

BOOK REVIEW

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE FOR ALL IT'S WORTH

by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart
(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981, 1993)

This is simply the finest and most accessible manual I have ever read on Bible interpretation. Although it is directed primarily toward the layperson, it deserves reading by every preacher and Bible scholar, because preachers and scholars are notorious violators of many of the hermeneutical principles in this book. This preacher has profited immensely from this book in two ways: 1) It has corrected a few of my pet misinterpretations, and 2) It has given me a practical and communicable construct for my often intuitively practiced hermeneutics.

The heart of the book addresses the unique hermeneutical difficulties and principles of the various genres of biblical literature: Epistles, Old Testament narratives, Acts, Gospels, Parables, Law, Prophets, Psalms, Wisdom, and The Revelation. Each genre is carefully explained and given helpful examples of appropriate uses and unfortunate abuses of the meaning of the text. The one chapter that will likely provoke the greatest disagreement on the part of the reader is the one on The Revelation. Most evangelical readers will be frustrated by his tendency toward “broad symbol” versus “particular reality” in dealing with the images of The Revelation, e.g., the locusts from the abyss. The material on interpreting the Parables is outstanding, especially in distinguishing between the several different purposes of Jesus’ parables, especially the clarification that the parables were not all designed to hide truth from unsympathetic listeners (as was the parable of the Sower and the Seed) but more often were employed as powerful illustrations of truth that everyone understood (like the parable of the Good Samaritan).

The first chapter argues for a “common sense” approach which does much in dispelling the mysticism that often threatens a lay reader of the Bible. Exegesis is explained as the quest for the original meaning of the biblical author and the one that would have been understood by the original intended readers of the book. This brings out the need for understanding the original context through an understanding of language, literary forms, and historical background. This is designed to be a practical book. Thus the bias of the book is to primarily use the term “hermeneutics” in its *narrower sense of seeking the contemporary relevance of ancient texts* (p. 25); in other words, what does the Bible mean to us today? But to get to that contemporary application, one must employ the most responsible disciplines of exegesis.

The second chapter addresses the choice of a translation(s). The authors help the Bible student understand the differences between types of translations and when to use a paraphrase. The NIV is his recommendation for a primary translation and he explains why. He also gives recommendations for a secondary translation and free translations.

The appendix features recommendations for multi-volume commentary sets and several recommendations of individual volumes for each of the books of the Bible. This

does need to be checked against newer publications since this book includes nothing published after 1993.

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