

Editor's Foreword

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Although the interpretation of the New Testament has been the subject of much discussion in recent years, it is hard to find any books which sum up the results of this discussion and offer a comprehensive and practical guide to the task of interpretation. It was with this lack in mind that the New Testament Study Group of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research took up the theme at its meeting in July 1973. The papers which were presented then have been revised and are now offered to a wider public in the hope that they may be found of value as an attempt to cover this important area of study.

The field of New Testament interpretation is an enormous one, and it perhaps deserves several volumes rather than one. We cannot, therefore, claim to have done justice to the subject, whether as a whole or in detail, but we hope that this collection of essays may be sufficiently comprehensive and succinct to offer a basic guide to students and to all who are concerned to interpret the New Testament in the modern world.

Four main areas have claimed our attention. First, there is the question of the presuppositions with which one approaches the subject. We have tried to submit both our own presuppositions and those of scholars from other schools of thought to careful scrutiny. Second, we have looked at the various types of critical study which contribute to the exegesis of the text of the New Testament. Third, we have attempted to deal with the actual methods of exegesis itself. Finally, we have been very conscious that New Testament interpretation is not concerned solely to lay bare the meaning of the text for its original readers but reaches its goal only when it examines the meaning of the text for today and allows the text to affect our own attitudes and understanding. Indeed, it is impossible to achieve either of these two theoretically separable aims in isolation from the other. Hence the book ends on a practical note, and, if it is biased in the direction of expository preaching, this is because of the needs of our intended audience, many of whom will be engaged in the ministry of the Word, and it reflects our conviction that exposition presupposes careful exegesis.

The subject of biblical interpretation is one that can sharply divide students of different schools of thought. We have written as conservative evangelicals who combine a high regard for the authority of Holy Scripture with the belief that we are called to study it with the full use of our minds. It is inevitable that not all will agree with everything that we say, and it should be emphasised that the statements in this book carry no sort of imprimatur. Although the contributors share the same general outlook, each is responsible only for his own share in the volume, and the reader may detect points at

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which some of us disagree with one another. This plurality of opinions is not surprising, and is not necessarily a bad thing. We are writing on a theme which has received comparatively little study in the past, and conservative evangelicals in particular have been slow to work out the implications of their view of Scripture for the task of interpretation and vice-versa. In some ways, therefore, this volume is no more than a first and very tentative attempt to grapple with some of the problems. Hypothesis and conjecture are inevitable at this stage;

I.H. Marshall, "Editor's Foreword," I. Howard Marshall, ed., *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, 1977. Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, revised 1979. Pbk. ISBN: 0853644241. pp.8-9.

nevertheless, we have thought it right to publish our views, in the hope that our book may stimulate discussion and lead to a fuller appreciation of truth.

As a result of the economic crisis which has affected many publishers in this country this book has been a long time in production. We regret that it has not been possible to bring our essays fully up to date and to take the most recent discussions of our subject into account. For example, it has not been possible to devote any space to structuralism, a topic which has moved to the forefront of discussion since this book was originally planned.

As editor, I should like to express my thanks to all the essayists whose work has appeared in this book. I should also like to express the appreciation of all the contributors to Norman Hillyer, who compiled the indexes, to the staff at Tyndale House, Cambridge, to the Paternoster Press, and to all the others who have helped towards the publication of this book.

I. Howard Marshall

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Prepared for the Web in December 2006 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

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