

Aspects of Biblical Interpretation: Introduction

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Christian interpretation of Scripture stems from those briefly recorded conversations of the Risen Lord to His eleven Apostles when He expounded from the Old Testament writings the 'things concerning himself'. The last of the Apostles provided an example in his view that 'the sacred writings are able to make wise to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete...'

Yet the mechanics of the use of Holy Writ by the first Christians are by no means simple, many questions arise, much is hard to explain. Inquiry into such matters may become abstrusely academic, or be lost in a welter of detail, but the Church—especially a 'New Testament' one—ignores it at its peril. The Scriptures are the final court of appeal, if not the sole authority, for all Christendom. It is imperative that they be correctly explained.

Superficially, the matter of quotations of the Old Testament in the New may appear to be a bypath of little profit. In fact, it is a vital component in any system of exegesis and exposition, and a central factor in studies of the Canon and the doctrine of Inspiration. If the principles of the first Christians are held to be valid in present-day church practice, then some attention should be devoted to their approach to Scripture.

The Church's history is peppered with interpretational vagaries; every phase of past and present has its own. Many of these have arisen in reaction to accepted views or in apologetic argument, others were produced to support particular doctrines or theories. The Christian Brethren have contributed liberally to this chest of treasures of dubious worth. Concentrating upon these precious teachings, they have often missed greater jewels found in more widely ranging search. How the Testaments and covenants interrelate, how prophecy may be understood, how the ethics of the Old Testament fit with the teachings of Jesus—these are examples of topics neglected by many.

The Risen Lord expounded the Scriptures of Himself, and it can be said, anticipating the papers presented here, that His followers did the same. While our claim may be to do this, is our insight as deep as theirs, or do we concern ourselves with minutiae, with types of debatable truth, or a rigid literalism? May it be our prayer and our goal so to study the Word that we may learn what the Spirit of Christ signified in writing it.

Several sessions of the Cambridge CBRF group were spent in considering aspects of the Old Testament in the New. This was done with some trepidation, and little previous knowledge; the results may not be acceptable in every point, therefore. Moreover, only a partial study of a surprisingly extensive subject was practicable. Nevertheless, it is hoped that presentation of some of the papers to a wider audience may stimulate a few to further research in this field, and serve to inform many who are as ignorant of these matters as were the Cambridge group.