us to see a new subject matter in a new way. The extended meanings that result, the relations between initially disparate realms created, can neither be antecedently predicted nor subsequently paraphrased in prose.74

While it is important to remain aware of this imaginative dimension in the interpretation of models, it is nevertheless possible to structure the process of analysis according to a fixed framework. Recognizing a parallel between how metaphor functions at the word level and how motif functions at the level of literature, Alan Groves has borrowed a framework from linguistic theory and applied it to the analysis of motifs understood as images that recur throughout a body of literature.75 This framework considers three factors. First, the “form” of a motif has to do with the elements that signal its presence. Second, a motif’s “range” is its synchronic and diachronic variation of meaning. Third, “distribution” considers the contexts and situations in which the motif occurs.


75 Groves, “Old Testament Motifs,” 2-3. What Groves refers to by the term “motif” is similar to what this study denotes with the term “model.”
The terms of the model itself need to be named and described. For instance, my concern is with “God” and “host” as an individual who extends hospitality in terms of food. The subject of lodging is related but not part of this study. These two terms may also be called the “donor” and “recipient” fields.76 While the nature of the recipient field or target domain “God” is transcendent and therefore relatively unknown except through other models, the donor field is subject to investigation in the light of ancient culture as illuminated through biblical and extra-biblical sources. Nielsen has pointed out the importance of this step by noting, “Since the context [of the donor field] is not only the specific historical situation and the specific literary placing but also the culture in which the image acts, analysis of an image must assume that one obtains a reasonable knowledge of the notions that are associated in the given culture with the image analyzed. If this is neglected, one risks interpreting the image in the light of one’s own preconceptions.”77

Admittedly, every culture has its own set of expectations and practices that constitute good hospitality and these social mores differ according to geography and location in history. But the concept of hospitality is universally understood and honored. With respect to biblical hospitality, then, those who uphold the authority of the Bible bind themselves to the model of God as Host


77 Kirsten Nielsen, There is Hope for a Tree: The Tree as Metaphor in Isaiah, trans. Christine and Frederick Crowley, JSOTSup 65 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989) 66.
as universal and its trans-cultural entailment of being hospitable people, yet remain unbound with respect to the obligation of performing particular ancient and culture-bound practices associated with hospitality.

The nature of the relationship between source and target domains of models has to do with analogies, just as in the case of metaphor. Exploring the positive analogy means pointing out the ways in which God is like a human host. For example, hosts often issue an invitation to a meal and so does Yahweh (Isa 55:1–2). The negative analogy has to do with the ways in which God is unlike a human host, such as, God is not a physical being nor does he expect his guests to leave his house sometime after the meal or special occasion. The neutral analogy is more open-ended, suggestive, and intuitive. Since God cannot be fully repaid or the offer of divine hospitality reciprocated in kind, what might God reasonably expect in return from his guests? Having responded to God’s invitation, how much cordiality should one display and in what forms could this attitude be properly expressed? The answers to questions like these are valid implications of the model yet may not receive much treatment within the span of biblical literature.

Paying attention to the form of a model also means attending to its various linguistic signals: nouns, verbs, synonyms, antonyms, and figures of speech.

Finally, it is important to recognize ancient literary uses of the model.


For example, when explaining how the Bible presents God as a Warrior one should notice that Baal is often presented as a warrior who rides his war-chariot across the clouds. With polemical interest, Psalm 68 calls on the faithful to extol Yahweh who “rides on the clouds.”

b) Range

The range of a model pertains to the synchronic variation of meaning within the model. As Judge, for example, God not only metes out justice to the guilty but defends the oppressed. Range also has to do with the diachronic development of a model throughout Scripture. In Exodus, God hosts his people in the wilderness by providing them with manna, meat, and water but in the eschatological future he will prepare a banquet of rich meat and fine wine for “all peoples” (Isa 25:6). Often a model will undergo a heightened transformation as it crosses the threshold between the testaments. Not only does Jesus provide wine (John 2:1–11) and bread in a remote place (John 6:1–15), he offers his own life, presenting his own body and blood as both food and drink (Matt 26:26–29).

c) Distribution

The distribution of a model considers the locations of its occurrence throughout Scripture. The interpretation is sensitive to the contexts in which

key features tend to occur and how various genres such as narrative, poetry, prophecy, hymnody, and wisdom convey different aspects of the model.

B. Divine Anthropomorphisms and the Language of Revelation

This study began by considering the nature of metaphor and then extended its discussion to the level of biblical models. It noted that the presence of a model is usually indicated by instances of figurative language. When the model is anthropological, the corresponding figures of speech will usually be anthropological as well. Because the subject of divine anthropomorphisms has received substantial attention not only in philosophy but in biblical hermeneutics, it is appropriate to reflect on its relationship to the present study. This section will therefore comment briefly on the antiquity of divine anthropomorphisms and then provide justification for their use from a biblical and theological point of view. It will close by focusing the discussion on the issue of anthropological models.

1. The Antiquity of Anthropomorphic Language

Frederick Ferré argued that the Greeks were the first to distinguish between nonfigurative and metaphorical uses of religious language and he thus regarded the earlier use of figurative language in the Hebrew Bible as “unself-conscious” imagery. His linkage of early literature and “unself-conscious” imagery.

use of imagery, however, does not take stock of anthropomorphic language used to describe divinity in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Syria.\textsuperscript{82} For example, Marjo Korpel claimed that the Ugaritic theologians were fully aware that their descriptions of the gods were couched in anthropomorphic terms. Relating this observation to the language of the OT, Korpel commented, “The interaction-view of metaphor implies that Israel’s anthropomorphic language about God, though definitely less realistic than that of its neighbours, hints at certain essential qualities of God without confining him to the imagery used.”\textsuperscript{83}

The evidence of the OT itself indicates that the writers of ancient Israel were aware that even though God could be represented by anthropomorphic linguistic expressions, God was essentially different. Moses warned the second generation of Israelites not to make an idol (\textit{midrash} or image \textit{mīnmīn}) of people or animals because “you did not see any form on the day the Yahweh spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire” (Deut 4:15). The prohibition against corporeal idolatry is grounded in the inherently non-anthropomorphic and non-theriomorphic nature of God. Speaking of the majestic otherness of the God who dwells above the earth, the prophet exclaimed, “To whom can you compare...”

\begin{flushright}
\text{of accommodation in classical rhetoric and the church fathers see Ford Lewis Battles, “God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity,” Int 31/1 (1977) 21–26.}
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{82} See the list of references in Long, “Dead or Alive?,” 519.

God? And what image can you compare to him?” (Isa 40:18). One implication is that Yahweh is too great to dwell on earth among humans.\(^8^4\) Twice the OT affirms that God is not a man.\(^8^5\) The biblical use of anthropomorphic metaphor for the divine certainly predates the literature of ancient Greece.

2. Justification for Anthropomorphic Language

On one hand, the objection by philosophers and theologians to the appropriateness of anthropomorphic language in Scripture is due partly to the older, ornamental view of metaphor. It is furthermore due partly to an evolutionary view of Israel’s history which maintains that Israelite theology developed from Moses through the Prophets and into Judaism, moving from a physical to a spiritual understanding of the divine nature.\(^8^6\) On the other hand, the presence of anthropomorphic language for God in the Bible together with a self-conscious awareness of its figurative nature provides some justification for its fitness in cognitively-significant descriptions of God’s nature and relationship to creation and his people. But additional support can still be gleaned from the Bible as well as the Christian epistemology of Cornelius Van Til.

Longman has noted that the Bible’s account of humanity’s creation in

\(^8^4\) 1 Kgs 8:27; Isa 57:15; 66:1.

\(^8^5\) Num 23:19; Hos 11:9.

the image of God provides the link necessary to speak of God in human
terms. Furthermore, the fact of the incarnation forever sealed the connection
between the divine and human nature. Mauser observed, “The New Testament
is entirely dominated by the conviction that in Jesus Christ God has come,
lived, and acted as a man. It is, therefore, true to say that the New Testament
presents God’s act radically and fully as a human act: In Christ, God has acted
anthropomorphically.” Likewise, Vischer stated, “The entire Bible testifies
with its every word of the one Word which in Jesus became flesh. The humanity
of Jesus is the truth of the biblical anthropomorphisms.” The incarnation
may be seen as part of a broader perspective in which God accommodated his
truth to human beings. Battles cited the view of Calvin on this matter: “In
Christ God so to speak makes himself little (quodammodo parvum facit), in
order to lower himself to our capacity (ut se ad captum nostrum submittat); and
Christ alone calms our consciences that they may dare intimately (familiariter)
approach God.” Always the pastor, Calvin noted the advantage secured to the

87 Tremper Longman III, “Anthropomorphism,” in The New Dictionary of
Theology, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright, 30–31 (Downers Grove:
InterVarsity, 1988) 31, a point also made by Mauser, “Image of God and
Incarnation, 12.


90 Battles, “God Was Accommodating Himself,” 38, with reference to
Calvin’s commentary on 1 Peter 1:20 (Schipper ed., 1667, Tom. 7, p. 8). For a
fuller treatment of this subject, see Clinton Ashley, “John Calvin’s Utilization
of the Principle of Accommodation and Its Continuing Significance for an
Understanding of Biblical Language” (Ph.D. diss., Southwest Baptist Theological
Seminary, 1972).
believer by God.

Anthropomorphisms and anthropomorphic models of God can also be justified with reference to epistemology. It has already been noted in this chapter that Van Til said we are to “think God’s thoughts after him.”91 This mandate is based on the idea that human knowledge is “analogical” in relation to God’s “original” knowledge, which is sometimes called “archetypal.”92 Because God has accommodated his revelation to humankind, Van Til held to the principle that “all Scripture is anthropomorphic”93 and that in a broad sense, we can only speak anthropomorphically. Van Til professed, “We must speak of God anthropomorphically. The Scripture speaks of God in that way. In fact there is no other way for us to speak of God.”94 With reference to metaphors, then, Poythress claimed that their truthfulness depends on the analogies which exist in the world by virtue of God’s creative work.

Well-chosen metaphors assert the existence of analogies that God has placed in the world, not merely analogies that we impose on an unformed or chaotic world. Thus metaphors assert truth about an analogical structure in the world, and by invoking such analogical structures, they


92 Poythress, Symphonic Theology, 47–49.

93 Frame, Cornelius Van Til, 94 with reference to Van Til, Christian Theory of Knowledge, 37.

also assert truth about their principal subject.95

Beyond the drive to simply justify the use of anthropomorphic language, there is also room to view this phenomenon in Scripture and our corresponding ability to both understand and use it in terms of a gift to be received with a sense of gratitude. Like Van Til, Vischer affirmed the originality of God’s knowledge and pointed out, “Even then, and precisely then, when God speaks in human language, does he speak in his own, in God’s own language. He does not borrow from man ideas and concepts in order to make himself understandable. Rather the reverse occurs, that God himself loans and adapts his concepts and ideas to man. The speech of man is God’s gift and not the creation or product of man.”96 Calvin applied this truth when commenting on the language of the Psalter: “Since he condescends in such a gracious manner to our weakness, surely there is nothing to prevent us from coming to him with the greatest freedom.”97

3. Anthropomorphic Models

Just as a specific instance of metaphor is the tip of a submerged model, so an anthropomorphic description of God presupposes an underlying anthropomorphic model. For example, the line, “Dispute with your mother,

95 Poythress, Science and Hermeneutics, 112.


dispute, for she is not my wife and I am not her husband” (Hos 2:2[4])

presupposes that Yahweh is the husband of his people.98 We can thus expect
the anthropomorphic model “GOD IS A HOST” to inform the anthropomorphic
metaphors of Deuteronomy 32:13: “He [Yahweh] caused him [Israel] to ride on
the heights of the earth, and he fed him with the fruit of the field, and he
nourished him with honey from the crag, and with oil from the flinty rock.”

Yet it is important to point out the difference between anthropomorphic
stories and anthropomorphic metaphor.99 The latter appears when God is said
to see or hear, and less frequently, smell or taste. But in anthropomorphic
stories, God’s actions and attitudes are not merely
described
in anthropomorphic language, God himself appears in plainly human terms.

Stienstra noted that the only truly anthropomorphic stories are restricted to
Genesis and Exodus.100 In Genesis 3, Yahweh walks in the garden in the cool
of the day and converses with Adam. In Genesis 18, Yahweh and angels pay a
visit to Abraham and Sarah, eat their food, and speak with them. In Genesis 32,
Jacob wrestles with “a man” (vayai whom he did not identify until later when he
said, “I have seen God (µyhil¿aÔ face to face” (32:30[31]). In Exodus 24, the “God
of Israel” appears to Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of
Israel in Mount Sinai where they ate and drank together.

While interpreters of the Bible understandably differ in their

98 Stienstra, YHWH is the Husband of His People, 103.
99 Ibid., 55–63.
100 Ibid., 56.
comprehension of these accounts, it is clear that these narratives do not draw on poetic metaphor but rather tell, in simple terms, what happened. There is no hint of these events having taken place in a dream, vision, or prophetic state of altered consciousness. Barr prefers to avoid the term anthropomorphism for these accounts because they are not seriously trying to come to grips with the actual form (morphe) of God; he reserves the category of anthropomorphism for expressions like, “Turn your ear to me” (Ps 31:2).101 Whatever their classification, they belong in the study of biblical models for whether by poetic description or narrative simplicity, Scripture speaks of God in human terms. Beyond these observations, the somewhat artificial and problematic distinction between literal and figurative language use must ultimately be handled on a case-by-case basis.

C. Biblical Theology and the History of Redemption

The study of a theme, dominant metaphor, or model throughout the OT raises substantial methodological issues relative to the program and practice of OT theology, especially when the findings of such a study are brought into relation with the NT. Even though what was known as “The Biblical Theology Movement” was once pronounced dead,102 the twentieth century has witnessed


persistent interest the subject. With the field appearing today to be more
diverse than ever, it is important to clarify one's own presuppositions in order
to situate one's study in relation to the aims and claims of others. The
methodological foundation of this study is primarily redemptive-historical in
that it rests on the positions advanced primarily by Geerhardus Vos, John
Murray, Richard Gaffin, and Willem VanGemeren. This approach has
significant points of contact with the “multiplex approach” of Gerhard Hasel,
which will be set forth below. Finally, this section will demonstrate the
relevance of biblical theology to the study of key models for God in Scripture.

1. The Redemptive-Historical Approach

Geerhardus Vos taught on the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary
as its first Professor of Biblical Theology from 1893 until 1932. After his
retirement, he published the essence of his approach in which he defined the
nature of biblical theology in fairly brief terms: “Biblical Theology is that

103 See the reader compiled by Ben C. Ollenburger, Elmer A. Martens,
and Gerhard F. Hasel, eds., The Flowering of Old Testament Theology: A Reader
in Twentieth-Century Old Testament Theology, 1930–1990, vol. 1, Sources for
Biblical and Theological Study, ed. David W. Baker (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns,

104 Vos receives credit for publishing the seminal work (Geerhardus
Vos, Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,
1948]); with further development provided by John Murray, “Systematic
Theology,” WTJ 25/2 (1963) 133–42; and John Murray, “Systematic Theology:
Second Article,” WTJ 26/1 (1963) 33–46. See also the analysis of Richard B.
Most recently, Willem VanGemeren has elaborated on the approach and
sketched its relevance to the interpretation of the whole Bible (The Progress of
Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem[Grand
Rapids: Zondervan, Academie, 1988]).
branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.”\textsuperscript{105} VanGemeren has pointed out that this approach rests on two presuppositions: the Bible is the Word of God and the word of man.

This method of interpreting the Bible begins with the presupposition that the Bible is both the Word of God and the word of man. As the Word of God the Bible reveals the triune God and his plan of salvation and life for human beings in relation to his grand design for the renewal of heaven and earth.

As the word of man the Bible is the collection of the literary works written by men of God and inspired by the Spirit of God. These literary treasures were written in human languages over many centuries, reflecting different literary conventions and cultures. As such the Scriptures are related to specific cultures. God spoke to the writers in the language of accommodation, and he still speaks to us in a way that we can understand.\textsuperscript{106}

In terms of a full-scale biblical theology, Vos’ book was brief but programmatically significant and the systematic theologian John Murray further developed his ideas. Richard Gaffin has offered a helpful synthesis and analysis of the approach by distinguishing three cardinal characteristics. First, the historical character of special revelation is essential; there is no discontinuity between revelation and history. Second, “The focus is on the historically progressive and differentiated character of special revelation.”\textsuperscript{107} Third, there is an organic unfolding of revelation, not a process of error and correction. “The movement of the revelation process is from what is germinal

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{105} Vos, Biblical Theology, 5.
\textsuperscript{106} VanGemeren, Progress of Redemption, 17.
\textsuperscript{107} Gaffin, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” 289.
\end{footnotesize}
and provisional to what is complete and final.”¹⁰⁸

2. The Multiplex Approach

Since 1972, Gerhard Hasel has kept students of OT theology apprised of significant publications since the Reformation with particular attention paid to the current state of discussion.¹⁰⁹ In spite of the variety of positions taken relative to the sources, methodologies, nature, purpose, function and design of OT theology, Hasel has set forth a set of six proposals which could be designated a “multiplex canonical Old Testament theology.”¹¹⁰ These proposals overlap and supplement the redemptive-historical approach described above.

First, biblical theology should deal with the final, (i.e., canonical) form of each book or block of material.¹¹¹ Regardless of the history of its composition and compilation, the OT has stood as a unified work of literature for approximately two thousand years. As such, it should be interpreted that way.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.


Northrop Frye observed that when we take the Bible as a unit, “it becomes a single, gigantic, complex metaphor, first by tautology, in the sense in which all verbal structures are metaphorical by juxtaposition, and second, in a more specific sense of containing a structure of significantly repeated images.”

Second, the source of OT theology should be the OT canon itself which has priority of appreciation in relation to the historical setting of the OT and ancient Near Eastern thought. Furthermore, as a historical-theological discipline, OT theology uses the tools of historical and philological research to understand what the biblical testimony actually meant.

Third, recognizing their mutual complementarity, OT theology should allow “the various motifs, themes, and concepts to emerge in all their variety and richness without elevating any of these longitudinal perspectives in a single structuring concept.” The quest for a suitable center (Mitte) of the OT such as “covenant,” “holiness of God,” or “promise” have ultimately proven unsuccessful. If one abandons the attempt to derive an axial theme from the whole of the OT or impose a pattern of thought on it, the researcher is free to recognize similarities and differences between various blocks of material.

Leo Perdue conducted a study of the book of Job using a cognitive view of


114 Ibid., 113.

115 Ibid., 203.
metaphor to clarify the structure of the entire book. Without necessarily agreeing with his specific conclusions, Perdue's programmatic statement is relevant.

Old Testament theology must begin with the metaphors which are present in narrative and poetic texts. The theologian should not be content to describe elements of faith, but must explain how narrative and poetry actualize faith and understanding for the implied audience. The task is not simply confessional recital but rather explanation of process. Then one may move to systematic conceptualization. In my judgment this conceptualization would clarify and extend the implicit features of the ancient models. This is proper theological interpretation. Conceived in this fashion, a system is not imposed on the text, but rather grows out of the paradigmatic features inherent in the ancient traditions.116

Fourth, OT theology should highlight the historical growth of ideas by treating “the richness of themes, motifs, concepts, and the like along longitudinal lines in the historical sequence of appearance and development.”117 The sequential temporal location of each book is admittedly difficult to fix and raises questions of authorship and subsequent editorial activity, but it is clear that the simple canonical ordering of the books is not equal to the historical location of their emergence.118 In broad terms, however, the canon of the OT developed over time, resulting in three major collections: Law, Prophets, and Writings.119


119 See the detailed survey of the debate over the historical development of the OT canon by Roger Beckwith, The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism (Grand Rapids:
Fifth, these longitudinal themes, motifs, and concepts can be brought together to show their growth, progression, and expansion throughout the OT period.\textsuperscript{120}

Sixth, the OT is part of a larger whole and OT theology stands in relationship to the NT. No single pattern of development can exhaust the fullness of this “polychromatic” relationship.\textsuperscript{121} The OT must be allowed to speak on its own terms while still recognizing a forward flow which reaches its climax in the NT.\textsuperscript{122} There is a well-recognized possibility and danger of over-reading Christ into the OT, but this fact does not negate the essentially Christocentric character of biblical theology. In the words of VanGemeren,

The redemptive-historical approach assumes that the Bible was primarily given not to convey history or morals but to record God’s fidelity to the nations, the patriarchs, Israel, and the church of Jesus Christ. Through a study of redemptive history, the purpose of God in Christ becomes more evident. This method provides a framework for connecting the parts of Scripture into a coherent whole, but is also displays the many themes as a mosaic. The variety and harmony of Scripture are held in tension by the assumptions that now we know in part and by the confidence that God knows the end from the beginning.\textsuperscript{123}

3. Relevance to the Study of Biblical Models

The study of any individual model for God in the OT is one element

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\textsuperscript{120} Hasel, “Future of Old Testament Theology,” 383.

\textsuperscript{121} Hasel, Old Testament Theology, (4\textsuperscript{th} ed.), 114.


\textsuperscript{123} VanGemeren, Progress of Redemption, 31–32.
contributing to an overall OT theology which ultimately dovetails with NT theology. The primary concern of the present study is the model of God as Host in the Pentateuch, but it would be meaningful to consider how the ideas presented there both develop through the OT and then become realized in the life and work of Jesus Christ, ultimately pointing to fulfillment in the Eschaton. Longman and Reid have published a study explaining how the Bible presents God as a Warrior. Their work presupposes the unity of biblical theology which they defend on theological grounds, though they admit the point can be supported by appealing to the concept of a unified canon as well as the concept of intertextuality within a work of literature.

Commenting on the multiperspectival approach to biblical theology, they state, “The most fruitful biblical-theological studies are those that focus on one of these important metaphors of relationship and follow it from the beginning of biblical revelation to its end, from Genesis to Revelation.” Because a biblical model for God tends to be pervasive as it is re-used in various contexts, an exhaustive study is not only impractical but it can reduce the appeal of the model to incite personal exploration. Therefore, this study must be content to deal with Pentateuch only and seek to elucidate the contours of the model and so provide a foundation for subsequent explanation of related passages.

124 Longman and Reid, God Is a Warrior.
125 Ibid., 26.
126 Ibid., 16.
D. Summary and Commitments

This chapter began with an understanding of metaphor founded in chapter 2 and extended those conclusions to inform the subject of models, particularly as they function within biblical literature. It dealt with the issue of anthropomorphic language for God and sketched the methodological principles of biblical theology as conceived by those in the redemptive-historical school as well as the multiplex proposals of Gerhard Hasel.

In summary, I set forth the following definitions and presuppositions:

(1) A biblical model for God is a conceptual metaphor which presupposes a set of coherent metaphorical expressions and may be present even when the specific terms of the model are not explicit.

(2) An anthropomorphic model of God presents God in terms of a human role, either in anthropological stories or with the use of anthropological or otherwise figurative language.

(3) A model is available for re-use in a variety of contexts and is subject to intertextual analysis.

(4) Like metaphors, biblical models are cognitive devices capable of disclosing truth and stimulating exploration, based on the world view they presuppose.

(5) Biblical models can interpret the experience of people within a given community which agrees to accept such a model as a valid picture of reality.

(6) Biblical models can also foster a meaningful relationship between God and the reader.
(7) The choice concerning which biblical models are valid is central to the issue of theological authority. An affirmation of biblical authority entails a corresponding acceptance of biblical models for God.

(8) No single biblical model is capable of presenting an adequate depiction of God.

(9) The multiple biblical models for God function as complementary (yet not necessarily reducible) witnesses to the authentic nature of God. Their interlaced presence in Scripture does not necessitate adopting a relativistic position regarding the existence of objective truth but is rather a testimony to its richness.

(10) A biblical model for God may entail other models and may itself contain sub-models.

(11) Models cannot be fully explained by paraphrasing in non-figurative language, but they can be interpreted by attending to the dynamics of their form, range and distribution.

(12) A redemptive-historical approach to biblical theology acknowledges the dual nature of Scripture as the Word of God and the word of man. It traces the historical and organic unfolding of revelation’s major themes from Genesis to Revelation with special concern for how they culminate in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

(13) The multiplex approach to biblical theology treats the canonical, final form of Scripture as a historically-situated document to be interpreted in relation to its ancient environment. It avoids imposing an organizing center on the biblical material by seeking to elucidate
appearance and development of its complementary themes, motifs, and concepts while recognizing elements of continuity and discontinuity. Taking the Bible as a canonical and literary whole, investigation of the OT material must start with a theological awareness of the NT to which it testifies.