

Blomberg, Craig L. and Jennifer Foutz Markley. *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010. 298 pp. \$22.99.

Introduction

"This handbook provides a one-stop-shopping guide to the New Testament exegetical method. . . . It offers both a broad overview of the exegetical process and a step-by-step approach to studying the New Testament. . . . The book is chock-full of illustrations of New Testament texts where the method under discussion truly makes a difference."¹

At the time of the publication of *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*, Craig Blomberg was distinguished professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary. Jennifer Foutz Markley, a former graduate student of Blomberg, served at the same seminary as an admissions counselor.

Summary of Strengths

The *Handbook* contains ten chapters, each one a different step in the process of biblical interpretation: Textual Criticism, Translation and Translations, Historical-Cultural Context, Literary Context, Word Studies, Grammar, Interpretive Problems, Outlining, Theology, and Application. It is a dense, intense three hundred pages—hardly the "slim volume" the authors humbly claim (ix). One may sense in reading this book that he has gotten his money's worth. He may also sense that it will need to be read again and again, studied, and practiced

¹http://books.google.com/books/about/Handbook_of_New_Testament_Exegesis_A.html?id=EMF0CdzglDcC. Accessed online, April 24, 2013.

before its fullest help can be realized.

One's anxieties about ever comprehending so much material are allayed when the authors state, "there are really only a fairly small number of unvarying rules or principles with which one need to acquaint oneself; the rest of the skill comes from repeated practice and from the evaluation of the work of other practitioners" (vi). Furthermore, the authors regard their work "not so much as a precise how-to manual, in which strict, unvarying conformity to a long set of rules and policies will produce award-winning exegetical papers . . . but rather as a tool box." The construction worker needs a hammer for one job, but a screwdriver for another job. Likewise, "pastors will seldom need to apply all ten steps (or apply them to the same degree) to all New Testament passages" (ix).

The authors have, as indicated in the above paragraph, thus helped us to relax and not worry so much about having to rigidly follow all the interpretive rules perfectly if we ever hope to succeed in interpreting the Bible. Regarding the solving of interpretive problems, such matters often defy simple, step-by-step procedures. It seems difficult because it is difficult. Familiarity with the ten steps and all the tools is required. However, "a tentative stand" is permissible, and we can "exonerate (ourselves) of the pressure to resolve these problems beyond a shadow of a doubt. The odds are good that if a problem has existed throughout church history, we will not solve it here. We must *be aware of the conversation*, however, and decide which approach makes the best sense based on sound exegetical method (emphasis mine)" (168). The authors also apply this concept of awareness in a different, more specific context by saying, "The person trained in textual criticism is therefore at least aware of the original reading, even if he or she is not certain

which one of several options it is" (18, 19). The reminder of the necessity of "reading widely" but not letting the commentaries do all of our thinking for us is also appreciated (169).

The format of *A Handbook* is excellent. Every individual chapter has a helpful concluding paragraph. After the final chapter there is a chapter-by-chapter *Summary* of the entire book, then an *Appendix* that contains a chapter-by-chapter "Checklist for Doing Biblical Exegesis," and finally, there is a *Select Bibliography* for each chapter as well.

Summary of Weaknesses

Few are the problems with this book. A couple of concerns, however, do arise. Like nails on a chalkboard, it is unnerving when we read, "Such translations . . . can make the Bible come alive for competent readers" (47). The authors also proffer that knowledge of the "culture or audience converges with the science of in-depth exegetical work to make the text come alive for people today" (260). Of course—and the authors would agree—the Scriptures are not dead so as to need to "come alive." God's words *are* alive (Deut 32:47; Heb 4:12)! Similarly, we read, "While the Bible reflects varying perspectives on numerous topics, it never actually contradicts itself, *at least* if each passage is interpreted in context" (emphasis mine) (100). Contrariwise, Scripture does not contradict itself even if and when it *is* taken out of context. In such a case it is the interpreter who is being contradictory to the text and to his calling and task.

Conclusion

A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis truly is "one-stop shopping," though serious students and pastors will want to also make use of other excellent works on the topic. For those the bibliography is a great place to look. Having carefully read, reviewed, highlighted, and

annotated this book, it is going to become a primary reference work for me, Lord willing, for years to come.