



A Survey of Biblical Interpretation

by Ronald Cooke

Truth International Ministries,
Max Meadows, VA, 2012,
176 pages, \$10.00

Ronald Cooke served as president of Breckbill Bible College in Virginia for more than 30 years with faithful preaching, pastoring, writing, and missionary work extending his ministry to over 60 years. In its ninth printing since 1982, this book is a tremendous resource for the pastor, teacher, or layman in conducting proper biblical exegesis.

Unlike some intimidating treatises on hermeneutics that insist the interpreter have a thorough knowledge in diverse fields from geography to politics and everything in between (Terry, pp. 23–28), Cooke's work is written for the average reader and reminds us that "biblical interpretation is a must for every Christian" (p. 84). As such, the book is designed to assist the layman in "rightly dividing the Word of Truth" (2 Tim. 2:15) and provides specific examples where faulty interpretations result when consistent exegetical methods are ignored.

Packed with fascinating information concerning various schools of interpretation throughout church history, Cooke's survey is a delight to read. As an introductory work on the subject, complex technicalities of Greek grammar, for example, are avoided in favor of a profitable overview of the history of interpretive methods. Cooke does not overlook the importance of studying the original languages and is well educated in them himself, yet in no way does he

limit the work of biblical interpretation to scholars.

The book is divided into two parts. First, Cooke exhibits a humility and balanced approach in assessing both the history of interpretive methods and the key figures associated with schools of interpretation. He notes both the valuable contributions and the regrettable influences of theologians ranging from the rabbinic era up through the Reformation, to the degeneration of exegesis by way of German rationalism and higher criticism. It is surprising to learn how severely the literal method of interpretation was suppressed by allegorists for most of church history. The outright rejection of the literal interpretation became the indispensable foundation needed to justify a multitude of doctrinal aberrations. "True exegesis always suffers when men become more concerned with issues rather than the text of Scripture. In modern times men have invented the Gap Theory to 'save' Christianity from the attacks of the evolutionary geologists. God's Word does not need to be 'saved' from the attacks of the critics; it just needs to be interpreted correctly" (p. 13).

Part two of the book explores the rules of biblical interpretation. Presuppositions are addressed, as well as explanations on how to properly treat symbols, colors, numbers, figurative language, idioms, prophecy, etc. The information contained here is indispensable for every Christian. Cooke emphasizes the fact that pride and dogmatism have no place in formulating doctrines that are not clearly stated or can be logically deduced from the biblical text.

Cooke holds firmly to the inspiration, inerrancy, authority, and perspicuity of Scripture. He writes:

The object of all true interpretation is to find out what the Scriptures demand of us and not what we demand of them.

It has become fashionable in some areas to make the statement that the Scriptures have to be interpreted in a certain way in order to meet the demands of geology. Certain writers indicate that this is their position: that in order to meet the demands of modern science thus and so has to be done. The true Scriptural exegete is not concerned with the 'demands' of modern geology. To begin with, Geology [sic] is an infant science ... Geology is not in a position to make 'demands' upon the Bible, even if it was an ancient science. The Bible makes any 'demands' that are going to be made. It is up to man to bring his findings into conformity with that which God has revealed" (p. 106).

Considering the importance of proper biblical interpretation for every Christian, this work is highly recommended. Its value far exceeds the suggested donation amount. Dr. Cooke's many books and tracts are available through www.truthinternationalministries.com.

Nick Sabato
n.sabato@yahoo.com

Reference

Terry, M.S. 1890. *Biblical Hermeneutics*.
Eaton & Mains, New York, NY.