

BOOK REVIEW

of

David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture:
An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation*,
Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is presented by Larry D. Paarmann.

In recent years the Southern Baptist Convention has been divided over theological issues, and key to these issues is the difference that occurs between conservatives and liberals over the inspiration, authority and interpretation of Scripture. It appears that the conservatives have gained much ground, and one of their focal points has been The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS). This book is significant to this controversy in that David Dockery is Vice President for Academic Administration and Dean of the School of Theology at SBTS, and the book is dedicated to the faculty and trustees of SBTS. The book includes an appendix that surveys the history of Biblical inspiration and interpretation in the Southern Baptist Convention. While I don't think that this is one of the more significant books available on the Scriptures, it is easy to read, it is informative about the struggles that the Southern Baptists have gone through, and Dockery does make some good points.

The book is organized into four parts. The first part, titled *Introduction*, has two chapters. Chapter 1, titled *Crisis of Biblical Authority*, sets the stage for the remainder of the book, and states that the "contemporary crisis revolves around understandings of truth, approaches to interpretation, and the meaning of authority." Chapter 2, *Revelation, Jesus Christ, and Scripture*, begins with all "knowledge of God comes by way of revelation," and describes general and special revelation. When describing special revelation, he stresses that it is propositional. Dockery emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the central message of the Bible, the Old Testament as well as the New.

Part II, titled *Inspiration*, has three chapters. Chapter 3, *The Inspiration of Christian Scripture*, deals with basic approaches to understanding what inspiration is. "The precise relationship between divine revelation and the human writings that comprise the canonical Scripture has been and continues to be a subject of contention. . . . It is our belief that the divine-human tension is the most crucial issue in contemporary discussions concerning Christian Scripture." Dockery argues for the plenary view of inspiration, that is that inspiration extends "to all (thus, the adjective plenary) portions of Holy Scripture, even beyond the direction of thoughts to the selection of words." In Chapter 4, *The Truthfulness and Authority of Scripture*, Dockery asks in what sense is Scripture normative? In this chapter he argues for Biblical inerrancy. Chapter 5, *The Transmission and Canonicity of the Bible*, reviews material such as the large number of early manuscripts, citations of Biblical books in the writings of Church Fathers, etc.

Part III, titled *Interpretation*, has three chapters. Chapter 6, *Pre-Reformation Hermeneutics*, summarizes the principles of interpretation of Jesus, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, John Cassian, and Thomas Aquinas. Chapter 7, *Reformation and Post-Reformation Hermeneutics*, summarizes the principles of interpretation of Erasmus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Bernard Spinoza, Johann Bengel, Johann Semler, Julius Wellhausen, F.C. Baur, Scheiermacher, Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth, Charles Hodge, and B.B. Warfield. In Chapter 8, *The Use and Interpretation of Christian Scripture*, Dockery suggests that the Bible is useful in private study and devotions, in establishing theology, and in worship. Dockery provides detailed steps in proper interpretation.

Part IV, titled *Conclusion*, has but one chapter, *Conclusion*. Dockery states that "Evangelicals must continue to affirm that the Bible is totally true and trustworthy because this foundational commitment serves other primary and fundamental affirmations of the Christian faith. A commitment to a completely truthful and fully authoritative Bible is the first step toward healing the deadly sickness in today's theological and ethical trends that threaten the very heart of the Christian faith and message. When approaching the Bible, we recognize its authoritative and normative character which can enable us to discover truth and its implications for the answers to life's ultimate questions. We also can find guidance for godly living in our world."