

New Testament Exegesis

Test over Berkhof: Principles of Biblical Interpretation

"Taylor never reads these things anyway", said Student X with a smug complacent grin. "You mean the book or the report?" asked his untried roommate. "Well, rarely the book and only slightly the report. He mostly grades them by throwing them down the stairs so don't use too much ink or your paper will fall all the way to the bottom." "But, if you don't read the book, X, how do you write the report?" "Easy," answered the affluent student, "I pick up a few page numbers, a few lines and a few notes. Then with a lot of my own ideas I make an interesting account. These scholars ought to pay me to write the books not the reports."

And so below is the book report of X. Your job is to read it and note the mistakes he makes in reviewing Berkhof. Prepare your paper in orderly fashion and correct false impressions with right concepts. And--I have read the book and I will read your paper.

The work of Prof. Berkhof is without peer in its field. Written in concise outline style it covers the whole field of hermeneutics from the days of the Jewish scholars to the present time. Long a student of interpretation, Prof. Berkhof has brought years of scholarly practice into his work and has produced a noteworthy volume. Unfortunately the years of scholarly practice have also caused him to include in the book a few items that mar its usefulness.

In the latter category it is lamentable that he has included so many foreign language quotations (e.g. "quod ubique, quod semper, quod omnibus creditum est", p. 23, etc.) This cumbers the text and often causes us to miss specific points; The problem with these is further heightened by the citations of many proof-text authors from foreign language sources. When the argument for the writer's view is presented from the force of a German scholar whose works are not available today, the value of the whole point is in doubt.

Unfortunate too, is the fact that in the history of interpretation, apart from the Reformation period, he does not show the development of orthodox methods of interpretation. Too much time is taken with unbelievers who dabble in Bible study.

These diminutive points do not ruin the work, however. There are several things of searching value. For example: His observation that an interpretation allowing a double-fulfillment of prophecy is possible; his claim that types must be limited to persons and places hence saving much allegorizing; and the implication that the language of the prophets, being often symbolical, should be taken throughout as symbolical. There is a good point to this however when he allows that "the prophets occasionally transcended their historical and dispensational limitations and spoke in forms that pointed to a more spiritual dispensation in the future." (152) But in general, the interpretation of prophecy in Berkhof might tend to make the amillennial view the necessary interpretation of many O.T. sections.