

Book Review

Michael Graves.

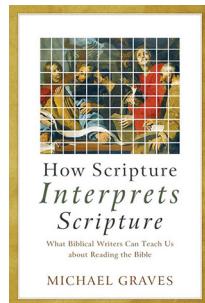
How Scripture Interprets Scripture:

What Biblical Writers Can Teach Us About Reading the Bible

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022.

978-1-5409-6200-3. 240 pages pb.

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As Armerding Professor of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College, Dr. Graves is no stranger to the field of the interpretation of Scripture. His efforts have included translating Jerome's Hebrew Jeremiah commentary for the Ancient Christian Texts series, as well as early Christian interpretation in *The Inspiration and Interpretation of Scripture: What the Early Church Can Teach Us* (2014). In his latest book, Graves argues "that biblical writers have much to teach us about how we should interpret the bible." (p.177).

Graves uses his splendid introduction to prepare his readers to be receptive to his thesis. Interestingly, he states a profoundly pastoral purpose for learning the internal hermeneutic of the biblical authors, namely, to help us improve our relationship with God, to develop Christian virtues, to make proper decisions, and to show love to our fellow man (p.1). In a time where too many Christians confuse information with godliness, Graves forthrightly states that knowledge of Scripture is to cause behavioral changes. In this regard, one could read this book as a plan to build a bridge over Gotthold Lessing's ugly trench.

To illustrate how the biblical authors interpreted each other, Graves dedicates each of the next five chapters to the following biblical themes: corporate and individual responsibility, insiders and outsiders, marriage-polygamy-divorce, sacrificial offerings, and afterlife.

Clearly, the selection of topics underscores the author's interest in ethics rather than more cerebral topics such as the doctrine of God or eschatology. All five themes are discussed in the following manner. First, Graves reviews the relevant key passages in the Old Testament with due attention to conflicting concepts or ideas. Second, the theme's treatment and development by the Writings or the Prophets is discussed. Graves is careful to not press harmonization of conflicting concepts. He allows tensions to remain. However, he does assume that there is an inner coherence to the text and, therefore, will suggest harmonization when he believes a reasonable solution is available. Third, the summaries are typically provided before the New Testament testimony is taken up. Fourth, how the Apostolic writings appropriated the Old Testament is addressed, noting where the authors emphasized ideas and ignored others. Finally, Graves summarizes key ideas that he believes show an inner unity and reasonable development flowing from the Old Testament to the New.

The final chapter reprises his findings in shortened form, followed by an extended argument for the value of careful observation of the prophetic/apostolic interpretative method. While not providing a detailed exegetical method, Graves does outline a six-step process to guide the interpreter (pp. 177-179). The cornerstone of this method is Graves' assertion that readers interpret passages in accordance

with the teachings of Christ and summative passages (p. 178). Graves concludes by arguing that the early Church Fathers employed this internal biblical hermeneutic in their own work. Unsurprisingly, he uses Jerome as an exemplar. Graves, however, does not believe his method perfectly aligns with the practice of the Church Fathers, including Jerome. Rather, he suggests their method substantively aligns with his (p. 186) Could it be that Graves is implicitly encouraging his fellow evangelicals to revisit the writings of the Church Fathers?

This reviewer's reaction to the book is decidedly conflicted. On the one hand, Graves has provided ample evidence for the internal coherence within the biblical canon. His use of the biblical data and employment of modest conclusions should help break down barriers amongst those skeptical of a unity within the biblical witness. On the other hand, method-based exegetes will be disappointed by the general nature of his advice for how we can adopt the method. Surely, Graves is correct

that to copy the hermeneutics of the biblical writers will require modern readers to become intimately familiar with Scripture even to the point of memorization (p.178). But how is a minister with a Sunday deadline to accomplish this? Could it be that the method must be caught and lived rather than taught as a formula?

Despite the lack of a detailed methodology, readers will benefit from this text. The book's focus on ethics will likely keep the attention of contemporary students looking to find something practical from their theological studies. Faculty will likely favor the flexibility granted by the author's non-dogmatic approach which is more in line with Richard B. Hay's *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* than Walter C. Kaiser Jr.'s *The Promise-Plan of God*. Readers will also appreciate the inclusion of thorough Scripture and topic indexes. While this book will not illuminate the path for copying the bible's internal hermeneutic, it certainly points readers in the right direction to assess biblical literature more thoroughly and deeply.