

William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word, 1993. 470 pp.*

In an age when "hermeneutics" has become a buzzword and publications on the subject abound, there is need for expert guidance on proper methods for the study of Scripture. After Grant Osborne's recent publication of *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, here is another major release on biblical interpretation. While Osborne's book addresses the more advanced reader, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* is written to equip serious Bible students at a more fundamental level.

The reader is introduced to the current state of the hermeneutical debate in the first third of the book (150 pp.). How can one overcome the distance between the ancient and the contemporary contexts in biblical interpretation? Does an interpreter's pre-understanding doom that person to perennial relativity and subjectivity? How does one decide which interpretation of a text is *valid* when choosing from a number of *possible* interpretations? Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard provide the reader with a thorough road map to these preliminary but nevertheless vital hermeneutical issues.

The bulk of the book (220 pp.) is devoted to a presentation of general and special hermeneutics. The authors divide the former into rules for the interpretation of prose and poetry, and the latter into the genres of the OT and NT. The different kinds of literature treated include narrative, law, poetry, prophecy, and wisdom (OT); and gospels, Acts, epistles, and Revelation (NT). In their discussion of the rules for interpreting prose, the authors deal with five essential items: (1) literary context; (2) historical-cultural background; (3) word meanings; (4) grammatical relationships; and (5) literary genre.

In the final section of the book (50 pp. + 70 pp. of appendices) the authors address the contemporary uses of Scripture. The Bible is shown to be useful for personal study, worship, liturgy, theology, preaching and teaching, pastoring, spiritual formation, and for aesthetic enjoyment. The book closes with a four-step methodology for the legitimate application of Scripture. A section on modern approaches to interpretation, an extensive annotated bibliography (but no complete bibliography), and thorough indices are appended.

Generally, the authors succeed in covering a vast amount of material with admirable competence and conciseness. As a result, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* is an extremely valuable resource for college and seminary teaching as well as for personal study. In order to provide some guidance for those who will use the book in the future, a discussion of some of its strengths and weaknesses may be helpful here.

Let us begin with some of the many strengths. First, the authors should be commended for their thoroughly evangelical stance. Personally, I found myself agreeing with virtually everything that is said regarding the doctrine of Scripture and proper presuppositions. Second, the collaboration of specialists in OT and NT studies proves extremely beneficial for the reader. At a time when it has become close to impossible for one person to be up-to-date with recent developments in both fields, such a wise division of labor maximizes the strengths and minimizes the weaknesses. Indeed, the book is strong in both areas. My personal favorites are the chapters on OT poetry and on the gospels, both very competent and brimming with groundbreaking research. Third, the authors are willing to be unconventional in their judgment and to go against the current conservative evangelical consensus where they feel such is warranted in the light of scriptural data. They must be highly commended for such an effort to "call the issues as they see them."

When discussing a book of such consistent quality, one is reluctant to point out any weaknesses. Occasionally, one might have wished for a clearer organization of the material (see, for example, the overlap between chaps. 7 and 8 on OT poetry, or the sandwiching of the section on prophecy between the treatments of poetry and wisdom in chap. 8). Also, one wonders whether the ratio between the introductory chapters and the actual discussions of general and special hermeneutics is a bit lopsided (150:220 pp.). In the latter portion, perhaps the weakest part is that on the book of

Revelation (8 pp.; ct. here Osborne's *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 221–34). More substantially, I must confess my occasional frustration with the authors' reluctance to take positions on given issues. It seems that Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, apparently due to a skepticism regarding interpreters' ability to transcend their pre-understanding and perhaps also in the light of the persistent inability of contemporary evangelicals to come to a consensus on certain issues (e.g., the alleged pseudonymity of some of Paul's epistles, the Millennium, or women's roles in the church); content themselves prematurely with an affirmation of the validity of several interpretive options rather than encouraging the reader to keep pursuing single *correct* interpretations (ct. e.g., pp. 143–45). I would hope that the current lack of consensus on a given issue, rather than causing us merely to settle for tolerant dialogue, may actually spur us on toward greater efforts to find more definitive solutions. Why should we not acknowledge the possibility that further research and dialogue may lead to greater clarity in the church's understanding of a given issue? I am concerned that we not take evangelical pluralism too far so that so-called "difficult" or "disputed" matters are simply set aside and not applied, merely because of "the sincere disagreement of godly, well-educated interpreters" (pp. 409–10). As M. Bauman argues in a recent book, issuing "a call to informed pluralism, not relativism," we should engage in "pilgrim theology," rightly understood. While "theological premature closure" should be avoided, Bauman advocates "a skeptical and tolerant biblicalism, *one that wrestles with problems until they are solved and that does not quit.*"

None of these reflections should take away from the significant accomplishment which the book by Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard represents. Hermeneutics is an exciting and exceedingly important field. May God give us the grace to grow together in a true knowledge of him and his will and to do so charitably and respectfully.

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