

Introduction

In these increasingly post-Christian and postmodern days there is a virtual illiteracy not only about the historical or factual content of the Bible but also about what the Bible teaches theologically. This began in the early part of this century, with Alfred North Whitehead lamenting it as early as the 1930s. It has continued unabated into our own time so that now, even in Christian colleges where students at least have a church background, there is only a rudimentary biblical or theological understanding to be found. But this is also a day of information explosion, and many people are not satisfied with knowing more about the Chicago Cubs or the latest trends in Hollywood than they do about the theology of the Bible. Although good books are available to help rectify this situation, such as *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (3 vols.) or *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2 vols.) unfortunately, they require a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek and hence are inaccessible to most people. It was for this reason that Baker Book House decided to produce a convenient, one-volume work that covered both the Old and the New Testaments but did not require a knowledge of the original languages. The research was in fact done in the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible, but it was written in such a way that virtually anyone could understand it.

The present volume is intended to make available to interested pastors, students, teachers, and lay people the biblical teaching on a wide variety of topics, ranging from the individual books of the Bible (such as the theological teaching of Isaiah) to specifically theological ideas (such as

atonement or prophecy) to individual ideas that might appear only a few times or even once in the Scriptures (such as abyss or Armageddon). In every instance an attempt has been made to emphasize the theological significance rather than focus on the historical, social, geographical, or biographical elements involved. The writers were also instructed to steer away from the complexities of current academic debate on these subjects because of the rapidly changing and rather esoteric nature of some of these debates, as well as the limited space available in a one-volume work. It was thought better to deal with the subject as understood from the Bible than to deal with all of those technical issues that led to that understanding. For all practical purposes, those issues are of little interest to most people (much as we scholars are loath to admit it).

This work is also defined as “Evangelical,” meaning that the full integrity and trustworthiness of the Scriptures are affirmed. All the writers honor the Scriptures as the Written Word of God and not only write with that understanding but live their lives according to it.

Bibliographies are appended to the larger articles, and again, they are designed for the reader. Books and articles referred to are almost all currently available, written in English and readable by most people. Some bibliographical entries depart from this goal, but only when deemed necessary.

It is the supreme desire and prayer of the writers of this volume that the reader will be edified both intellectually and spiritually by the use of it. What the Scriptures teach us is the most vitally needed thing today. These are in fact God’s very words to us and are profitable for correction, reproof, and instruction in righteousness. If this present volume helps in that regard by making clear what the Bible is

saying on any given topic, then the prayers of the writers will have been answered.

I would also like to thank those people who have had a hand in producing this work, so much of it behind the scenes. I would especially like to thank my wife Barbara, Allan Fisher, Jim Weaver, Maria den Boer, Cindy Ingram, Rebecca Cooper, Bruce Paulson, and J. D. Douglas, whose sharp eye for detail seldom fails.

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