

RAY C. STEDMAN

Adventuring Through the Bible

A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible

New Enhanced Edition



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God Spoke in Times Past



Do you remember where you were and what you were doing on September 11, 2001? Virtually every American who was alive that day can recall with clarity, horror, and sadness the moment of hearing about the 9/11 attacks. We can close our eyes and still see the burning towers in lower Manhattan, the terrified people who leaped to their deaths to escape the flames, the gaping, blackened wound in the side of the Pentagon building, and the scar at the edge of the woods in Shanksville, Pennsylvania where Flight 93 went down.

The emotional aftermath of that event is one of shock, dismay, and depression. It's as if the sun were suddenly blotted out, and the entire landscape went dark. Magnify those emotions many times over, and you might begin to understand how the disciples of Jesus felt in the aftermath of the crucifixion.

Luke 24 contains the story of two of His disciples as they walked along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Whenever I read the story of the Emmaus Road, I feel an emotional tug inside, a wish that I could have witnessed that event with my own eyes. I believe that, since the coming

of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the life of Jesus is more real and available to believers now than when He physically walked the earth. Yet I still would love to have been there to watch that incredible event in the lives of those two downhearted disciples.

It was the day of the resurrection of our Lord. The countryside was already exploding with the incredible news that Jesus had risen—but few would believe it. These two disciples were full of sorrow and despair. They saw no future ahead. As they walked, they talked about their grief—and that's when a stranger drew near and walked with them.

The stranger asked, “What are you discussing?”

The disciples looked at him in amazement. “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This chapter provides a “thumbnail” overview of the entire twenty-eight Old Testament books, and answers such questions as: What is the central theme of the Old Testament? Why are there so many blood sacrifices in the Old Testament? Why do so many Old Testament passages deal with unsatisfied longings, pain, anguish, and injustice? How is Jesus prophetically and symbolically depicted throughout the Old Testament?

in these days? . . . Jesus of Nazareth . . . was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

The stranger said, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" Then, Luke tells us, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets," the stranger—the risen Lord Jesus Himself—"explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

Later on, as they were thinking back over the events of that wonderful incident, they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

What caused this wonderful, awe-inspiring sensation of "holy heartburn," this divine glow of anticipation in their hearts? And don't you just wish that you could have an experience like that? I certainly do!

Well, the source of that strangely warmed experience on the Emmaus Road was nothing less than the exposition of the Old Testament in the power and clarity of the Holy Spirit: "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." This is what

the Old Testament does: It points to Christ! The Old Testament prepares our hearts to receive the One who truly satisfies. Jesus is not just the object of the New Testament but of the Old Testament as well.

As He once told the Jewish leaders who opposed Him, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39).

In the previous chapter we found that God's purpose in revealing His truth to us through the Bible is to bring us all to Christlike maturity. It takes the entire Bible, Old and New Testaments, to accomplish this, and it takes the work of the Holy Spirit to open our understanding of Scripture.

In this chapter we'll examine the contribution the Old Testament makes to our maturity in Christ—not in detail, but in an "orbital view" survey. We'll gain a panoramic view of the Old Testament so that we can clearly see the part it plays in producing Christlike maturity within us.

An Incomplete Book

The Old Testament is an incomplete book—and that is by God's intention. He never intended the Old Testament to be His last word to the human race.

Dr. W. H. Griffith Thomas has suggested that if we would approach the Old Testament as though we had never read it before, we would see that it is a series of predictions about a Person. These predictions begin in the early chapters of Genesis. As the text moves along, the predictions about this Person grow increasingly more detailed. A sense of anticipation grows. Finally, in the books of

the Prophets—Isaiah through Malachi—they break out in brilliant colors, describing in breathtaking terms the One who is to come.

Yet, after completing the last Old Testament book, we would still not know who this Person is. So the Old Testament is a book of *unfulfilled* prophecy.

But the mystery of the Old Testament doesn't end there. Read through the first thirty-nine books of the Bible and you will notice that a strange, disturbing stream of blood springs forth in Genesis and flows in increasing volume throughout the remainder of this Testament. The blood of thousands of animal sacrifices is poured out in a surging tide across the history of Israel. The sacrifices hammer home a message that without sacrifice, without blood, there is no forgiveness, no reconciliation. The animal sacrifices seem to point toward something—but what? The ultimate meaning of the sacrifices is left unexplained at the end of the Old Testament.

And there is a third dimension to the Old Testament: Again and again, the great men and women of Old Testament faith seem to express a longing for something more than life offers them, something transcendent, something eternal. For example, Abraham sets out to find the city whose builder and maker is God. The people of Israel were on a pilgrimage throughout the books of the Old Testament. In Job, in the Psalms, and in the books of Solomon, there is the continual cry of thirsty souls longing for something that has not yet been realized. So the Old Testament is not only a book of unfulfilled prophecies and unexplained sacrifices, but also of unsatisfied longings.

But something wonderful takes place the moment you cross from the Old to the New Testament. As you open the pages of Matthew, the first words you read are, “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ.” This is the Person the entire Old Testament was pointing to. Jesus alone fulfills the prophecies, explains the sacrifices, and satisfies the longings. The New Testament fulfills the promise of the Old—and we can't fully appreciate the profound meaning of the New Testament until we have first been awakened by the message of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament was intended to prepare us for something. The New Testament letter to the Hebrews ties in closely with Old Testament themes, and the first two verses of Hebrews capture this idea:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Heb. 1:1–2).

There you have the two testaments side by side: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers . . . at many times and in various ways” (the Old Testament), and “In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (the New Testament). The New Testament completes the Old Testament.

Just think of the many times and various ways in which God spoke in the Old Testament. Beginning with Genesis, we have the simple, majestic account of creation, the fall of humanity, and the flood—an account never equaled in all of literature for power and simplicity of expression. Next comes the straightforward narrative of the lives of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then

we encounter the thunderings of the law in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; the true drama of the historical books; the sweet hymns and sorrowful laments of the Psalms; the practical wisdom of Proverbs; the exalted language of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah; the touching human tenderness of Ruth, Esther, and the Song of Songs; the vivid, visionary mysteries of Daniel and Ezekiel; and on and on—many books and various ways of expressing God’s truth.

And still it is not complete! Nothing in the Old Testament can stand complete in and of itself. It is all intended as preparation.

Many Syllables, Many Phrases, One Voice

As a first year college student, I was inducted into an organization called The Ancient Order of Siam. Looking as ridiculous as possible in our little green skullcaps, a group of us were led into a room where we were subjected to an assortment of indignities. A number of sophomores stood around with paddles in their hands, ready to enforce their commands. We were lined up in a row, and one fellow stood before us and ordered us to follow him in repeating this chant: “Oh wah! . . . Tah goo! . . . Siam!”

We dutifully repeated the chant.

“Again!” he barked, so we all said it again.

“Faster!” he commanded. So we said it faster. Then again, still faster.

Suddenly, we realized what we were chanting: “Oh, what a goose I am!”

Then we were members of the Order of Siam.

Sometimes, the meaning of a thing doesn’t emerge until you put it all together. In a far more serious sense, a similar experience

takes place as we gain the big picture of the Old Testament. Each book of the Old Testament might be likened to a phrase or a syllable. Each book makes its own sound, but it is an incomplete sound. Only by merging all the phrases and syllables together does the overall meaning become clear. A marvelous expression comes into view—an expression of the fullness of God’s Son.

And where do all the phrases and syllables of the Old Testament come together? In the New Testament. That’s where all the Old Testament voices merge into one voice, the voice of the Son of God. At the very end of the New Testament, in Revelation, the apostle John writes that he saw the Lamb and he heard a voice like the voice of many waters. That voice booms forth, gathering itself out of all the thousands of rivers flowing together in one great symphony of sound: the voice of the Son!

In its incompleteness, the Old Testament is like a collection of syllables and phrases spoken to us by God—wonderful phrases, rich syllables, yet never quite connected and complete. But in the New Testament, these syllables and phrases join into a single, unified expression of the reality of the Son of God.

You may ask, “Why should I spend time on the preparatory material? Why not skip the Old Testament and go straight to the New Testament, the final voice of the Son?” That would be a big mistake! You can’t appreciate the fullness and richness of the New Testament without being prepared by the Old. While much of the New Testament is easy to grasp, there is much that is built on the foundation of the Old Testament. We can

never understand all God has for us in the New Testament until we are prepared by an understanding of the Old.

Why does a farmer take time and trouble to plow his field for planting? Why doesn't he just take the seed out and sprinkle it over the ground? Some of that seed is bound to find a place in which to take root and thrive. Does the farmer really need to spend all that extra time preparing the soil? Yes! Every farmer knows that though the seed is the most important single item in raising a crop, most of it will never take root unless the soil has been adequately prepared.

Why do schoolteachers start with the ABCs instead of charging right in and teaching Shakespeare? Wouldn't it save a lot of time, money, and effort to simply send our five-year-olds straight to college? Obviously, we can't educate students this way. Why? Because that's not the way human beings learn. Without adequate preparation, all the knowledge in the world, dispensed by the greatest teachers in the world, would wash uselessly over them, leaving them unchanged.

As Paul says in Galatians 3:24, "The law [of the Old Testament] was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." Something is lacking in our lives if we try to grasp the reality of Christ without grasping the reality of the Ten Commandments. We can't grasp all that Christ has done for us unless, like Paul, we have wrestled with the demands of a rigid, unyielding law—the law that makes us cry out, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24).

For many years I taught the book of Romans, including the great liberating themes

of chapters 6 through 8, without grasping the core truths of the book. I failed to experience the mighty power of Romans in my own heart until I had spent some time with the children of Israel in the Old Testament, living in the wilderness with them, feeling the burning desert heat beating down on me and the pain of a barren, defeated existence throbbing in my soul. After seeing what God accomplished in the lives of the Old Testament people by delivering them, I was able to understand what God is saying to us in Romans 6, 7, and 8. The "soil" of my heart needed the preparation of the Old Testament in order to receive the "seed" of the New Testament Word.

The Book of Human Experience

Dr. Harry A. Ironside told me a story from his early years of ministry when he was an officer in the Salvation Army. He was holding evangelistic meetings in a large hall in a major city, and a great number of people came every night to hear him. One night, he noticed an alert young man sitting in the back, leaning forward and listening attentively. The young man returned night after night, and Dr. Ironside wanted to meet him. He tried to catch him before he left the building, but each night, the young man melted into the crowd and disappeared.

One night the young man came in late, and the only two seats left in the auditorium were in the front row. He came down the aisle rather self-consciously and slipped into a chair. Dr. Ironside thought to himself, *Ha! You won't escape tonight, my young friend.*

Sure enough, when the meeting was over, the young man turned to go, but the aisle was full. Ironside stepped forward, tapped him on

the shoulder and said, "Would you mind if we just sit here and talk?"

They sat down and Dr. Ironside said, "Are you a Christian?"

"No," said the young man, "I don't think I could call myself a Christian."

"Well, what are you?"

"I really couldn't say. There was a time when I would have called myself an atheist. But of late, I just don't think I could say with assurance that God doesn't exist. I guess you could call me an agnostic."

"Well," said Dr. Ironside, "what has produced this change in your thinking?"

The young man pointed to an older man sitting a few seats away. "It's the change in that man right over there."

Dr. Ironside looked and recognized the older man as Al Oakley, who had co-owned a popular saloon in that city—that is, before he became his own best customer, ending up a skid-row drunk. But Al had experienced an amazing conversion in a Salvation Army jail service, and his life had completely turned around.

"I've known Al Oakley for years," said the young man, "and I know he hasn't any more backbone than a jellyfish. He tried to quit drinking many times but was never able to. Whatever turned his life around must be the real thing. So I've been reading the Bible lately. I can't get anything at all out of the New Testament. But recently I've been reading the book of Isaiah. I've always admired great oratory, and Isaiah slings the language better than anyone! If I could become a Christian by believing Isaiah, I would."

So Dr. Ironside opened his Bible and said, "I'd like to read you a short chapter from

Isaiah. It's about someone who is unnamed in the passage—but when I finish reading, I believe you'll be able to fill in the name."

"I don't know the Bible that well," said the young man.

"I don't think you'll have any problem," said Dr. Ironside. He turned to Isaiah 53 and read:

*Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD
been revealed?*

*He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.*

*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us
to him,*

*nothing in his appearance that we
should desire him.*

*He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with
suffering.*

*Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him
not.*

*Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was
upon him,*

*and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

*He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,*

*and as a sheep before her shearers is
silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken
away.
And who can speak of his descendants?
For he was cut off from the land of the
living;
for the transgression of my people he was
stricken.
He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth
(Isa. 53:1–9).*

Dr. Ironside continued reading to the end of the chapter, then turned to the young man and said, “Tell me—who was I reading about?”

The young man said, “Let me read it myself.” He took the book and read through the whole chapter. Then he dropped the Bible in Dr. Ironside’s hands and dashed down the aisle and out the door without a word. Not knowing what else to do for the young man, Dr. Ironside prayed for him.

The young man didn’t return for two nights. Then, on the third night, he was back. This time there was a different expression on the young man’s face as he came up the aisle. He took a seat in the front row, and when a time of sharing testimonies was announced, the young man stood and told his story.

“I was raised in an atheistic family,” he said. “In my school years, I read all the critics and was convinced there was nothing to this ‘Christian’ business. But while I was in Palestine, working for the British government, I was exposed to a number of influences that

suggested to me that the Bible might be true.

“In Jerusalem, I joined a tourist group that went to visit ‘Gordon’s Calvary,’ the site outside the Damascus Gate where General Charles Gordon believed he had found Golgotha, the skull-shaped hill with the garden tomb nearby. I went with the group to the top of the hill. There, the guide explained that this was the place where the Christian faith began. In my mind, it was the spot where the Christian deception began. I became so angry I began to curse and blaspheme. The people around me ran in terror, afraid that God would strike me dead for my blasphemy at that sacred place.”

At this point, the young man broke down in tears. “These last few nights,” he continued, “I’ve learned that the one I cursed on Calvary was the one who was wounded for my transgressions and by whose wounds I am healed.”

It took an Old Testament prophecy to prepare this young man’s heart for the good news of the New Testament. His experience demonstrates the purpose and power of the Old Testament. The Old Testament was written to set our hearts aflame, to cause our hearts to burn within us in longing for the Christ of the New Testament. Truly, the Lord Jesus Christ supplies all our needs, but the Old Testament awakens our hearts to the reality of our need of Him.

No book in all the New Testament asks the kind of deep, soul-searching questions you find in the Old Testament—questions that continue to plague the hearts of men and women today. No place in the New Testament will you find the earnest searchings of the human heart all gathered in one place. In the Old Testament we find expressed all the

pain, anguish, and confusion that afflicts the modern soul: Why is there injustice? Why do the wicked prosper? What is our place in the cosmic scheme? How can we find meaning and purpose? Are we loved? Are we valuable? Or is everything ultimately futile? Do we just live, laugh, suffer, then die and return to dust?

The Old Testament is designed to articulate our deep spiritual hunger, to put life into terms we can see and express, to define the thirst of the soul, so that we can put a finger on our pain, our need, and our desire. How can we recognize the One who satisfies if we haven't identified the sources of our dissatisfaction?

For thousands of years, right up to the present moment, people of all cultures and backgrounds have turned to the Old Testament and have read its precious, powerful words, and said, "That's exactly how I feel!" They have gone on to find the answer for their pain and problems in those pages. The Old Testament is the book of human experience. It's designed to portray us as we are. In the mirror of the Old Testament we see ourselves clearly, and this reflection of

ourselves prepares us to listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks to us through the New Testament.

How poverty-stricken we would be without the Old Testament—yet many Christians choose to be poor. They ignore the preparatory revelation God has given in the Old Testament, so that the rich truths of the New Testament might come alive in their hearts. As we move from the Old to the New Testament, I hope you'll be challenged and changed in your approach to this great book, and that the pages of the first thirty-nine books of your Bible will become as worn, underlined, and treasured as the pages of your favorite New Testament books.

The Divisions of the Old Testament

There are four divisions of the Old Testament, and each is especially designed to prepare us for a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. From the story of humanity's origins to the history of Israel to the great Old Testament poetry to the thundering books of prophecy, each section of the Old Testament lays its own foundation of truth. Each division

touches our hearts in a subtly different way and presents the approaching ministry and person of Jesus the Messiah in a subtly different light. When He is finally revealed at the critical moment in history, we see Him and say, "Yes! This is the One we have always heard read about in the Old Testament!"

Here is a thumbnail

DIVISIONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis–Deuteronomy

Five Steps to Maturity *Origin of the universe and humanity*

Joshua–Esther

The Message of History *Perils that confront the walk of faith*

Job–Song of Songs

Music to Live By *Praise & protest of the human heart*

Isaiah–Malachi

The Promises of God *Truths for living*

guide to the four divisions of the Old Testament:

FIVE STEPS TO MATURITY—THE BOOKS OF MOSES. These five books take us from the origin of the universe and of humanity, and lead us toward maturity through the introduction of sin (and the first gleaming of the plan of salvation), the first judgment of humankind through the Great Flood, the heroes of faith (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph), the beginnings of the nation of Israel, the captivity in (and exodus from) Egypt, the leadership of Moses, the introduction of the law, the wandering in the desert, and right up to the very borders of the Land of Promise.

Genesis means “beginnings,” and the book of Genesis opens with the greatest mystery of our existence: our relationship to the universe and to its Creator. In Genesis, we see reflection after reflection of our own human need. Adam and Eve needed a covering for their sins. Noah needed a boat to save him from the waters of judgment. Abraham continually needed God to intervene, deliver him, and supply him with things he lacked. Isaac needed God to prod him to action. Jacob needed a Savior to get him out of the messes he made in his life. Joseph needed a deliverer from the pit, from prison, and from life’s unfairness. The message of Genesis is the message of God’s answer to our human need.

Exodus is the story of God’s response to our human need. It’s the lesson of His redemptive power in our lives—the story of the first Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, and the giving of the law at Sinai. It’s the story of human oppression in the land of Pharaoh—

and the story of miraculous redemption and deliverance from bondage. The Israelites did nothing to bring about their own salvation. God did it all. That’s still how He works in our lives today.

Leviticus is a book of detailed instruction. It’s designed to make God accessible to us so that we will be available to God. It begins with the story of the tabernacle, the dwelling place of God. The tabernacle is a symbol of our lives, the place in which God chooses to dwell.

Numbers is the book of the wilderness of failure. The book begins at Kadesh-barnea, at the very edge of the Land of Promise. The people of Israel wander away from that place, losing sight of God’s promise for forty years. After wandering in barrenness, loneliness, and blistering sand, haunted mile after mile by defeat, they finally arrive at the same place where Numbers began—Kadesh-barnea. Numbers is a record of failure—and a warning for our own lives.

Deuteronomy means “second law.” It’s the story of the regiving of the law—and the people’s recommitment to follow it. The book closes with the disclosure of the blessings that await those who pattern their lives after the revealed will of God.

So the thread that winds through these five books, from Genesis through Deuteronomy, is that we are advancing, step-by-step, book-by-book, toward maturity, toward a relationship with the living God of the universe.

THE MESSAGE OF HISTORY—JOSHUA THROUGH ESTHER. The historical books make a unique contribution to the preparatory work of the Old Testament. While

the first five books of the Old Testament gave us the pattern of God's working in the human race, the next twelve books of history present us with the perils that confront us in our daily walk of faith. These books trace the history of one nation with a special ministry—the ministry of representing God to the world and perpetuating the lineage of the One who will be born the Messiah, the Son of God. In the perils and failures of Israel we see the perils and failures that beset us today as believers. And in God's loving discipline and redemption of Israel, we see His work of sanctifying and saving us from our sin and failure.

The books of history lead us into the battlefield as Joshua obediently seeks to take the Land of Promise. We see the intimidating forces of Jericho, followed by God's miraculous victory. We see the failure of the flesh at Ai and the deception of the Gibeonites. Through it all, we see Joshua steadily marching onward, fighting the battle of faith, never turning aside from the mission God had given him.

In Judges we see the cycles of spiritual success and spiritual defeat—and we see God's use of seven special people, the judges of Israel, to bring deliverance to Israel. In Ruth we have a wonderful story of faithfulness, set against the backdrop of the failures of Judges. Ruth, an alien woman in Israel, hears the voice of God and joins herself to His people, Israel. It's a beautiful story of romance and faith.

The books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles tell of the glory years of Israel as a mighty kingdom—and of the tragedies that result when human kings disobey the King of Kings. These books tell us the stories of King Saul, King David, King Solomon, and on and

on—kings who were strong, kings who were weak, wise kings and foolish, righteous kings and evil, great kings and small. And whenever a bad king has led Israel into disgrace, the Lord lifts up a man like Hezekiah or Josiah to cleanse the temple, rediscover the book of the Law, and turn Israel back to God.

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther deal with Israel's captivity and restoration. God is always at work in our lives—even in our bondage and pain. He lifts us out of defeat and discouragement and helps us to rebuild the walls of our lives, even as Nehemiah led the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. God enables us to shout in triumph, even amid seemingly hopeless circumstances, just as Queen Esther was able to triumph over her impossible odds. In these twelve books of history, we see how God prepares our hearts for the long-awaited arrival of the Messiah.

MUSIC TO LIVE BY—JOB THROUGH SONG OF SONGS. These are the poetical books that express both the praise and protest of the human heart. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs expose our hearts to God, honestly expressing our pain and longing for God. There is not a single emotion we experience in life that is not expressed in these books. If you want to understand your own experience in life and find a reflection of your own soul in the Scriptures, then turn to these beautiful Old Testament books.

THE PROMISES OF GOD—ISAIAH THROUGH MALACHI. These are the books where God says what He will do. There are seventeen of these books, commonly divided

between the “major” prophets and “minor” prophets. They are not major or minor in importance—only in length. Whether long or short, all of these books contain major truths for our lives.

Isaiah is a book of glory and majesty. It predicts in startling detail the life, ministry, and sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus. It is also a book of grace. It tells the story of how we have destroyed ourselves through sin—and how God has intervened and given us the promise of a new beginning. Jeremiah and Lamentations, by contrast, warn of the absence of God from our lives if we turn our backs on Him. Ezekiel begins with a cascading, transcendent vision of God and leads us on a tour of future history, revealing God’s promise of intervention in worldwide human events. Daniel shows us God’s power to give us boldness, even in a hostile, rapidly changing world; Daniel goes on to reveal what God is planning to do through the nations of the world down through the course of history, even beyond our own day.

Hosea is one of the most beautiful books in the Bible, a picture of God’s unconditional love toward erring, sinful human beings; it’s the promise of God’s persistent pursuit to bring us redemption. Joel is the promise that God can weave our tragedies into His eternal plan. Amos is the promise that God never relaxes His standards, but continually seeks to bring us to perfection in Him. Obadiah is a promise of spiritual victory, as seen in the

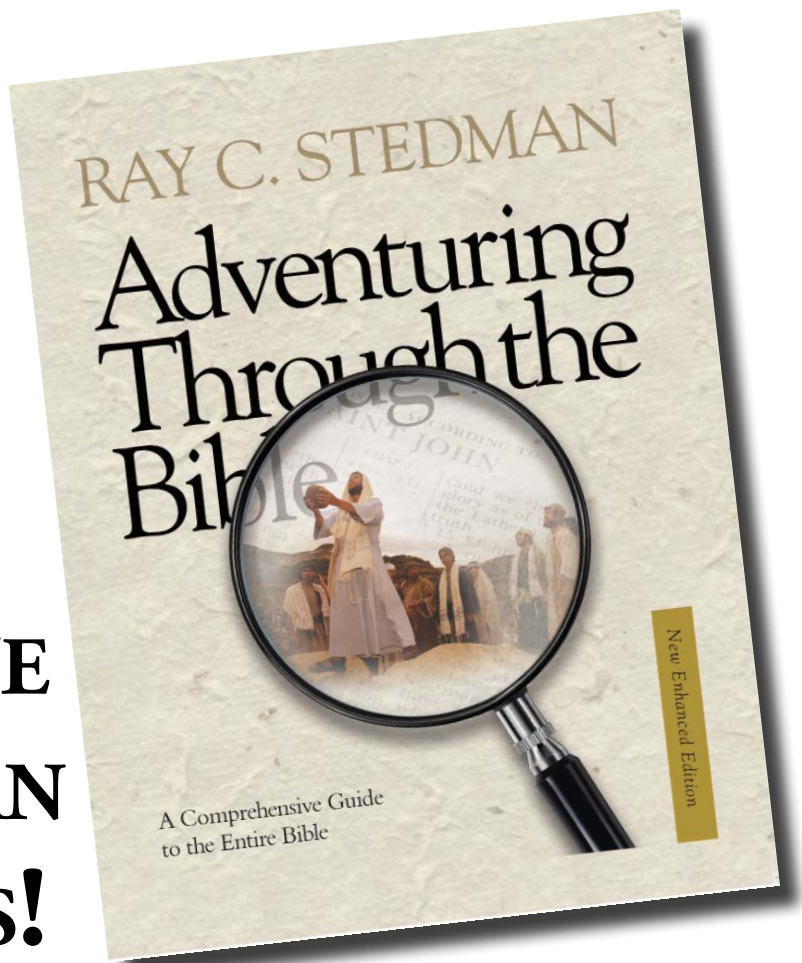
contrast between Jacob and Esau, the spirit and the flesh. Jonah is the promise of God’s patience, and His gracious second chance, as revealed in the life of Jonah and the repentance of Nineveh.

Micah is the promise of God’s pardon, echoing the themes of Isaiah. Nahum promises the destruction of Nineveh; it comes after the story of Jonah and the repentance of Nineveh by a hundred years and demonstrates that God does not change. If we repent once, then lapse back into disobedience, we can expect the disciplining judgment of God. Habakkuk promises that God will ultimately answer our cries for justice in an unjust world. Zephaniah is a dark book that promises judgment in “the day of the Lord.”

Haggai promises material restoration if we turn our hearts to God. Zechariah is “the Apocalypse of the Old Testament,” promising God’s management of future events and His preservation of His people through times of judgment. Malachi promises that God will respond to our need and send us a Savior; it predicts the first coming of Jesus (preceded by John the Baptist), then skips over to the second coming of Jesus, the dawning of the Sun of Righteousness.

In these few paragraphs, we have sketched the outline of the Old Testament. In the pages that follow, we’ll look at some of the subtler shadings of God’s grand book of preparation for our lives.

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