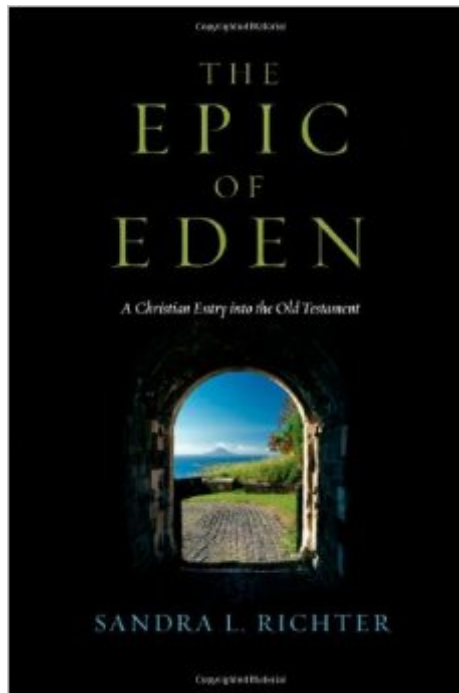


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# The Epic Of Eden: A Christian Entry Into The Old Testament



## Synopsis

Does your knowledge of the Old Testament feel like a grab bag of people, books, events and ideas? How many times have you resolved to really understand the OT? To finally make sense of it? Perhaps you are suffering from what Sandra Richter calls the "dysfunctional closet syndrome." If so, she has a solution. Like a home-organizing expert, she comes in and helps you straighten up your cluttered closet. Gives you hangers for facts. A timeline to put them on. And handy containers for the clutter on the floor. Plus she fills out your wardrobe of knowledge with exciting new facts and new perspectives. The whole thing is put in usable order--a history of God's redeeming grace. A story that runs from the Eden of the Garden to the garden of the New Jerusalem. Whether you are a frustrated do-it-yourselfer or a beginning student enrolled in a course, this book will organize your understanding of the Old Testament and renew your enthusiasm for studying the Bible as a whole.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book captures over 20 years of study and teaching experience. The author's Harvard PhD and technical publications assure the reader of her expertise. A veteran of the classroom, pulpit, and popular conference venues, she understands the importance of communicating clearly and powerfully. The book almost effortlessly integrates the history of the ancient Near East, archaeological data, literary observations, a survey of the content of the OT, and an explicitly Christian interpretation that sees the OT in relationship to the NT without suppressing its distinctive witness. All of this is presented in a style that is engaging but not chatty, personal but not

excessively autobiographical. This book would be an ideal text or collateral reading for an OT introduction at the college or seminary level. A serious church group wanting a meaty study of the Old Testament would find this volume an ideal resource. Anyone eager for a strategic grasp of this challenging portion of scripture will appreciate Dr. Richter's fine book.

I love this book. It is organized around a metaphor of cleaning a closet. It makes the entire Old Testament clear and orients the reader in time, geography, culture, redemption, and relevance to today. I was given a copy, read it, and then went out and bought a handful to send off to friends. Unlike some books by scholars, it does not diminish one's faith--neither does it "dumb down" the scripture. Dr. Richter's book is a gift to all those who struggle with the good, the bad, and the ugly of the Old Testament. May God bless her and all who read this magnificent book. J. Matthew Sleeth M.D.

This review originally appeared on [...] on 7/16/09. Special thanks to Adrianna from IVP for a review copy of this book. Over the last few years of teaching in my church, I have searched in vain for a book to recommend to folks that will help them grasp the (often confusing) content of the Old Testament. It seems to me that most books simply don't communicate well enough to satisfy the needs of the church. Enter Sandra Richter, and her new book, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament*. Richter is an OT professor at Asbury Theological Seminary (and a Gordon-Conwell grad, so you know this has to be good). I've been looking for exactly this kind of book for some time. It's hard for most readers to make sense of the OT; there are violent wars, strange customs, a bunch of funky sounding names, odd chronological arrangement of the books, etc. The confusion alone makes it seemingly not worth the effort to work through the OT. And when you add in things like the sacrificial system and the Law of Moses, which are no longer binding in the new covenant, some Christians wonder why it's worth the time to figure all this out. What Richter does is demonstrate masterfully not only why the OT is worthwhile (it is part of our story, after all) but how OT works. She uses the metaphor of a "closet organizer." She notes that for many, the OT is like a messy closet: there are all sorts of items in there, but seemingly little-to-no organizational structure. Richter comes in to provide order to the chaos, and does so admirably well. She breaks the OT down into 5 main portions based on 5 main characters: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. If you can understand these 5 men and why they are important, Richter claims you can have a good grasp of how the OT works. Even before she does this she takes the time to explain basic customs of the Ancient Near East, as well as important concepts such as covenant. Richter does all

of this without coming across as dry or academic. One gets the sense that she's explained these things in non-academic settings before. Richter focuses more on content rather than academic debates, but I don't mean to say that this book is shallow. She discusses Hittite treaties and how they effect our understanding of Deuteronomy, explains how covenants were made and why Abraham split the animals into 2 halves in Genesis 15, mentions the disagreements over the date of the exodus (15th or 13th century?) etc. All this to say, there is not a lack of depth. But she doesn't dive into these things merely for the sake of good information; she demonstrates how all these help us understand what is going on in the Bible. Outside information serves to illuminate and illustrate the biblical text. Richter includes a glossary at the end of the book, which will be useful for those who are having trouble sorting through all the new vocabulary. She also added an appendix dealing with FAQs, a unique idea that I wish more books utilized. The only downfall is that she only answers 2 questions: what role does the Law play in the Christian's life and what do we make of the current state of Israel? Those, of course, are big questions (and I happen to agree with her answers) so I can understand why she didn't include more. There are, of course, a couple points I would have liked for Richter to handle a little differently, most of which are fairly minor. A subject index would have been nice, as well as perhaps a recommended reading list (though you can mine the endnotes if you want). In her discussion on the Image of God (which was too short) she notes that to figure out what is meant by this phrase in Genesis 1:26 one must look at the context, an approach which I applaud. But in her list she includes "self-aware and emphatic" (p107), which I don't find in the text at all. Also, Richter doesn't say as much as one might like about the prophets. Sure, they're sprinkled throughout the book, but there's no real sense of where they belong in the OT, which in my teaching experience has been an obstacle for many readers. I don't think she would have needed to write much, but maybe a subsection under the David chapter (which deals with the kingdoms of Israel and Judah as well) and how the prophets were operating during the time period of the Kings. I also felt like Douglas Stuart's emphasis on the prophets as covenant enforcement mediators would have been helpful here, to demonstrate how the prophets were calling the people of God to remain faithful to the covenant as outlined in Deuteronomy. But those detractions are hardly detrimental to the effectiveness of the book as a whole. Richter has done exactly what she set out to do, to help Christians make sense of the the storyline of the OT and how it impacts us as Christians (for instance, how God's original intention as seen in Genesis and God's final intention as seen in Revelation fit together). And she has done this in such a winsome manner. I was impressed again and again how easy this book is to read and how clearly she explained difficult and foreign concepts. If all Bible scholars could write this well for a general audience, I'd be able to recommend

many more books than I currently do. I have yet to encounter a book that accomplishes so well the goal of organizing the apparent chaos of the Old Testament. I have and will continue to recommend The Epic of Eden to anyone who is looking to learn more about the Old Testament and how it does actually make sense. Go buy this book.

I recently used this book as the guide for a group of Agnostic, Jewish, Christian, and other folks that met in a bar to discuss the Origins of Monotheism. It received two thumbs up from every member. They all appreciated the clearly articulated depth of research and the overall ease of comprehension through the unveiling of a contextual framework. Now all of them are able to grasp the legendary Biblical stories as part of a larger pattern revealing an even deeper significance for the tales individually. Having completed the book, they are all much closer to understanding their own origins and how they relate to God's activity in the present. In other words, they were all able to see themselves as an ongoing part of the Epic of Eden.

About ten years ago, I began to understand the Bible as one complete story organized around God's desire of creating and calling to Himself a people for His own possession. "I will be their God; they will be My people" is "the Bible's story" start to finish. As a result, I wrote a children's book entitled "What God Has Always Wanted" which gives parents a way of explaining the "big idea" of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation to their children. "The Epic of Eden" takes this basic idea and fleshes it out in a thoroughly biblical and yet easily understood way. I cannot think of a book that is more helpful or necessary than this one if you want to understand the storyline of the Bible. Don't even think about it--order it now!!!

This book is an exceptional treaty of epic inclusiveness. Dr. Sandra Richter has enriched my impenetrable dementia and unethical deranged closet of Biblical Theological ineptness. She has helped bring my closet into a neat order of hangers and boxes tuck away very fashionably. It is now easy to pull out what's needed knowing the surrounding material which has been put in an understandable compositional sequence. Watch out, this work is knocking at the door of books by Dr. Graeme Goldsworthy, Dr. T. Desmond Alexander and Dr. George E. Ladd.

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