

Abstract

THIS BOOK EXAMINES THE work of a number of influential speakers and writers in the Wesleyan tradition (after the death of John Wesley) in relation to their theology of mission. In particular the book offers an analysis of how these speakers and writers have used the Old Testament to inform their thinking about mission. Spokesmen have been selected from three distinctive groups: the founders of the Wesleyan Missionary Society; leaders in the nineteenth century Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC); and denominational and interdenominational leaders of the holiness movements which withdrew from the Methodist Episcopal Church over the last half of the nineteenth century.

Relying heavily upon primary sources, the book examines the writings of each selected spokesman to determine the following:

1. Whether Old Testament texts were used to address missiological issues such as the mission of Israel, the universal sovereignty of God, and the inclusivism or exclusivism of the Old Testament record.
2. Whether Old Testament texts were used by them to mobilize their listeners to the work of mission.
3. Whether they used Old Testament texts to support the distinctive missionary message of Wesleyanism.

In dealing with the last line of inquiry the book seeks to take further the suggestion of Howard Snyder, who proposed that the distinctives of a Wesleyan theology of mission are the Wesleyan understanding of the image of God, prevenient grace, salvation as healing, and the perfecting of Christian character.

The analysis of the work of these writers shows that the Old Testament has played a significant role in their thinking about mission. There

are clearly differences in usage, however, between the representatives of the three groups examined. The founders of the Wesleyan Missionary Society show remarkable familiarity with the missiological questions outlined above and interpret the Old Testament as addressing those questions. They regularly use Old Testament texts to motivate missionary activity. In their writings, each of the distinctives of a Wesleyan theology of mission is widely supported from the Old Testament. The leaders of the nineteenth century Methodist Episcopal Church, however, rarely used the Old Testament for missionary motivation. While the leaders of the holiness movement used the Old Testament to address each of the issues mentioned above, predictably they focused their attention more on the Old Testament basis for the perfecting of Christian character.

The book concludes by examining two books that were written by Wesleyans seeking to offer perspectives on a biblical theology of mission. One of these authors was from the MEC, and one from the holiness movement. These two books are used to reflect upon the development of a Wesleyan theology of mission.