

Highlights of the Bible

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Part One: Introduction: Invitation to a Journey

The Bible is easily the most fascinating book in the world. Granted it doesn't often appear as such to many. Some have even thought it to be dry and even boring. But that is surely because they have not spent much time with it. It is a book of wonderful variety. There are beautiful love stories which reflect the tenderest and most delicate of human passions. There are stories of political intrigue and maneuvering which rival anything we know today. There are stories of blood and thunder which chill the heart. There are poetic passages which soar to the very heights of ecstasy. There are narratives of intense interest and intricate plot and there are strange and cryptic passages filled with weird symbols and allegories which are difficult to penetrate and comprehend.

THE BIBLE'S THEME

Yet through all this variety there runs one coherent theme. Despite the diversity of human authorship and the vast span of time over which it was written (which surely precludes all possibility of collusion) this book has but one message tells one story moves to one point and directs our attention to one Person: it is the glorious story of how God became flesh the Immortal became a mortal the Eternal One became a temporal being like ourselves that we may know the truth concerning ourselves.

The ultimate theme which makes the Bible of eternal fascination is essentially the story of your life and mine. It reveals the secrets I need to know about myself. It is the book that goes with man, as an instruction book goes with every major appliance. The Bible explains man. It instructs us, exhorts us, admonishes us, corrects us, strengthens us, teaches us. In the *story* which unfolds throughout the book God has incorporated all the truths we need to know about ourselves to discover the beauty and glory He had designed for man in the beginning.

The more you understand of the Bible's truth the more thrilling it becomes. I have been studying this book for over four decades and it has grown more fascinating, more mysterious, more marvelous in its implications, as my apprehension of it has increased.

A physicist friend once said to me, "Studying the Bible is like my study of the physical universe. At first it seems rather simple and easy to grasp. But the more deeply I probe into the makeup of the universe, the more complex and challenging I find it to be, till at last it blows all my mental fuses and I have to admit to myself that it is beyond me. So is Bible study. It is relatively simple to read, somewhat more difficult to understand; but once understood it is mind blasting in its implications." That ought not to surprise us, seeing that one God is behind both the universe and the Bible.

Even the story of how the Bible came into being is one of sheer fascination. The apostle Peter tells us the Bible was written by men who were "moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1 :21). No one has ever been able to analyze that process. How was it that ordinary men like ourselves, some from the most common callings of life, could have been so led by the Holy Spirit in recording what they thought and felt that they would succeed in capturing in human words the thoughts and attitudes of God Himself? We do not really know. It is an amazing miracle. All we can know is that is what did happen, and if it had not, the Book could not have come into being.

When we hold it in our hands, sooner or later we ask ourselves: Why was it written? What is the ultimate aim of the Book? What does God want to accomplish by giving us a book like this, and giving us also the Holy Spirit to interpret it and make it real in our experience? The questions are surely to the point for nothing exists that does not have a purpose. The Bible was written by men moved of the Holy Spirit, and it has been kept and preserved through the centuries in strange and providential ways. It comes to us with its pages wet by the blood of martyrs. Surely God would not have gone to all this tremendous trouble to record His words in written form and preserve them through centuries of attack without some overwhelming purpose in view.

THE BIBLE'S PURPOSE

The Bible itself gives us the purpose. It can be found in a number of places, but one of the clearest is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul states that the Lord Jesus, having finished His work here on earth through the cross and the resurrection, ascended to heaven and gave gifts to men." And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, *to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ*" (Eph. 4:1 1-13, italics added).

God's purpose in giving us the Bible, is that we might know what it takes to become a "mature man." According to the *Amplified Bible*, the definition of mature manhood is "nothing less than the standard height of Christ's own perfection." Amazing! This verse says that the whole universe in its physical and moral dimensions, and the entire biblical record of God's actions among men exist in order that you might fulfill your manhood or your womanhood in Jesus Christ. That is God's purpose. That you and I might fulfill the possibilities God has hidden in our humanity. The true measure of that humanity is the measure of the manhood of Jesus.

At one time in my ministry I met regularly with five young high school boys. On one occasion I said to them, "Fellows, tell me this. What is your idea of a real he-man?" One of them answered, "Well, I think a real he-man is a guy with a lot of solid muscle."

There happened to be a young man in that high school who had a tremendous body--lots of muscle, and especially between the ears! So I said, "Do you mean so-and-so?"

He thought for a moment and said, "No, I guess not. He's really not too much of a man."

So I went on. "Obviously, manhood is not muscles. What is it? What does it mean to be a real man?"

They all thought for a bit, then another replied, "I think a real he-man has guts." We started making a list and wrote "courage" at the top. They named other qualities: considerateness, kindness, integrity, honesty, and so on. After a while we had quite a long list. I said to them, "You know, guys, isn't it amazing that you could go anywhere in the world to any man in any city, open countryside or jungle--rich or poor, high or low, black or white or red or yellow--and ask him the question, 'What do you think it means to be a man?' you would eventually get the same answers you've given me! All men everywhere want to be real men. All women want to be women. The ideal they hold in their hearts is exactly the same. There may be small variations in standards but not in the general qualities."

They looked disbelieving until I asked: "Do you know anywhere on earth where courage is regarded as a vice and cowardice a virtue? Does any man want to be known as a coward and is proud that he is widely regarded as such?"

They all shook their heads.

I said, "Right. Everywhere, cowardice is despised; courage is admired."

Then I said to these fellows, "Do you know anyone who has fulfilled his idea of manhood? How are you doing yourselves?"

One of them rather cockily said, "Well, I think I make it about 30 percent of the time."

The others jumped on him right away and said, "No you wouldn't even make five percent!"

I questioned further. "Do you know anybody who has done it 100 percent?"

For a moment they looked blank. Then their faces lit up and they said, "Of course! It was Jesus!"

They were right! There is God's perfect man. In Him we see humanity in its fullest flower.

As a boy I ran across a copy of Rudyard Kipling's poem "If." When I read it I put it up on the wall of my room, for it seemed to describe exactly what I understood a real man to be. The opening verses read:

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
And make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating;
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream, and not make dreams your master;
If you can think, and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster,
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken

Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build them up, with worn-out tools;

These admonitions describe character where it counts. Anyone who has seriously tried to do them knows that they are tough demands--too tough for me. I've broken them scores of times. In a concluding stanza Kipling says:

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings--nor lose the common touch,--
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you--but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And--which is more--you'll be a Man, my son!

THE BIBLE'S PERSON

Who fulfills the glory of Manhood? In the course of human history, only one Person had the qualities that describe precisely the aim God has in mind in giving us His book of revelation.

Let us think about Ephesians 4:13 again. It says that we must come to mature manhood and that the steps toward that end are two. First, we are to come to "*the knowledge of* the Son of God." There is no possibility of achieving manhood, as God intends man to be, if there is no experiential knowledge of the Son of God. We must be born again.

The step that flows from this knowledge is that *we all attain to the unity of the faith.*" We share the same life (the life of Jesus) because we have come to the knowledge of the Son of God in the new birth. We discover, then, that we belong to one another and are gradually growing into a mutual understanding of the teaching of truth. This means we need each other to achieve the maturity that God desires. It is impossible to move to maturity unless we are sharing truth with each other. What the Presbyterians know should be shared with the Pentecostals, and what the Baptists know is to be shared with the Episcopalians, and vice versa. Those who know the Son of God in any denomination may help in the building up of other such believers wherever they encounter them, till the whole church universal attains an increasing unity of faith. We need each other, to the end that we may continue growing in the knowledge of the Son of God. Thus the knowledge of Christ both begins the Christian life (in the new birth) and characterizes it throughout its duration. The apostle Peter exhorts the Christians to whom he writes: Go on growing in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18, JB).

This is why the Bible was given to us. It is, from Genesis to Revelation, all about Jesus Christ. In symbol, in narrative, in marvelous prophetic vision, in history, in poetry, it all points to Him--the true center of the universe of God. He is the secret of the book. But, as we have already implied, in learning about Him we discover that we are learning about ourselves also. We discover our true nature as human beings when we see it reflected in Him. We understand our problems and our reactions to them as we see Him at work both in the Old and the New Testaments. We will find all our needs fully met in Him.

Major Ian Thomas has well stated of Jesus: He had to be what he was in order to do what he did. He had to be the Son of God in order to be the Savior of the world. No other could have done it. He had to be God, manifest in the flesh--the Eternal, Immortal One--yet dying upon a cross. He had to be what He was in order to do what He did.

But Major Thomas goes on: "He had to do what he did in order that we might have what he is." That is the true glory--the good news--of the gospel. It is not particularly good news to be told that our sins are forgiven by the shed blood of Jesus if then we must struggle on through this life doing the best we can, falling and failing, struggling and slipping, going through periods of doubt, despair, discouragement and defeat, until at last we get over on the other side and find the release we crave. That has an element of hope about it, but it is not really the good news. The truly good news is that not only does final fulfillment await us over there, but right now, where we are in this present life, we may have all that our Lord Jesus Christ is! He had to do what He did in order that we might have what He is.

But still further: "We must have what he is in order to be what he was." What was He? As we have seen, He was perfect man. He was God's ideal man, man as God intended man to be. For more than 33 years, right down here on this sin-drenched planet where you and I live, in the very circumstances and under the same pressures, up against the same problems, the same "contradiction of sinners against himself" that you and I face every day, He lived that perfect life. If God's intention is that we too may learn how to live like that, to be "mature" as He was, then it clearly follows that: "We must have what he is in order to be what he was."

THE PROCESS

We don't come to the knowledge of the Son of God without learning to do so, without a process. We require a gradual, deepening understanding of God's truth. Someone once said to a Christian, "Will your God give me a hundred dollars?" His reply was, "He will if you know Him well enough." George Mueller, man of prayer, and founder of the world-famous Bristol Orphanages in England, knew Him so well that God gave him millions of dollars. He will give you whatever you need to serve His purposes--if you know Him well enough.

We learn to know God through the pages of Scripture, as interpreted and taught by the Holy Spirit and put into actual practice in our lives. We cannot separate the Word and the Spirit. The Bible without the Spirit leads to dullness and intellectual pride, to a dead Christianity. The Spirit without the Bible leads to fanaticism and folly. It takes both the Spirit and the Word.

And we need the entire Bible. The story of man before the Fall is necessary in order that we might know what God intended when He made man, and what we can expect to come to in our relationship with Him. We must also know the story of the fall of man, to study it, to search out its secrets, in order that we may have an explanation for the strange reactions which arise within us, often unbidden, that make it easy to be bad and difficult to be good. We need to know the Law in order to see what God expects of us, and to learn our guilt and our helplessness before Him.

We must know, too, the stories of the men and women of faith throughout the Bible, to see how God meets them, strengthens them, delivers them, teaches them, and ultimately brings them to glory. What an encouragement these lives are to us! As we read our Bibles we see that Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, David, Ruth, Daniel, Mary, Paul, Peter and others, all went through many of the same experiences we do, and we understand that God recorded these experiences that we may learn how to handle our problems and find the way through them.

We must read and understand the Prophets that we might see the whole picture to the end, and come to a certainty that God knows what He is doing and can work all things out. We must learn God's thoughts and ways, which are different (and higher) than ours. Especially must we learn what Paul refers to in I Corinthians 2:7 as the "mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory." We must be brought by the Spirit into the proper attitude to learn that hidden wisdom, for Jesus once said to His Father, "I thank Thee that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes."

The four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, next demand our attention in order that we may see the perfect life of Jesus--that remarkable, magnificent display of God in humanity--which is totally different from anything we can learn outside the Word of God. We must then know the Epistles of the apostles in order to apply the great truths we learn in the Gospels to the everyday circumstances of our lives. It is the business of the writers of the New Testament letters to explain truth in logical and clear fashion and to translate these truths into practical daily lessons.

Finally, we need to know the book of Revelation, because in hours of crisis (both as individuals and nations) we will find in Revelation the assurance that the darkness shall ultimately pass, the futility will be ended, man's present bondage shall cease, and Jesus Christ shall be fully and completely manifested throughout the universe as King of kings and Lord of lords. Then "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ."

Thus the whole of the Bible is needed to convey us to the maturity which God desires for us, and to which He has called us. The Testaments are not divided into two portions so that we may choose the one that best appeals to us.

THE PREPARATION

There is a good reason why our Bibles are consistently divided into two major portions: the Old Testament and the New Testament. Some may reason that the division is because of the 400-year gap between the Testaments. It is true that some 400 years of human history lie between the close of the writing of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New, during which time no prophet spoke for God and no new truth was added to the revelation of God to men. Though many religious books were written during that period, and several helpful books of the history of God's people came into being, none of them ever found their way into the sacred canon as authentic words from God. However these "silent years" are not the only reason for the two Testaments.

Another thought is that the Old Testament was written almost entirely by Jews; the New Testament was written wholly by Christians (though most of them were Hebrew Christians). Yet the differences of outlook between Jews and Christians are not the only reasons why the Bible consists of two books.

A third idea is that each Testament is intended to do a separate and distinct thing. Both help in bringing us to the maturity God desires but in two quite different ways. Thus it would be folly to use one to the exclusion of the other.

Dr. W. H. Griffith-Thomas has suggested that if we were to approach the Old Testament for the first time and read it through we should doubtless become aware of certain remarkable predictions that pointed forward to Someone who was coming. The

predictions would begin in the early chapters of Genesis and, as the text moves along, the predictive element grows in detail until-, in the Prophets, it breaks out into glowing, marvelously flaming colors of description giving us detail after detail of the One who was to appear. When we finished our reading at Malachi we would be abundantly aware that the Old Testament is a book of *unfulfilled prophecy*.

Then, if we read it through again, noticing this time all the strange and bloody sacrifices which begin in Genesis and are mentioned in increasing volume throughout the book with thousands and multiplied thousands of animals whose blood was poured out in unending rivers of death, we would close the book again at Malachi with a realization that here is a book of *unexplained sacrifices*, as well as one of unfulfilled prophecy.

Yet once again, if we read through the Old Testament, this time noticing the prominent personages who appear on its pages, we could hardly escape seeing the longing they express for something more than life was offering them. Abraham sets out to find a city whose builder and maker is God. Moses leads his people out of Egypt with the hope of finding a promised land of rest and hope, and yet when at last the people enter Canaan they do not find the satisfaction they seek. Men and women are on a pilgrim journey all the way through the book. There is a continual cry from thirsty souls, longing after something which has not yet been realized. Again we would end the book at Malachi with the realization that it was a book not only of unfulfilled prophecies and unexplained sacrifices, but also a record of *unsatisfied longings*.

But the moment we opened the New Testament the first words we would read would be: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ." Reading on we would soon discover that He is the one who fulfills the prophecies, who explains the sacrifices, and who satisfies the longings of human hearts. Thus the Old Testament has fulfilled its role of awakening us to the full and deep meaning of the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth. It has prepared us to understand Him in richer and more incomparably profound ways than a reading of the New Testament narrative alone would have done.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan puts the same truth in a slightly different way. He divides the Old Testament into three major divisions: A sigh for a priest; a cry for a king; and a quest for a prophet. The first five books, the books of Moses, are a sigh for a priest, an expressive plea for the ministry of one who can successfully stand between man and God. The books of the historical section are a cry for a king. They gather up in a unified declaration the desires of men for a voice of final authority. The didactic books, the teaching books of the Old Testament--Job, Psalms, Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, and the Major and Minor Prophets--are a quest for a prophet; a reaching out for one who can expertly analyze human problems, offer insightful commentary on the passing scene, and anticipate accurately what is coming. Yet again, when we open the New Testament, we find all this fulfilled in one magnificent person: Jesus Christ, the Priest, the King, the Prophet.

This indicates clearly for us the nature of the Old Testament. It is a book intended to prepare us for something. Every successful process requires an adequate preparation. Why else should a farmer take all the trouble to plow and disc his fields and get them ready for planting? Why doesn't he just sprinkle seed over the hard and rocky ground, hoping that it will grow? Because every farmer knows that though the seed is the most important single item in raising a crop, yet it will never take root unless there has been adequate preparation of the ground.

So the Old Testament enables us to grasp the teaching of the New Testament with a cogency and power quite impossible otherwise. Paul says in Galatians 3:24: "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (KJV). I am confident that something will forever be lacking in our lives if we try to appropriate Jesus Christ without living for a while with the Ten Commandments. We shall never be able to find the release we desire unless, like Paul, we have wrestled with the demands of a rigid, unyielding law which makes us cry out, Oh "wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

I have read the book of Romans for years, especially chapters 6,7 and 8. I even taught it, rather frequently. But I never grasped with real understanding the truth it contains, never let its mighty, liberating power come through to my own heart and experience until I had lived for a while out in the wilderness on the back side of the desert with the children of Israel, and felt the burning desert heat and shared the barren, fruitless, defeated life they experienced. When I had been there too and saw how God delivered them then I was able to understand for the first time what God tells us in Romans 6,7 and 8.

There is no book in the New Testament which asks the same deep, soul-searching questions you will find in Isaiah or Job in the Old Testament--questions which are forever recurring in the hearts of men. There is no place in the New Testament where you find gathered up in brief pungent phrases the deep, deep searchings of mind and heart when confronting the problems of injustice and cruel twists of fate such as you find in the prophets. There is no book like the Psalms to put in graphic, precise terms those troublesome attitudes we find so frequently bothering us today. It is only there we can find these attitudes so accurately put into words that we can say, "That's exactly how I feel" and then go on to find the answer for the problem as well.

The opening words of the book of Hebrews state: "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world" (Heb. 1:1,2).

In these words you have the two Testaments side by side. The Old Testament: "God . . . spoke...in many portions and in many ways," in the New Testament: "In these last days [He] has spoken to us in His Son." The phrase the writer employs describing the Old Testament is very significant: "In many portions and in many ways." As we read the Old Testament through, we can see how true this is.

The Old Testament is God's utterance of syllables of truth which are sometimes almost impossible to understand by themselves, but when merged together the whole produces meaning, preparing us for that marvelous expression of the fullness of truth given to us in God's Son.

In the New Testament, all the many voices from the Old Testament merge into one voice, the voice of the Son of God. Remember that marvelous scene in the book of Revelation in which John sees the Lamb and hears His voice "as the sound of many waters"? That voice then sounds out, catching up in itself all the rivulets and creeks and streams of a thousand rivers, flowing together in one great confluence of sound--the voice of the Son of God!

Some of you may be feeling, "Well this may all be very good, but why not turn directly to the New Testament and listen directly to the final voice of the Son. Why bother with the Old Testament at all?" The answer is that not only does the Old Testament properly introduce the New; it is also true that without the preparation of the Old no one can fully and properly understand the meaning of the New.

Remember the statement of Abraham in that parable Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. The rich man had died and gone to Hades. There he besought Abraham to send Lazarus back to his five brothers to warn them of their fate unless they should repent. Abraham said Lazarus could not do this and added, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." The rich man pleaded that if someone would just go to them from the dead and tell them the truth, then they would believe. But Abraham replied, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should return from the dead." That is, even though someone should return from beyond the river of death with a report of all he has seen and heard, those who refused to believe Moses and the prophets will also reject the one who returned from the dead. Having failed to hear Moses and the prophets they are no longer able to believe truth though it come from beyond the grave. It is simply true that in this, as in many other relationships of life, we cannot short-circuit the processes of learning.

Let us then turn to the Old Testament and allow it to set our hearts aflame with the anticipation that Someone is coming who can supply to us all that we need.

Part II Introduction: The Makeup of Man; The Character of God

The Bible is the most fascinating book in the world precisely because it answers the two most searching questions man can ask. The most profound question of all is: "Who is God?" What is He like--this strange invisible Being who created the world, governs the universe and holds in His hands the destiny of all creatures everywhere in all time. The second question is: "Who are we?" How did we get on this earth? Why are we put here? What is our relationship to the God who made us, and how can we find Him and know Him?

These are the questions which the Bible answers, but not by philosophical discourse, as the major books of other religions in the world attempt to do. Rather, the Bible reveals the self-disclosure of God through the events of history. It recounts the story of the creation of a physical earth on which is placed a human being whose reason for existence is to discover the marvels and majesty of the God who made him. Through disobedience a tragic separation occurs, and the rest of the book is the story of how God prepares man to recognize his helpless alienation and to understand how God Himself ultimately becomes flesh, the Eternal One becomes a temporal being like ourselves, that we may know the truth concerning ourselves.

We have already seen in volume one of *Highlights of the Bible*, covering Genesis through Esther, that the Old Testament makes a special contribution to man's understanding of the redemptive plan of God. The divisions of the Old Testament reflect the several stages of this special contribution. The Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, develops the pattern of God's work with man, showing first, in Genesis, man's essential inadequacy without a close relationship with God. Exodus reveals God's grace in providing a redemptive act which will bring fallen man to Himself. Leviticus is the book of worship, teaching the means of access to God. Numbers describes the wandering of God's people through many up-and-down experiences, but always under the overarching, loving concern of the heavenly Father. Deuteronomy describes the faith which at last rests upon God's full ability to be all-in-all to His people.

The 12 historical books, from Joshua through Esther, depict the perils encountered along the spiritual journey of life. Though lived out in actual history, these stories are of great personal help to us for they picture the spiritual dangers we also face. There is the danger of premature contentment, reflected in the book of Joshua, the peril of dedicated blundering, found in the book of

Judges; the peril of a forgotten calling, manifested in the stories of I and 2 Samuel; divided allegiance, described in the books of 1 and 2 Kings; the terrible peril of counterfeit faith revealed in I and 2 Chronicles. Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther all describe the danger of the discouraged heart. Thus these books are given to us in order that we may see how to overcome such perils and recover from them.

This brings us then to the second half of the Old Testament which is also divided into two parts. There are the five poetical books-Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon--which reflect both the rejoicings and the protests of man in response to life. There we find the sighs and the exaltations, the anger, contentment, tears and laughter of life. Though we call these books poetical this does not mean they are written in rhyme; rather it means they have a structure of repeated ideas expressed in magnificent language. This is the type of poetry the Hebrews employed.

Concluding this second division of the Old Testament are 17 books of the prophets: Five books of Major Prophets (designated so because of their size) Isaiah, Jeremiah and his little volume of Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel; 12 books of Minor Prophets, so called because they are smaller in size. They record the prophetic messages of various men over the course of several centuries of time. Each of the prophetic books is built around a theme, revealing an attribute or character of God. For instance, Isaiah tells us how and why God redeems. Jeremiah speaks of how arid why God chastens, while Ezekiel and Daniel describe how God rules. Thus in this second division of the Old Testament, as in the first, we find God and man together. Man discovers himself only when he begins to understand the self-disclosure of God.

Another fascinating feature of the Old Testament is that both of the divisions cover approximately the same span of time. The first division, beginning with Genesis, covers the early days of human history and the dawn of civilization. It ends with the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, which cover the return from captivity in Babylon during the fifth century B.C. The second division begins with the book of Job which takes us back again to the dawn of civilization. This division ends with the ministries of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, who were prophets of the post-exilic period following the return from Babylon, during which the Temple was being rebuilt and the city of Jerusalem reestablished. But the perspective of both divisions is quite different. The first division is much more external and deals with the facts recorded in history. The second division is more internal and deals with the changing, colorful passions of life. Here we touch on the feelings of the heart and the deep-seated, almost inexpressible yearnings and desires of the spirit. Though historical events are referred to in these books and form a framework for them, yet the central feature of the books is the deep probing of the inner recesses of human thought and the chronicle of the struggles and passions of man as he seeks to both resist and accept the will and purposes of God.

As already stated, the five poetical books reflect the passions and feelings of man, and since man is a threefold being these five books fall into three divisions to correspond to the makeup of man: spirit, soul and body. The book of Job is perhaps the most profound and difficult book in the whole Bible. This is because it deals so penetratingly with the deepest part of our human makeup the spirit within. As we shall soon see, no other book reveals so much of the nature of our humanity as the book of Job. It is the cry of the human spirit.

The three books of Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes together express the functioning of the human soul. Since the soul is the equivalent of our conscious life, it includes the faculties of mind, emotion and will, along with more minor distinctions such as conscience, memory, etc. The book of Psalms is essentially the book reflecting the emotions of God's people. It therefore voices our feelings. Proverbs details the continual choices which must be made throughout the journey of life, and the results that will accrue; it is therefore preeminently the expression of the will, while Ecclesiastes is the book given over to the logical searchings of the intelligence as to the meaning and purpose in life.

Finally, the book of the Song of Solomon has the distinction of being the only book in the Bible devoted to the praise and exaltation of the body. As Job is essentially the cry of faith, and Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes explore the hope of the human soul, the Song of Solomon deals with the glories of love, both from a physical and spiritual standpoint. Thus these poetical books probe the depths of the things which abide-faith, hope, and love. In doing so they remain forever a perennial source of fascinating exploration.

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