***A Biblical Theology for Knowing God’s Will***

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**The Old Testament Data on “Knowing” God’s Will**

**[GM 4 Additional Notes to OT Slide 4]**

The creation is totally dependent upon God's self-disclosure (Revelation) in order to have accurate knowledge concerning their Creator and to do what He desires.

We have learned that knowing God, knowing God’s will requires “revelation.” Without God’s self-disclosure to us, we have no sure “word” from God. So, how did God communicate his will as represented in the Old Testament Scripture? We need to review the process of God’s self-disclosure before we can even define “God’s will.”

**A. THREE MAJOR ASPECTS OF KNOWING GOD’S WILL**

1. Period of **Oral transmission**

Pre-Mosaic Period (albeit later recorded by Moses for posterity)

Adam and Eve

Noah

Abraham

Lot (Gen 13-14; 18-19; 2 Peter 2:7-8)

Melchizedek

Baalam mystery

Moses (beginning of codified Scripture)

2. Period of **Written transmission**

Job? [dating runs from Patriarchal to Post-Exilic Israel!!]

Moses / Torah (Gen-Deut)

Deut 6:4-9

Deut 8:3

Nevi’im / Prophets (Josh-2 Kings, Isaiah-The Twelve)

Josh 1:7-8

Isa

Kethuvim / Writings (Ps, Pro Job, The Scrolls [SoS, Ruth ,Lam, Ecc,

Esther, Daniel, Ezr, Neh, 1 & 2 Chron)

Pss 1; 19:7-14; 119

3. Development of a **“Values Deposit”** from which to reason out God’s desires

Along with the “revealed message” there is a developing “values deposit.” The value deposit is a reasoned extension of God’s initial revelation and provides a guide for God’s people to discern the divine desire.

Lot (Gen 13-14; 18-19; 2 Peter 2:7-8)

Wisdom literature (Job, Prov, Ecc, Numerous Pss; texts that adjudicate divine meaning when no Torah proof-text exists)

Daniel

**B. BE AWARE OF THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE SHIFT FROM PRIEST TO PROPHETS AS GOD’S VEHICLES FOR REVELATION**

Urim and Thummim (Priests, see below)

With the shift to prophets (speaking and writing) to guide Israel, God’s word/will is conveyed via this group. The biblical record demands we stick with the content of revelation through various conveyors (People, major leaders, priests, prophets … all of whom are eventually locked in to the developing “Scripture”). The farther we get into the OT, the more it is exclusively “to the Word and to the Prophets” that defines information (Isaiah 8:20).

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| ASV s. 8:16   Bind thou up the **testimony**, seal the 9**law** among my disciples.  Isaiah 8:19   And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits and unto the wizards, that chirp and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? on behalf of the living *should they seek* unto the dead? 20 **To the 10law and to the testimony!** 11if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them. | NIV (2011) 8:16 Bind up this **testimony** of warninga and sealb up God’s **instruction** among my disciples.  Isaiah 8:19   When someone tells you to consulta mediums and spiritists,b who whisper and mutter,c should not a people inquired of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? 20 **Consult God’s instructiona and the testimony of warning.**b If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no lightc of dawn. |

“*Testimony* is what God has testified to as his truth (for *law* see 1:10). My *disciples* are ‘my instructed ones’ (cf. 50:4; 54:13).” (Motyer, 96). The point is that Isaiah and those who follow the Lord “gather around the written word of God” as their guide and encouragement.

**C. OTHER SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE CONDEMNED**

1. Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) divination practices observed and usually condemned

Lev 19:26ff.

Deut 18:10-12

Samuel

Jonah 1:7

Isa

1a. Lot casting

Jonah 1:7

2a. Reading of organs (liver, "hepatoscopy")

Ezekiel 21:21

3a. Arrow casting ("rhabdomancy")

Ezekiel 21:21

4a. Reading water in vessels ("hydromancy")

Genesis 44:5

5a. Astrology

2 Kings 17:16; 23:4-5

Jeremiah 10:2-3

6a. Mediums, Spiritist

Leviticus 19:31

1 Samuel 28

2 Kings 17:17

Isaiah 8:19

2. “Divination” Vehicles Which God Originated or Sanctioned.

Five specific categories

1a. The Prophets, especially the early prophets

Judges 4, Deborah

1 Samuel 9:9ff. “Seer” (early prophet)

Deuteronomy 13:1-5--Conformity to God's teaching is the test for the prophetic office.

2a. Urim and Thummin (all references cited)--**Priest controlled; NEVER for individuals but for the nation of Israel.** “…used in seeking God’s will (Ex 28:29-30). Reliance on this unique means of revelation (Nu 27:21; Dt 33:8) seems to have ceased after David’s reign, although an attempt to revive the practice occurred during the postexilic period in the fifth century B.C. (see Ezr 2:63; Ne 7:65).” (Arch Study Bible, p. 135) This unsuccessful attempt was priest focused.

Exodus 28:30

Leviticus 8:5-9

Numbers 27:18-21

Deuteronomy 33:8

1 Samuel 28:6

Ezra 2:63

Nehemiah 7:65

3a. Lot casting

Leviticus 16:8

Numbers 26:55

Joshua 14:2

Jonah 1:7

Mark 15:24

Acts 1:26 (last mention)

4a. Dreams

Genesis 37

Judges 7

Daniel 7

Matthew 1:20; 2:13; 2:19 (still OT era)

5a. Miraculous signs

Exodus 3

Numbers 22:28-30

Judges 6:15-22

1 Samuel 14:8

Observations

1a. Miraculous procedures were special not normative. Obedience to special revelation was normative...to the law and testimony is the normal pattern for representatives and people alike.

2a. Special events of direct divine communication had special significance in relation to the nation of Israel as God's channel for redemptive history.

3a. The New Testament shows no perpetuation of revelatory procedures as normative.

4a. Even a knowledge of the future does not always indicate God's will for human actions (e.g Paul, Agabus and the trip to Jerusalem).

**D. THE “LANGUAGE” (LINGUISTICS) OF GOD’S WILL IN THE OT**

1. The concept "will of God" and the Old Testament So, HOW is “God’s will” presented in the Old Testament?

1a. English translations of terms for "will" with God in the OT vary from one English version to another!

1b. **Bible memorization of certain versions has a major impact on stereotyping theological concepts** (will be noted in the examples).

2b. **The OT does not phrase “God’s will” like the NT does.** The need to look for a concept rather than a certain word or phrase.

A continuum of terms for Hebrew words:

"desire to "purpose"

to please /\ to choose

to delight in to favor

to love

to determine

3b. There is a need for a fuller biblical theology perspective rather than just a “word or phrase.” Theology is never built on an isolated term alone.

2a. **Patterns** derived from statements concerning God's will in the Old Testament.

1b. A significant emphasis on **God's sovereign purposes**.

Job 42:2

Psalm 103:21

Proverbs 21:1

Isaiah 25:1

44:28

46:10

48:14

53:10 (cf. 55:11)

Daniel 4:35

Cf. Ezra 7:18 (with 5:17)

2b. **God's moral instructions**, His desires for the behavior of His creation, are also a prominent pattern.

Ezra 10:11

Psalms 23:1-3

40:8 (cf. v. 6)

73:24

143:10

Ecclesiastes 8:5

3b. Consider the patterns of Daniel (law and values deposit)

1c. He recognized his dependence upon God's revelation of ultimate truth.

Daniel 2:20-23

2c. He organized his life around obedience to the values deposit of God's previous teaching.

Daniel 1

Daniel 6

3c. The entire account of his life is a supreme demonstration of God's sovereign will.

Daniel 4:34b-35

Compare the flow of events

Daniel 12:13

2. **WHAT ABOUT** the stereotype of an “individual will” we often hear we should “find”?

This construct is a creation of numerous superficial Bible “preachers” and certain subjective movements especially in English and American teaching (e.g. the Keswick Movement; Oswald J. Chambers; etc.). “Motivational literature” has NO boundaries other than the imagination of the speaker/author.

There is no biblical pattern mandating that a person “find” God’s will for their individual decisions. This is a myth. Decisions are imaged as being made within the confines of God’s revelation…even when special representatives (e.g. prophets, apostles) are involved.

3. Classic Old Testament texts often cited as models for "finding" God's will need contextual analysis. Stories of “direct guidance” are claimed as normative and certain “vocabulary,” e.g. “guide,” “trust” are claimed as well. A closer look at context and use of language show these not to be normative or the languages is calling Israel to follow Yahweh’s instructions. **“We need to develop the EARS of the original hearers.”**

1a. Examples

1b. A Wife for Isaac

Genesis 24

2b. Gideon's fleece

Judges 6

3b. Proverbs 3:5-6 (cf. Psalm 25:8-9, 12, 14)

4b. Psalm 32:8 (cf. 37:3-5)

5b. Isaiah 30:20-21 (cf. 58:11)

2s. The question of HOW the Bible teaches us

Are such illustrations “normative”?

The question of prescriptive and/or descriptive (review Fee and Stuart)

**Reflecting upon Knowing God's Will in the Old Testament**

1. The OT was a period highlighted by direct revelation from God. That direct revelation was mediated by directly appointed representatives of Yahweh. There is no “individualistic” system.

2. The direct revelation from God provided a value deposit from which the OT believers drew wisdom to discern their world and how to live for God in it.

3. Supernatural forms of guidance were only periodic, applicable to key historic narrative purposes, and usually required a sanctioned representative of God (e.g. a seer or priest or prophet). Even in the OT, God's Word was the normal way to address how one should live. To seek information outside the “law and testimony” was viewed as divination.

4. Forms of special guidance occur in historical narrative literature. The wisdom literature almost exclusively images reflection on God's character and the law’s implications as the form of guidance.

5. The Old Testament prominently views God's will as a matter of His purposes and desires. His purposes are reflected in His sovereign direction of people and events and His desires are defined by His law and instructions.

6. Old Testament narratives record examples of God's sovereign direction of the history of redemption. These are special descriptions of God's orchestration of His world and never intended to be normative patterns believers are to seek to know in advance.

7. The Old Testament depicts living to please God as a pursuit of His revealed will, especially in moral categories.

4. Texts that image guidance usually relate to God's sovereign direction of history or an expected response to His moral will.