Introduction

THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES COULD be theologically described as beginning and ending with an epistemological outlook. The first episode of humanity's activity centers on the knowledge of good and evil. The final stage of humanity is pictured by Jeremiah as a universally prophetic and knowing society: "And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord" (Jer 31:34). What happens to knowledge in between? We intend to hash out epistemology with the tool of biblical theology: an approach to knowledge as developed in Genesis 2 and explored throughout the Tanakh (i.e., the Old Testament) and New Testament.[1]

In short, due to the resemblance of Genesis 2–3, both in the theology and narratives of Israel's canon, we will work from the beginning of the Pentateuch forward. But we are not bound to a particular school of biblical theology. In this manner, we will follow this epistemological process through the narratives rather than make theological statements about individual passages.

The goal of this book is to lay the groundwork for a biblical theology of knowledge–how knowledge is broached, described, and how error is rectified within the texts of the Protestant Christian canon. Essentially, this

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1. Of this problematic term "biblical theology," we only mean that we will work through the story of Scripture as it is developed canonically in the Protestant Christian bible. First, we want to avoid rigid modes of biblical theology. We are not endeavoring to see epistemological process as necessarily bound to just one approach: salvation-history, promise-fulfillment, typology, or covenant theology. Methodologically, we recognize that "The possibility of biblical theology remains, even for its own practitioners, a very precarious thing . . ." Barr, *Biblical Theology*, 229. Hence, this study is guided by Watson's call to lower the "lines of demarcation" between biblical studies and systematic theology. Watson, *Text and Truth*, 1–29. This biblical-theological approach allows us to be co-readers of the biblical texts, just as first century Jews saw themselves as co-readers of the Tanakh. See also, Bartholomew, "Story and Biblical Theology."

study is meant to be a pry-bar, a tool to open the lid on the neglected idea that Christian Scripture might be developing robust descriptions of knowing that can direct us today. Proper knowing as it occurs in the Scriptures means that there are better and worse ways to know. Even more, the epistemology that we find advocated in Scripture is not relegated to religious knowing. We will argue that scientific epistemology and biblical epistemology, if we can allow such a term in an introduction, make significant points of contact—enough to suggest that they are fundamentally consistent with each other.

This project comes with inherent difficulties. The consistency of epistemic vocabulary varies, even in the early texts of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., the Old Testament).[2] For instance, if we merely consider the breadth of connotations concerning knowledge in the first four chapters of the Pentateuch (i.e., knowledge from a tree, knowledge of one's own nakedness, and knowledge qua sexual intimacy) then our methodology cannot be limited to a word study of "know."[3] This effort means to reflect a biblical-theological approach inasmuch as it attends to the Bible's manner of disclosing what a proper or improper epistemology might look like, from the beginning of the history of humanity through the earliest moments of the post-Pentecostal messianic movement (i.e., the church described in the New Testament canon). This biblically-attuned view of knowing *unfolds* in the history of Israel and we are attempting to locate the trajectory of knowledge as it unfolds within these texts.

Throughout, we will employ a three part system of checks to constrain ourselves, as much as is possible, from reading epistemological concerns *into* the texts. The three criteria for examining a text for epistemological description are that epistemological language and concepts must be 1) present, 2) relevant, and 3) persistent.

First, in looking for the presence of terms and concepts, we are asking ourselves the question: Are epistemological concerns present or are we reading them into this text? Second, the presence of vocabulary is not sufficient. Epistemological language and concepts must be relevant. For instance, Roman execution methods are present in the Passion narratives, but

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2. By "Hebrew Bible," I am referring to the same collection of Israelite literature commonly called the Tanakh in Judaism and the Old Testament in Christianity. Specifically, I am referring to the Masoretic Text of the *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia.* Unless specifically noted otherwise, I am not including the emendations of the Septuagint (LXX) or portions of the Apocrypha.

3. E.g., Hebrew: *da'at* (דעת); Greek: *gnosis* (γνοσις).

those stories are clearly not about crucifixion. We are asking: Would any attentive reader of the text be able to notice the epistemological concepts in the text? Third, even present and relevant talk of "knowing" does not make a text epistemologically interesting. The concept and terms must be persistent—developed by the text to yield a fuller description of the epistemological process beyond mere passing use of the term (e.g., Judges 13:21: "Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the Lord."). Is knowing mentioned once and then never returned to? Or, is it a theme that the author employs and re-employs (or revisits at different times)?

As we follow the story and language of knowing and error, knowing looks more like a process than a mechanism that yields a product called knowledge. Epistemological process then must be discerned through a literary reading that will sometimes involve the common terms for knowledge, but sometimes not. In other words, focusing our attention on the various manifestation of the word "know" will not render the entire picture of epistemology and that has been the shortfall of some earlier attempts to develop a biblical epistemology.[4]

Further, focusing current epistemological models *onto* the texts of Scripture does not render the entire picture either. We will have to be cautious about affirming too much about the modern notion of propositional knowledge such as "S knows P" (i.e., "*Subject* knows *Proposition*"). At certain points, such models are not entirely alien to the narratives. For example, YHWH wants for Abraham to "know for sure" (ידע תדע) that his promises to him will come true (Gen 15:13). At first glance, it appears that "Abram *knows that* YHWH's promises are veracious" accurately reflects something about Abram's knowledge according to the narrative. However, we will find that defining this scene in terms of propositions alone cannot reflect Abram's knowledge *sufficiently*.

As we wade into these texts, we seek to explore how "the Subject" knows anything at all and we are especially concerned to figure out what happened when characters of the stories know erroneously. We want to describe both what characters came to know, but even more, how they erred in the epistemological process per the narrative.[5]

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4. For my critique of those attempts, see "Epistemology and Ancient Texts" in Johnson, "Error and Epistemological Process."

5. In this same thinking, Robinson argues that narrative analysis can restore perspicuity to biblical theology providing some of the corrective historical, literary, and theological tension. "Narrative Theology and Biblical Theology."

Why study error?[6] A shortcoming with deriving epistemology from ancient texts is that the object of knowledge itself is often ambiguous or obscured to the reader. Knowing is often portrayed as seeing something that never quite equates to a proposition, although it can be expressed sometimes in a sentence. For instance, Adam comes to know that the woman is his proper mate and states his discernment as a matter of fact, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh . . ."[7] But it was the man's ability to *see that this was his mate* that is constitutive of his knowledge and we are interested in how that *seeing* is honed.

Moreover, the object of knowing is often God himself and thus what is meant to be known still lies outside the perspective of the reader (e.g., Exod 29:46). What could it possibly mean, after all, that Israel could know YHWH as her God, or that the man and the woman knew that they were naked?[8] These could mean many things, none of which would be entirely plain objects called "knowledge" to us.

Part of the difficulty is the contemporary discussion of epistemology. The epistemic objectives found in Scripture are generally ascribed to knowing-in-relationship rather than the analytical formulation in current fashion: "knowing that."[9] For instance, someone might *know* their own child, but they also *know that* their child is a human being. For many and seemingly good reasons, relational knowledge is not the popular parlance in much of current epistemology.

Even where "knowing that" is stated in the biblical texts, it is often stated in terms that are explicitly covenantal or resemble covenantal relationship. For instance, when God states "surely *know that* (ידע תדע) your offspring will be sojourners . . ." (Gen 15:13), he speaks within what appears

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6. This book and the methodology was birthed from my doctoral work at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. As a second-generation of work, the devilish exegetical details that I sometimes rely upon here can be found in my doctoral thesis. Where appropriate, I will refer the reader to that work. This current work, however, makes the doctoral work more accessible and extends some of those ideas out further into the Christian canon. As well, I include a more precise analysis of Michael Polanyi's scientific epistemology and its relationship to the biblical texts plus a critique of the Analytic Theology movement that has arisen since that doctoral work was completed.

7. Gen 3:23.

8. Gen 3:7.

9. Attempts in analytic philosophy at reducing "know how" to "know that" remain unpersuasive given the nature of knowledge in these texts. See Stanley and Williamson, "Knowing How," 411–44.

to be a covenantal ceremony.[10] YHWH appears to bind Himself, possibly unto death, with Abram's descendants and the texts expects the reader to see the covenant ceremony as *the justification* for YHWH's declaration "know for sure."[11] So "knowing that" is contingent upon knowing-in-covenant-relationship. Similarly, to *know that* we are naked, in the sense that Genesis 2 juxtaposes it against Genesis 3, is to say that we are related to our body in a different way than we were before. What appears as "*knowing that* we are naked" is actually "knowing that we have a particular relation to our body." Genesis 2–3 expresses this as an ultimate epistemological concern of the narrative, not on the periphery of the story. Again, the problem is precisely this: the Scriptures tend to focus exclusively on knowing in relationship, *in contractum*, rather than knowledge as an object.

Where the nominal form is used, "knowledge" still generally reflects knowing-in-relationship. The contemporary philosopher, Thomas Nagel, made an inventive argument about consciousness that seems analogous here. Against the physical reductionists who want to reduce humanity's mental activity down to the chemical activity of the brain, Nagel argued that there is something ineffable and irreducible about the human mind that does not equal a chemical depiction of the brain.[12] In defense of this position, he argued that there is *something that it's like* to be a bat. While we might not know what that is like, because we will not ever be a bat, we can imagine that there is *something that it is like* to navigate sonographically, for instance. And if there is *something, anything at all*, that it is like to be a bat, then that *something* cannot be reduced to a chemical description.

In the same vein as Thomas Nagel's clever argument for what it is like to be a bat, the Scriptures appear most concerned that people know *what it's like to be* a knower primarily as an obeyer of YHWH and Jesus respectively. Knowing appears as a skill, figuring out to whom we should listen, where we should look, and how we should understand what is being said. Even if we figure out to whom we should listen, skilled "looking" and "understanding" has equal weight in knowing and avoiding error. Jesus

10. In the Hebrew, there is no equivalent to the English "that." It is supplied by the interpreter. However, the force of the statement is equivalent to the English "know that." The point is, the presence or lack of linguistic convention is not a defeater for the larger argument that many epistemologists are attempting to make: the notion of knowledge being propositionally related to us (e.g., "*knowing that* the sky is blue"). The argument that all knowledge is "knowing that P" remains despite mannerism of different languages.

11. Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 17–21.

12. Nagel, "What Is It Like To Be A Bat?"

hounds his peers on this point in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7). Merely knowing to whom they should listen (i.e., the Mosaic Law) does not bring them to understand what was meant to be known—the principles that undergird the Mosaic Law. Moreover, knowing is relationally bound and the epistemological process does not produce propositions (i.e., abstract facts) whose veridicality we can justify. The object of knowledge is not always clear, but error is patent at many points in Scripture. Thus, we will study the constituent factors where characters of the narratives get it wrong.

In the current philosophical discussion, many contemporary epistemological models posit abstract entities such as propositions, properties such as truth (not necessarily the biblical sense of truth found in Hebrew terms like *emunah* or the Greek *aletheia*), and necessary relationships between the two such as correspondence. By positing a world where there are such abstract entities and qualities, epistemological models have sometimes suffered from the possibility of being mere phantasms of knowledge—the way we would like knowledge to work and to be.

Some epistemological models have attempted to overcome the phantasms of knowledge, seeking instead to root their epistemology in description of the way the knowing world *actually is* rather than how *we would like it to be*. Naturalized epistemology is probably the best representative of an attempt to work descriptively, showing how humans *actually* rationalize, consider, conclude, and therefore, how they actually know. But in the search for fidelity to the actual lives of knowers, naturalized epistemology cannot defend better ways to know anything other than what is pragmatic. Indeed, the most-known standard of veracity for these naturalized views of knowing is pragmatism: it is true if it works, if there is engineering payoff.[13]

Beginning an epistemology with the *is* rather than the *ought* appears reasonable *prima facie*, especially for epistemologists who believe that the universe is only physical. For them, there *is* no *ought*. Continental philosophy has offered an even fuller description of knowing according to how reality *is*, but the Continental philosophers' impenetrable writings risk being labeled as irrelevant by many trained in the Anglo-American tradition of Analytic philosophy.[14]

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13. I am borrowing this phrase, "engineering payoff," from Prof. Paul A. Roth (UC-Santa Cruz, formerly at the University of Missouri—St. Louis.).

14. Whether this dismissiveness by the Analytic tradition in philosophy is fair is a wholly other matter.

It seems that we need both the descriptive and prescriptive view of knowing. The Christian Scriptures give us both: the way knowing is *supposed* to work and how it *actually* works. Further, the Scriptures describe in detail how the attempt to know goes horrifically wrong. In the Scriptures, we have a creation narrative that dominates much of the epistemological understanding of that which ensues in the Tanakh and New Testament. That creation story pictures a world in which knowing occurs apart from brokenness. Because we read of both covenantally responsive ways of knowing described in these texts *and* the egregious violation of the covenant in seeking knowledge, then we have the obligation of maintaining the dual perspective: assessing what is being prescribed by Scripture apart from what has been described. This book will struggle to see Scripture's description of knowing in order to understand what might be prescribed.

This work will begin with some ground-clearing. Chapter one tackles how we conceive of error and how that informs our reading of Scripture. Chapters two through six focus on the texts of Scripture, from Genesis to Kings, the stories internal to the Gospels, the rhetoric of the Gospel writers, and a discussion of scientific epistemology as compared to the Proverbs and Epistles. Chapter seven engages contemporary epistemology in Analytic philosophy in order to assess what fits best with what we have found in the Scriptures. Chapter eight deliberates the Analytic Theology movement and the fruits of recent biblical scholarship about epistemology. Finally, chapter nine concludes with some over-arching implications for theology, both in how theologians could think about their task (theological prolegomena) and how the actions of the church follow epistemological paths found in Scripture (practical theology). Very brief implications will be offered concerning teaching, preaching, counseling, and discipling in the church.

N.B. While I will note (in parentheses) the Hebrew and Greek terms/ passages where they seem particularly appropriate, a reading knowledge of neither language is required for this book. I merely post that information for those who need a bit more persuasion about the lexicography behind the claims.