

Preface to the Fourth Edition

This guide, which aims to help the reader understand the full sweep of the Bible from beginning to end, was originally prepared for the 1952 Religion in Life program at Bucknell University, sponsored by the Christian Association. To the surprise of many, including the author, it proved to have a wide appeal, far beyond the circle for whom it was originally intended. The guide was issued in revised form as a Haddam House Book in 1953 (later reprinted with only slight changes as a Reflection Book in 1957), followed by a second edition in 1971 that incorporated revisions based on almost two decades of use. A third edition was published by Fortress Press in 1988.

For this fourth edition, as in previous new editions, my policy has been to retain the basic outline and the original text as much as possible. In keeping with the times, however, I have added some new material:

- Responding to the interest in eschatology, or “the last things,” I have included a final study section on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 called “The Triumphant Return.”
- I have revised and expanded the postscript to the third edition (“The Dramatic Movement of Scripture”) under the new title, “Reading the Bible in the Twenty-First Century.” Here I talk about various perspectives on reading the Bible in the new millennium and about the approach of this book to the “unfolding drama” of Scripture.

Perceptive readers will note the introduction of the date abbreviations BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era)—now widely accepted in literature that deals with the

historical periods of the Old and New Testaments. As before, current standards of inclusive language are followed, and the “Suggestions for Bible Study Leaders” have been updated to take into account ongoing scholarly research.

The value of this book has been enhanced by several important contributions. Above all, I am grateful to my daughter, Carol Anderson Hanawalt, for her sensitive insights and her devoted assistance in editing the work and managing its publication. I would also like to thank my colleague and godchild, Judith H. Newman, for reviewing the bibliographic references and making valuable suggestions and additions, and my former student and colleague Steven Bishop, for his helpful review of the text.

The survival of this book through the decades is a clear indication that the study of the Bible is not a passing fad but remains a vital source of understanding for the community of faith and an irresistible challenge to many who seek a faith that is adequate to our times. Especially meaningful to me has been my lifelong association with a group of college friends known as the L.Q.L., or Life Questers’ League. Starting as students at the College of the Pacific in California, members of this group have kept in touch with one another through the hastening years and have enjoyed each other’s company in annual retreats for study, fellowship, and worship. To this extraordinary group I continue to dedicate this work, with the hope that others will find the study of the Bible helpful in the quest for a more abundant life.