

A detailed marble bust of Moses, featuring a long, curly beard and hair, and a pair of horns on his head. The sculpture is set against a background of classical architectural columns.

Moses

Gerhard von Rad

Edited by
K.C. Hanson

Foreword by
Walter Brueggemann



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Stephen Neill

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James Clarke & Co

James Clarke & Co

P.O. Box 60

Cambridge

CB1 2NT

United Kingdom

www.jamesclarke.co

publishing@jamesclarke.co.uk

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Editor's Note

I offer this new edition of Gerhard von Rad's volume on Moses to a new and wider audience than it originally received. I have a great appreciation for von Rad's contribution to Old Testament studies as well as his ability to take the most sophisticated research and present it in a way that broader audiences can appreciate.

Rather than simply reprinting the 1960 edition of this work, I thought it expedient to prepare a new edition. The original English-language edition included numerous awkward English phrases, it used the older RSV translation of the Bible for quotations, and it included very few footnotes and no bibliography. So what I have done in preparing this edition is:

- used the NRSV for biblical quotations, but read “Yahweh” for NRSV’s “the LORD”
- inserted headings throughout the chapters
- added footnotes in order to indicate other works by von Rad that treat these issues in more depth, especially his *Old Testament Theology* and commentaries on Genesis and Deuteronomy

Editor's Note

- added a few additional citations where the reader may find more detailed treatments; all my additional notes are marked [Ed.]
- provided a bibliography for the secondary works cited
- provided lists of books for further reading on: Moses, the Ten Commandments and the Law, and Additional Works by Gerhard von Rad
- invited Walter Brueggemann to write a new foreword.

K. C. Hanson

April 2011

Foreword

The decision of Cascade Books (U.S.) and James Clarke (UK) to republish *Moses* by Gerhard von Rad is a most welcome one. Gerhard von Rad is likely the most important Old Testament interpreter of the twentieth century, one whose influence in critical study and in theological exposition continues even now in powerful ways. This little book, first published in 1940 and first translated into English in 1960, is a gem that brings together in quite accessible ways samples von Rad's daring interpretation and his courageous faith.

In this book von Rad appeals to some of his most important critical studies that made him a defining force in the discipline. He makes that appeal to his earlier work without calling attention to it and without making matters especially complex. When we consider that the book was first published in 1940, we are plunged into that dangerous context in which von Rad did some of his most important work. In the wake of the Barmen Declaration of 1934 and in the midst of the Confessing Church in Germany that stood opposed, as best it could, to National Socialism, von Rad had to work out a way to continue to teach and interpret

the Old Testament in a political context where hostility to anything Jewish was broad and deep. In 1938 he published his programmatic essay, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," in which he proposed that the theological *Leit-motif* of Genesis-Joshua was the theme of God's promise to Israel that was fulfilled in the gift of the land of promise. That is, he saw a connection in the tradition between the promise of Genesis to the ancestors and the tales of conquest in the book of Joshua. Behind that sweep of promise to fulfillment was von Rad's defining hypothesis about the "credo" in which he identified a succinct statement of the faith of ancient Israel that centered in the events around Moses, most especially the Exodus and the land promise, traditions that were filled out by the covenant of Mt. Sinai.

Many of the critical assumptions with which von Rad worked are no longer sustainable, especially since current scholarship is in a mood to date everything in the Old Testament quite late, whereas von Rad, in an earlier scholarly context, had assumed an earlier dating for the text. But even if his critical assumptions are no longer persuasive, the theological insight he had about the faith claims of the text continue to shape much of the discussion in Old Testament studies concerning the faith of ancient Israel.

Because he was a Lutheran, it is not surprising that von Rad focused on the theme of "law and gospel" a topic that for a Lutheran is unavoidable in the Sinai tradition. Because von Rad wanted to preserve and affirm the cruciality of the Old Testament for Christian faith, he could not treat "the law," that is the commandments of Sinai, as simply a foil for the gospel according to the popular temptation to equate Old Testament-New Testament with "law-grace."