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BOOK REVIEW

William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017. 718 pp. Hbk. ISBN 978-0-310-52417-5. \$49.99.

The subject of effective biblical interpretation continues to claim a prominent position in the various theological disciplines, and rightly so. As members of the community of faith, believers have been commissioned to walk in obedience to the Lord's teachings and to instill in others the life-changing wisdom of God's Word (see Matt 28:16–20). However, one cannot give what one does not have, nor can one teach what one does not know. For this reason the church needs resources like *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, which is now in its third edition.

The first edition of this detailed yet accessible volume appeared in 1993 and was followed by a second edition in 2004. This third edition follows in its predecessors' footsteps by seeking to assist its readers to "become *biblical* Christians: Christians who learn what God's Word says, and who humbly, obediently, put it into practice" (33, emphasis original). More specifically, the authors seek to "establish, explain, and demonstrate guidelines and methods to guide those who want to understand and apply Scripture correctly" (42).

This book has five main parts followed by an extensive annotated bibliography and indices of subjects, authors, Scripture, and extrabiblical literature. In part 1, "The Task of Interpretation," the authors discuss the need for, and the definition of, effective biblical interpretation and also outline the history of (beginning with ancient Judaism and continuing through the patristic, medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation eras to the twenty-first century) and various literary (including narrative

criticism and reader-response criticism) and social-scientific approaches (including LGBT, feminist, and liberation-advocacy) to biblical interpretation. This section also discusses the origin and development of the biblical canon, certain aspects of textual criticism, and a number of issues related to Bible translation.

Part 2, “The Interpreter and the Goal,” delineates at length the differences between pre-understanding and presuppositions and expounds on the qualifications of an effective interpreter, including “a reasoned faith in the God who reveals” (202), a “willingness to obey the Scripture’s message” (205), and “membership in the Church” (208). The role and function of the Holy Spirit in the process of illumination is also discussed along with some material addressing author-centered textual meaning and whether the text of Scripture has only one fixed meaning or several levels of meaning.

Part 3, “Understanding Literature,” works through the rules for interpreting biblical prose. It offers ample discussion about the nature of words, complemented by a series of steps for performing word studies. It also addresses the significance of ascertaining a text’s historical-cultural background. There is also a large section on biblical poetry that discusses meter, how parallelism works, various types of parallelisms, the use of imagery in poetry, and other poetic devices.

Part 4, “Understanding Bible Genres,” includes detailed analyses of various genres in the Old Testament, including narrative (e.g., reports, comedies, heroic narrative, prophet stories, and farewell speeches), law, poetry, wisdom, and prophecy/apocalyptic. The material on prophecy also includes discussion of the various kinds of fulfillment (e.g., literal fulfillment, frustrated or suspended fulfillment, and historical/figurative fulfillment) and the difference between foretelling and “forth-telling.” With respect to the New Testament genres, this section discusses the Gospels, focusing on their historical trustworthiness and original intended audience. It also surveys parables, Acts, epistles/letters (which includes discussion of creeds, hymns, and vice-and-virtue lists), and Revelation/apocalyptic.

Part 5, “The Fruits of Interpretation,” is unique in that it provides information about how to formulate theology, create

liturgy, and motivate and enrich worship. It also offers some guidelines for preaching, teaching, offering pastoral care, and promoting spiritual formation in the Christian life. An entire chapter, the last one of the book, is on application—its importance, how one can avoid mistakes, and so on.

There are a number of significant updates in this edition, some of the content being entirely new. In chapter 2, “The History of Interpretation,” there is a new section under the “Jewish Interpretation” heading that covers inner-biblical allusion. The material here provides some clarity on how synoptic Old Testament texts relate to one other—for example, how does Chronicles use Kings? At the end of the same chapter, there is another new section that discusses more recent developments such as Pentecostal perspectives and Brevard Childs’ canonical criticism.

A short section has been added to chapter 3 under the heading “Social-Scientific Approaches to Scripture.” This new section, called “Advocacy Groups,” pertains specifically to LGBT (sometimes, as they acknowledge, enlarged to “LGBTQIAA”) hermeneutics. Some discussion is provided about the Metropolitan Community Church, a denomination that was founded largely for the purpose of providing a safe and supportive place for LGBT Christians, and the authors state that “apart from their understanding of the key biblical passages on homosexual behavior, the rest of their doctrine and ethics follow historic evangelical contours.” The authors also, “acknowledge [their] spiritual kinship” with these Christians (161). Further material concerns publications relevant to Christian views on gender and sexuality. This chapter is also rounded off with a new conclusion.

In addition to this new material, four notable changes have been made to the content of the previous edition. Firstly, the section on speech acts in chapter 6 now includes two new diagrams. Secondly, minor in some ways but consequential in others, the name of chapter 1 has been changed from “The Need for Hermeneutics” to “The Need for Interpretation.” This reflects the authors’ attempt to make clear the difference between exegesis and interpretation on the one hand and hermeneutics on the other. As Anthony C. Thiselton explains, “whereas *exegesis*

and *interpretation* denote the *actual processes* of interpreting texts, *hermeneutics* also includes the second-order discipline of asking critically *what exactly are we doing when we read, understand, or apply texts*” (*Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 2009, 4, emphasis original). Thirdly, a more robust engagement with various sources makes for marked improvements in this part of the book. Finally, this book includes ample updates to its footnotes and also has an admirable annotated bibliography (discussed below).

As something of an aside, the text itself is presented in a very pleasing format with ample, but not too much, white space, sufficiently wide enough margins to assist in the purposes of note taking, easily identifiable headings and subheadings, and plenty of charts, graphs, tables, and the like. Each chapter is also of a reasonable length, as is the book itself. As such, it is my opinion that no student would feel overwhelmed or unnecessarily burdened in having to read this text in its entirety for a one-semester course, even if an additional text were assigned.

One criticism I have regarding this volume is the fact that there is not a full bibliography. Admittedly, the wide array of materials included in the annotated bibliography, which is over forty pages, is most impressive, exhibiting the authors’ good judgement in selecting materials and identifying “top-priority” resources. The book also includes a helpful person index and “extensive footnotes” that are “conveniently located in the appropriate sections” (637). However, a formal bibliography is a boon to the serious student and is not made unnecessary by these other helps. Additionally, since the book is identified as an introduction, it would have been prudent to include a glossary.

My final criticism of this volume is that although I do not disagree with the authors that both *The Zondervan NIV Study Bible* (2015) and *The ESV Study Bible* (2008) contain “outstanding study notes in them throughout” (676), one may object to the fact that no mention is made of study Bibles for other translations, like the *New Living Translation Study Bible*, which is the only study Bible that I am aware of that includes a dictionary and index for Hebrew and Greek word studies along with fully indexed inline citations and transliterated words in the margins.

Surely other study Bibles such as this also contain “outstanding notes throughout” that are arguably equal to, or perhaps in some cases even superior to, those mentioned. Why have the authors only recommended those two study Bibles?

In closing, there is much to be gleaned within this volume, and one should not dismiss the text based upon any of the above criticisms. Many serious undergraduate and graduate students and studious pastors will derive much benefit from using this outstanding volume.

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