



**Wright, Christopher J. H.**

***Knowing God the Father Through the Old Testament***

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*Knowing God the Father Through the Old Testament* is the third in a series of three books written by Dr. Wright addressing the three persons of the Trinity as they can be known from the Hebrew Scriptures. Although this is the last in the series I've chosen to review it first because in the taxis (i.e., order) of the Trinity the Father is first.

I was quite surprised when I read this book as my expectations of what it would be were substantially different than what it actually was. I had originally expected an academic treatment of God the Father in the Old Testament (OT) with many references to Hebrew grammar but this is not what I got. I also expected that some of the more difficult theological issues that weighed on the minds of those in the early Church would have been addressed but sadly, they weren't. At the very least I expected a treatment of the manner in which the early Christians interpreted the Hebrew Scriptures, but alas, I did not receive this either.

What I did get was a very easy to read, somewhat devotional treatment of God as Father in the OT. Reading through the pages of this book we come across footnotes where the reader is encouraged to take a break from reading the text and look up a list of Bible quotations that will help to embody the author's points (e.g., 31, 79, 154). Throughout the course of this book there is a sense of the author's desire to have the reader look at themselves introspectively. This is not at all what I expected when I began reading.

With no bibliography and hardly a footnote to be found Wright takes us on a trip through the OT that we can truly say he leads alone. We begin the journey with a Christocentric hermeneutic as Wright says:

Now since all our understanding of God as Father must start out from knowing Jesus, it makes sense for us also to think of Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament Israel and the God of the one true faithful Israelite

Jesus, as God the Father, for that is who Yahweh primarily was in the consciousness of Jesus himself. (18)

Some attention is given to certain theophoric names that exemplify the metaphor of fatherhood in the OT such as: Abiel = God is my father (1 Sam 9:1); Eliab = My God is father (1 Sam 16:6); Joab = Yahweh is father (2 Sam 8:16); Abijah = Yahweh is my father (2 Chron 29:1); Abimelech = My father is king (Judg 9:1) — Wright says that: “[t]he common occurrence of these names shows that the idea of God, or Yahweh, as father was well known and accepted.” (24)

Various actions such as carrying, disciplining, pitying, and adopting are then discussed before Wright makes what I feel to be an extremely insightful statement. He says:

For Israel then, knowing God included knowing certain dimensions of his character and actions that could best be expressed and reflected upon by comparison with human fatherhood (or in some cases, parenthood). The idea of God as Father was not allowed to degenerate into the kind of pagan mythology that distorted the good gift of human sexuality into lurid parody of divine sexual antics as the origin of the human race. (38)

The book is lined with little nuggets of insight such as this. Wright in various places sums up his points with “knowing God . . .” statements such as:

- Knowing God is not an exercise in getting God to fit into my life. Knowing God is an exercise in humbly fitting myself into God’s great historical story of redemptive grace. (59)
- Knowing God is missional, not merely devotional. Knowing God serves God’s purpose of blessing others, not merely our personal enjoyment of being blessed. (107)
- To know God is to know *this* God, the God of compassion, grace, love, and faithfulness. (130)
- For, to know God means to share in his concerns, understand his scale of values and priorities, and to take delight in what pleases him—as is true of any genuine human relationship as well. (139)
- So for us to claim to “know God,” means a lot more than a vague, or even an intense, subjective spiritual experience. It means to know *this* God, the God who calls for, who longs for, who delights in, the exercise of love, justice, and righteousness. (143)
- Doing righteousness and justice; defending the poor and needy—*that* is to know God. (147)

Of particular interest to me was Wright’s treatment of God as father to the nation of Israel and then the Messiah. Of less interest, but interesting nonetheless, was the attention he paid to Abraham and Moses in Genesis and Exodus and subsequently the manner in which he connected knowing God with the new covenant as expressed in Jeremiah and the husband/wife and father/son relationships seen in Hosea.

There were however some parts of this book that I wish were not included especially a small section in pp. 84-88 wherein Wright assumes the doctrine of eternal security and then reads it back into the father/son relationship. This particular section of the book made my Arminianesque eyes burn. For example Wright says, “*You can break a covenant, but you can’t stop being a son of your father.*” (84)

This analogy is often used but seldom pressed. While it is true that a biological son can never stop being the biological son of his father, believers are sons by adoption (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5). Adopted (as well as biological) sons *can be* given up once again for adoption and they can also imancipate themselves (think of the parable of the prodigal son here). If we press further then what do we do with the fact that before our adoption we were once children of satan? Is that father/son relationship still in tact even though the ‘covenant’ has been broken?

Again Wright opines:

But we can go further than the way the Old Testament concept of God’s fatherhood strengthened *Jesus* as God’s Son. For clearly it also underpins *our* eternal security in Christ, as Paul so richly taught . . . Sonship and security are gloriously intertwined in this climax to Paul’s argument in the first part of the letter. (87)

and

And if the will of the Creator is our ultimate glorification in the likeness of his own Son (Rom 8:28-30), and if the whole of creation is the object of his redemptive purpose, then there is nobody and nothing “in all creation” that can threaten our eternal security as the children of God (Rom 8:31-39). (88)

This was the low point of the book for me because of what I feel is an irresponsible handling of the passage cited. Romans 8:31-39 is a passage concerning God’s love for believers, it is not a passage concerning eternal security in salvation. There is nothing in this section of scripture that would lead us to believe that as sons/believers we cannot cease believing and therefore break the relationship that we once enjoyed with our Father.

But this small section aside I can (tentatively) recommend this book to other readers. I recommend it on the strength of its devotional feel and the scattered insights. This is not a scholarly tome by any means but it is a book that you can sit down in your favorite chair and read on a Saturday afternoon.