Review: A Survey of the Old Testament (by Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton)

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The authors seek (Part I) first to establish Biblical patterns and principles by looking at the families of David and Isaac. Having laid a Biblical foundation, the authors continue (Part II) by surveying factors which contribute to dysfunctional families. The concluding section (Part III) deals with recovery. The book is not intended to deal with any specific abuses but to lay down general principles and to point out general characteristics and patterns. The benefit of a multi-author volume is that it allows a specialist to deal with his particular area of expertise. With several authors several areas of expertise related to the topic of dysfunctional families are able to be combined into one volume. As with any multi-authored work, the benefits, readability, etc. will vary from author to author and chapter to chapter.

Whether believers and pastors like it or not, ministry involves working with people. And working with people involves ministering to their problems. And ministering to their problems involves dealing with dysfunctional families and abuse. And dealing with dysfunctional families and abuse requires more than to simply 'Take two verses and call me in the morning.' Dealing with dysfunctional families and abuse lakes a long term commitment and understanding. One avenue toward understanding is education through volumes such as Secrets of Your Family Tree.


The discovery of new materials and methods of study which impact the understanding of the Old Testament never stops. Therefore, Old Testament survey/introduction books are particularly vulnerable to time. A Survey of the Old Testament is an introduction which is written from a conservative perspective, yet interacts with the plethora of current methodology and material.

In their preface, the authors state that their purpose is "to bring together the most significant data from Old Testament historical and literary backgrounds, critical and technical introduction, Biblical commentary, and Old Testament theology . . . challenging the reader to a serious investigation and personal appreciation of God's truth as revealed in the Old Testament" (xiv, xv). The first chapter deals with the historical, cultural, geographical, literary, and religious background of the Old Testament, and its formation and canonization. Chapters 2 through 5 treat
the individual books of the OT. Each book is investigated concerning its writing, background, outline, purpose and message, structure and organization, and major themes. Each section ends with questions for further study and suggestions for further reading (xiv). The final chapter discusses the relation of the Old Testament to New Testament studies, and reviews the major impacts of the Old Testament on Christian theology.

Hill and Walton believe that Israel was not unaffected by the milieu in which it lived, and that therefore studying this milieu may shed light on the OT (see Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context*). Thus light can be shed on the Decalogue by comparing it to a Neo-Hittite suzerain treaty (116, 144), or on Job by observing the retribution principle in ancient Near East theology (271-2). Likewise, higher critical methodologies may provide useful insights into the OT (eg. the partial Mosaic authorship of Exodus, 106). But Hill and Walton are also aware that, via Divine intervention, the OT can be quite independent of its milieu (eg. Canaanite worship versus true worship, 147ff).

*A Survey of the Old Testament* is a well-written, up-to-date introduction to the Old Testament. Its authors are both conservative and informed. This book is well suited for an advanced college or entry level seminary textbook. Its (sometimes excellent) outline and theme sections make it a useful reference for pastors as well.