

While for many years English speaking readers have consulted the Cambridge History of the Bible for a detailed scholarly treatment of the Bible's history of interpretation (vol. I: P. R. Ackroyd, C. F. Evans (eds.), From the Beginning to Jerome (Cambridge: CUP, 1970); II: G. W. H. Lampe (ed.), The West from the Fathers to the Reformation (1969); III: S. L. Greenslade (ed.), The West From the Reformation to the Present Day (1963), a number of textbooks have appeared in recent years which take a variety of approaches, not to mention a large number of studies of individual interpreters or particular passages and their scholarly treatment. There is, for example, the comprehensive one volume history of interpretation by Gerald Bray (Biblical Interpretation Past and Present; Leicester: IVP, 1996) and the Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters, edited by D. K. McKim (Downers Grove, Leicester: IVP, 1998). H. Graf Reventlow has completed his magisterial four volumes called Epochen der Bibelauslegung; I: Vom Alten Testament bis Origenes (München: C. H. Beck, 1990); Von der Spätantike bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters (1994); Renaissance, Reformation, Humanismus (1997) and Von der Aufklärung bis zum 20. Jahrhundert (2001). H. O. Old has already completed six volumes of his exhaustive project The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, I: The Biblical Period, II: The Patristic Age, III: The Medieval Church, IV: The Reformation, V: Modernism, Pietism and Awakening (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998–2004). In addition to volumes devoted to the whole Bible and its interpretation there are also a number of recent histories of Old Testament and New Testament research (e.g., W. Baird, History of New Testament Research I: From Deism to Tübingen, II: From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, 2002; as if New Testament research began with Deism! Vol 3: From Biblical Theology to Pluralism is forthcoming).

The two American scholars, Hauser and Watson, have initiated a further multi-volume project that – of those mentioned above – comes closest to the format and approach of the Cambridge History. Further volumes will be devoted to the medieval and Reformation periods, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and to the twentieth century (x).

After the preface (which includes explanations on the choice of the articles, i.e. why there are no separate chapters in Origen, Marcion, Gnostic exegesis and the Samaritans – though all are included elsewhere), the editors present a helpful introduction and overview of the ancient period which is covered in this first volume (1–54). They wish to provide a comparative analysis of some of the main points made in each of the articles. The purpose is to give the reader a means of scanning in broad perspective the primary issues and features of ancient biblical interpretation as treated in this volume, and a means of sampling the ways in which these key figures, schools of interpretation, and issues both interweave and contrast with each other (ix). The following fifteen chapters are mostly written by international specialists in New Testament studies or Early Judaism. Each article closes with an extensive bibliography including titles in languages other than English (I looked in vain for D. Instone Brewer's Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE, TSAJ 30; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992).

E. Menn writes on 'Inner-Biblical Exegesis in the Tanak' (55–79); L. Greenspoon on 'Hebrew Into Greek: Interpretation In, By, and Of the Septuagint' (80–113); P. Borgen on 'Philo of Alexandria as Exegete' (114–43), P. R. Davies on 'Biblical Interpretation in the Dead Sea Scrolls', (144–66), M. McNamara on 'Interpretation of Scripture in the Targumim' (167–97), G. G. Porton on 'Rabbinc Midrash' (198–224), J. A. Sanders on 'The Stabilization of the Tanak' (225–52) and J. H. Charlesworth on 'The Interpretation of the Tanak in the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha' (253–82). Though Josephus appears in a number of articles, one devoted to him and his use of


Would Matthew, Paul, the letter to the Hebrews and Revelation not have deserved either a longer chapter or separate treatment? To me this would seem necessary in view a) of the significance of this issue in current NT scholarship (in the exegesis of individual passages, in understanding the conceptual background and for various approaches to Biblical theology), b) of the ready availability of the sources and the problems this interpretation presents to readers of the NT and c) also in view of the pattern set by the NT usage which became influential for much Christian interpretation of the Old and New Testament. In my estimate this is the one major flaw in the design of this volume.


Hauser and Watson’s volume and those mentioned in the introduction describe the characteristics of Bible interpretation in a certain period or of a certain individual, often summarising and discussing examples of their theoretical discussion or actual exegesis of a Biblical text. In contrast to these volumes, Yarchin provides a reader with a selection of important texts (in English translation) from the history of Bible interpretation.

According to Yarchin’s preface, the collection aims at ‘presenting examples of how people have thought about interpreting Scripture’ and includes ‘reflection on biblical interpretation as well as examples of actual interpretations’ (vii). A criterion for the selection of the readings was that they had to be ‘representative of the best thinking in the subject from epoch to epoch as well as examples of the most influential exegetical treatments of biblical texts’. In addition, Yarchin ‘sought clarity of expression in selecting each piece. In some cases this meant passing over a more famous work by a given author in favor of a selection more accessible to nonspecialists’ (vii). The readings are limited to scholarly biblical interpretation thus missing interpretation in preaching, the arts and literature. Some of the readings have not been available in English previously (including three compendia of comments on Psalm 23 and the excerpts from Moses Mendelsohn).

For each reading the editor provides a short introduction (two to three pages), some explanatory footnotes for the text itself and some bibliographical references to secondary literature. Such