

RAY C. STEDMAN

Adventuring Through the Bible

A Comprehensive Guide to the Entire Bible

New Enhanced Edition



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God Has Spoken in These Last Days



There are two ways of learning truth: reason and revelation. Which is more important? That's like asking which blade of a pair of scissors is more important. It takes both. It's impossible to gather a complete and balanced understanding of biblical truth without using both reason and revelation.

Some people would throw out reason and rely on revelation alone. The result is fanaticism. If we decide that our God-given faculty of reason has no value at all, then we will behave irrationally.

I once read of a man who decided that the solution to every problem could be found in the Bible. When gophers began eating the vegetables in his garden, he took his Bible out in the yard and read the gospel of John in the four corners of his property. Somehow, he figured this would solve his gopher problem. It didn't. Reason would suggest that the best way to rid one's garden of gophers would be to set out gopher traps. By relying solely on revelation without applying reason and common sense, this man ended up behaving irrationally.

But what if we throw out revelation and rely on reason alone? The result would be

LEFT: Mount Arbel

equally disastrous. Reason has given us many scientific insights and technological advances, but reason alone has never shown us how to change the human heart; how to end war; or how to eliminate crime, poverty, drug abuse, or racism. In fact, our technological advances have actually rendered the future more dark and frightening. We can never begin to solve our social and human problems as long as we set aside God's revelation and rely on human reason alone.

The Word and the Spirit Together

What is revelation? It is simply the truth that cannot be known by reason. It's what Paul called "God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden . . . none of the rulers

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This chapter provides a "thumbnail" overview of the entire New Testament, the channel by which God makes the living Lord Jesus real to our hearts. The New Testament answers all the questions raised by the Old Testament. This chapter deals with such crucial issues as: Who is Jesus, according to the Gospels? How did the church begin? What is the purpose of the Epistles (the letters of Paul and other apostles)? What is the purpose of the book of Revelation?

of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:7–8). When Paul spoke of the rulers of this age, he was not necessarily talking about kings and princes. He was talking about leaders of human thought in every realm. And he said there is a body of knowledge—a secret, hidden wisdom—that is imparted by God to human beings, which none of the rulers with all their cleverness and wisdom could understand. Had they known this, they never would have crucified the Lord of glory.

The religious rulers who demanded the crucifixion of our Lord were a body of learned men who boasted that they, more than anyone else, could recognize truth when they saw it. But when the incarnate Truth stood before them, they neither recognized Him nor received His word. They crucified Him because they had thrown out revelation and were clinging only to the power of their own reasoning.

Revelation, in the fullest sense, is Scripture interpreted by the Holy Spirit. We have the Bible, given to us by God, as Paul told Timothy: “All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). Scripture did not originate with human beings. Rather, certain chosen human beings became channels through whom God delivered His Word.

As Peter wrote, “Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). The writers of the New Testament wrote letters just as we would write them today, expressing their feelings, their attitudes, and their ideas in the most natural and uncomplicated manner. But in the process, a strange mystery took place: The Holy Spirit worked through the New Testament writers

to guide, direct, and inspire. The Spirit chose the very words that would express God’s thoughts to human beings.

The hidden wisdom of God cannot be discovered in a laboratory experiment, yet His wisdom is essential to the kind of life God intends us to live. This wisdom is revealed in the Bible—yet it is worthless to us if we are not instructed by the Holy Spirit. It’s possible to know the Bible from cover to cover and get absolutely nothing from it. You can go to any bookstore and find dozens of books filled with extensive information about the historical, archaeological, and literary content of the Bible; yet the authors of these books are hardened atheists.

So revelation is not found merely by reading the Bible. The Bible must be illuminated, interpreted, and authenticated in our lives by the Holy Spirit. The Word and the Spirit must act together to bring us to a saving knowledge of God.

A Book of Fulfillment

Did you ever wonder why Jesus came to the Jews? Why didn’t He come to the Aztecs? or the Chinese? or the Eskimos? There’s a simple, commonsense answer to this question: He came to the Jews because they were the nation that had the Old Testament. The Jews, for this reason, were uniquely prepared to receive what God offered in Christ.

Certainly, not all Jews received Him. But for the first few years of its existence, the early church was overwhelmingly a Jewish church. The Jewish nation was qualified to receive the Messiah because it had been prepared by the Old Testament to receive Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

This is why many people today who read only the New Testament can go only so far in grasping the fullness of Jesus Christ. Their hearts are not adequately prepared. Our lives are always shallow and limited if we try to grasp something we are not ready to receive. That's why we need the ministry of the Old Testament in our lives.

If the Old Testament prepares, then the New Testament fulfills. God designed the New Testament to meet the needs stirred up and expressed by the Old Testament. How does the New Testament meet these needs? By revealing to us the One who is the answer to all our needs. Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37). "If anyone eats of this bread [referring to Himself], he will live forever" (John 6:51). "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). All the needs of the human heart are met in Him.

The New Testament is a channel by which the Holy Spirit makes the living Jesus Christ real to our hearts. The New Testament letter to the Hebrews tells us, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways" (Heb. 1:1). In other words, the Old Testament has given us an incomplete message, not the final word. "But in these last days," the passage continues, "he [God] has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:2). The New Testament is the answer to the yearning the Old Testament stirs within us.

When the corrupt religious leaders tried to trap Jesus and destroy Him, He replied, "You diligently study the Scriptures"—that is,

the Old Testament—"because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39). It's true. The Old Testament testifies about the coming Messiah, and the New Testament testifies of the Messiah who has come.

The New Testament answers the questions of the Old Testament because the New Testament makes plain what the Old Testament speaks of in symbols, prophecies, and veiled references. Once we have met the Christ of the New Testament, we are able to see Him plainly throughout the Old Testament as well.

In both the Old Testament and the New, Jesus stands out on every page.

The Divisions of the New Testament

Every division of the New Testament is particularly designed to set forth the Lord Jesus Christ as the answer to the needs of our lives.

The **Gospels** are the biographical section of the New Testament. There we learn about Jesus, who He is and what He did. Who is Jesus, according to the Gospels? He's the Son of God born in human form for us. What did He do? He submitted to being sacrificed upon the cross. He burst forth from the tomb in resurrection power. He saved us from the penalty for our sins.

There was a time when, in the fullness of my ignorance after graduating from seminary, I thought the Gospels were hardly worth reading! I had heard that the Gospels were "merely" the story of the life of Jesus. There was certainly *some* value in them, but I believed the most important parts of the New Testament were Paul's epistles. A few of my seminary instructors unwisely reinforced this

DIVISIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Gospels

Matthew to John *The life of Jesus*

Acts

Book of Acts *The life of the church*

Epistles

Romans to Jude *Letters to the church*

Revelation

Book of Revelation *Future events*

notion, encouraging me to give my attention almost exclusively to the Epistles. They promised that if I would grasp the Epistles, my biblical knowledge would be complete.

In time, I discovered that I couldn't understand the Epistles apart from the Gospels. As I read the life of Christ and saw Him portrayed in the four dimensions of the four Gospels, I discovered the secret that transformed my own life and ministry. The most radical, revolutionary statement ever presented to the human mind is revealed in the words of Jesus Christ, and is recorded in various ways in the Gospels: "I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me" (John 6:57). This statement explains the life of Christ—the miracles He performed, the sermons He preached, the parables He told, the work He accomplished, and even His death and resurrection.

Acts gives us the account of the beginning of the church. And the church is nothing more, nor less, than the body of Jesus Christ today through which He intends to keep on

being who He is and doing what He did. He poured out His physical life in order that He might pour it into a body of people who would express that life throughout the world. The book of Acts is but the simple, straightforward account of how this body began, how it was filled with the Holy Spirit, and how it began to launch out from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria, and far beyond to the uttermost parts of the earth.

The ministry that belonged to Jesus during His earthly life now belongs to His body, the body of believers. Our task as His followers is to open the eyes of the blind, to set at liberty those who are held captive, to comfort those who need comfort, to be conduits for God's transforming, life-changing power in the lives of men and women everywhere.

The **Epistles** are a series of letters written to individuals and churches in straightforward, uncomplicated language, conveying practical truths for Christian living. These letters are revealing, because nothing is as revealing as a personal letter. If I wanted to know what a group of people were like (short of sitting down and talking to them face-to-face), I would read their letters. The Epistles are letters written by human beings, under the direct inspiration of God. In them, we find revealed the personality of their human writers and the personality of their divine Author.

The Epistles represent a varied array of viewpoints. We find God's truth expressed through the personalities of the writers of these letters. There is Peter the fisherman, always casting his net for the human soul. There is Paul the tentmaker and church builder, always laying foundations and constructing.

There is John the net mender (that's what he was doing when Christ first found him), and his ministry is one of repairing, restoring, and bringing us back to God's original pattern.

In the letters of the New Testament, we discover the nuts and bolts of the Christian life, and we learn how to allow Jesus Christ to live His life through us. These letters are almost all composed in the same simple pattern. The first part is doctrinal, the second part is practical. The first part sets forth truth, the second part applies that truth to real life.

Truth must be applied. As the Lord Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31a-32). Until we begin to learn who He is and what He does and then apply it in the specific activities of our own lives and hearts, we can read our Bibles for years, yet be totally untouched by His magnificent truth.

Many people think that if anybody exemplifies what the Christian life should be, it is a pastor. It would seem to follow that if you could gather several pastors together, it would practically be heaven on earth! Let me tell you, it isn't that way at all.

At one pastors' conference I attended, there were ministers who were discouraged, confused, and soul-sick. In fact, some were so wounded and defeated that their very faith hung by a thread. Our speaker gave an excellent message on 1 Corinthians 2:16, where Paul says, "We have the mind of Christ." After the sermon, we had a prayer meeting. To my amazement, pastor after pastor prayed: "Oh Lord, give us the mind of Christ! Oh, if we could just have the mind of Christ!"

Now, what does the passage say? "We

have the mind of Christ." If that is what God's Word tells us, what kind of faith would pray, "Give me the mind of Christ"? Even many pastors, I'm sad to say, routinely ignore and misapprehend the promises of Scripture. We ask God for the things He has already granted us. He says to us, "Here! Take! All this is yours!" And in response, we stand and moan, "Oh, if I only had the mind of Christ, what I could do!"

As we adventure through the Epistles together, I pray you will open your heart to the straightforward truths presented there. I pray you will lay hold of all that God has given you, and that you will take these truths and apply them in your everyday life.

Finally, the book of **Revelation**. This is the only book in the New Testament that deals completely with prophecy. Here, in the form of a vision, God reveals to us not only a slate of future events, but the reality of who He is now and throughout all ages to come. Here we read the story of how the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, how He shall reign forever and ever, and how God's people shall become His dwelling place, so that a multitude from every tribe and nation will triumph over sin, death, and hell.

Peace, Perfect Peace

The message of the New Testament is fundamentally simple. It's the same message Paul states so eloquently in Colossians 1:27: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." We do not have any hope if we do not have that. If Christ is not active in you, and you have not already begun to experience the mystery of His life being lived in you, then you are not a

Christian and you have no hope—no hope of glory, no hope of fulfillment, no hope eternal life and eternal love.

But if you have placed your trust in Him, then you have every reason for hope. Thanks to God and His Son Jesus Christ, you have the greatest hope imaginable!

Hymn writer Edward H. Bickersteth puts it beautifully: “Peace, perfect peace.” But we cannot grasp the message of this hymn unless we notice its punctuation, because it has a rather peculiar structure. There are two lines in every verse. The first line ends with a question mark. The second line answers the question. The questions all concern life right now, and the answers are aspects of “Christ in you.”

Question: “Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?” Answer: “The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.”

Question: “Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties pressed?” Answer: “To do the will of Jesus, this is rest.”

Question: “Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging round?” Answer: “On Jesus’ bosom naught but calm is found.”

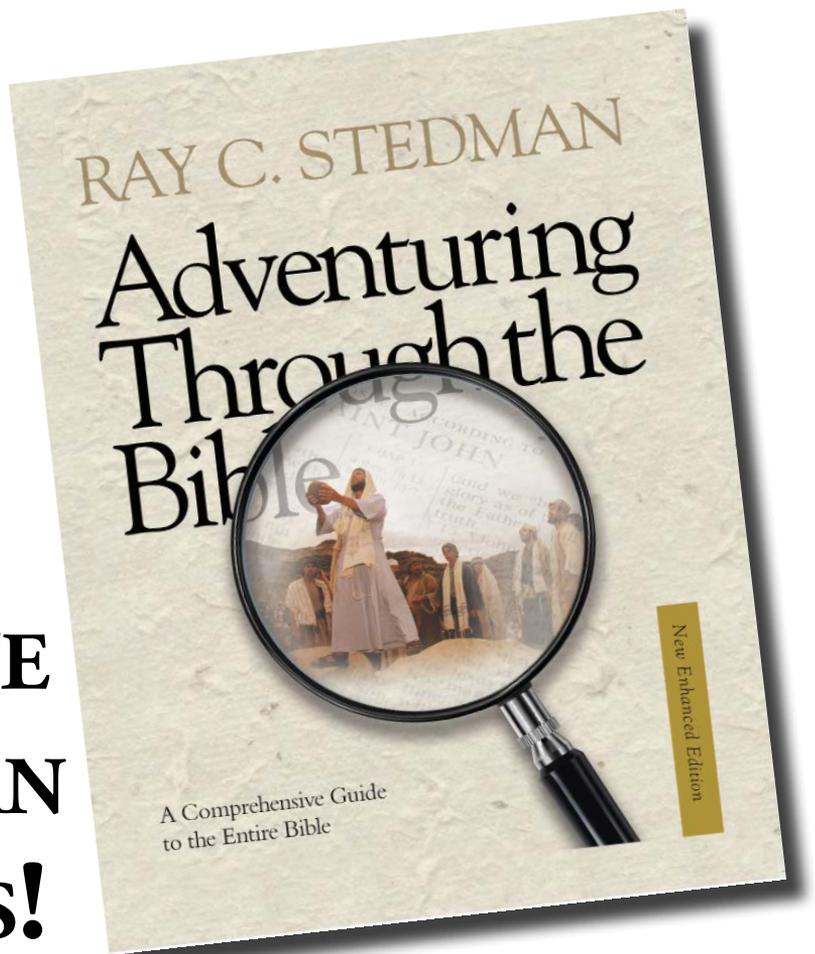
Question: “Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?” Answer: “Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.”

Question: “Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and ours?” Answer: “Jesus has vanquished death and all its powers.”

These are the questions desperately asked by the sin-sick, pain-wracked human race. And these are the answers found in the New Testament. Notice that each answer focuses on the name of Jesus! He is the focus of the New Testament. He is the answer to all our needs.

The purpose of the Bible is to point us to the living person of Christ. He is the One whose image is embedded in every page of the Bible. The New Testament was written in order that we may see Him—“Christ in you, the hope of glory.” In the pages of the New Testament, we see Jesus.

THE COMPLETE BOOK CAN BE YOURS!



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