

Evangelical Biblical Interpreters: Puritans, Germans, and Scots (Part II)¹

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Purpose

The purposes of these particular lectures are the same as in Part I in this series, and so I rehearse these purposes for your benefit. First, we want to promote the serious study of the Word of God – the scriptures. To that end we want to introduce or to become better acquainted with select evangelical interpreters who have stood the test of time. In addition to this overarching purpose I offer also the following: to help with guidance for your personal library acquisitions; to give some guidance in the vast field of biblical interpreters; to help you in your studies, preaching, and writing by giving signposts to library usage; and to encourage you to see the faithful workers who have served their generation and laboured well and so may they inspire and inflame you to press forward.

Each generation can be blessed by taking a few hours of study on the heritage of evangelical biblical interpreters. Most will cite Spurgeon's two masterful lectures in the nineteenth century, which eventually became his *Commenting and Commentaries*.²

¹ These lectures were first given on February 18th, and on March 18th, 2003 as Haddington House Winter Lectures No. 3, and 4, Moncton, N. B. This paper is in substance these lectures. It is also reflective of the way Haddington House attempts to conduct theological training.

² There have been various printings of this, and it is now available in electronic format.

See, C.H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries Two Lectures, a catalogue of Bible commentaries and expositions*. Original 1876 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1969).

Spurgeon is not alone in that practice; in our generation I think of similar efforts by D. A. Carson,³ Peter Masters, Cyril J. Barber, Derek Thomas or John F. Evans⁴ – one of which each serious bible student should possess. This lecture will I hope open the door to this subject.

At the outset I would say that your very attendance here tonight goes far in keeping us from certain dangers in the field of biblical interpretation, specifically, the attitude which pretends not to need help from commentators. I will make reference to two comments by Spurgeon to set the tone for this lecture. Commentaries should not be neglected.

...[A]s an aid to your pulpit studies, you will need to be familiar with the commentators: a glorious army...we have found the despisers of commentators to be men who have no sort of acquaintance with them; in their case, it is the opposite of familiarity which has bred contempt. ...who can pretend to biblical learning who has not made himself familiar with the great writers who spent a life in explaining some one sacred book?⁵

Spurgeon further challenged the audience of The Pastor's College:

No, my dear friends, you may take it, as a rule that the Spirit of God does not usually do for us what we can do for ourselves, and that if religious knowledge is printed in a book, and we can read it,

³ D. A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

⁴ Derek Thomas, *The Essential Commentaries for a Preacher's Library*
John F. Evans, "A Guide to Biblical Commentaries And Reference Works for students and pastors", revised 1993 edition (privately produced at Haddington House, Moncton, N. B.). This list is by no means exhaustive of annotated bibliographic works or commentators. For a fuller list see Evans, page 4 and 5.

⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, "Lecture No. 1. A Chat about Commentaries", pp.1-2.

there is no necessity for the Holy Spirit to make a fresh revelation of it to us in order to screen our laziness. Read, then admirable commentaries...

Yet Spurgeon was also wise enough to know that even good things must be properly approached and went on to write:

...be sure you use your own minds too, or the expounding will lack interest...Freshness, naturalness, life, will always attract, whereas mere borrowed learning is flat and insipid... So to rely upon your own abilities as to be unwilling to learn from others is clearly folly; so to study others as not to judge for yourself is imbecility.⁶

Finally, I will give one more exhortation for us to take seriously the use of bible commentaries:

In many ways a Bible commentary is like a teacher. Instead of being taught directly in a classroom or other type of setting, you are reading the teacher's comments in book form. This commentary may teach you about Bible history and culture, perhaps give you an insight into biblical languages, or maybe even offer a devotional thought on how to apply the Scripture to your own situations in life.

The first and perhaps most important question to ask when trying to decide what Bible commentary to use is, who is the person or persons writing this commentary in the first place? Does this person share the same basic presuppositions about the Bible that you do?⁷

⁶ C.H. Spurgeon, "Lecture No. 2. On Commenting", p. 27.

⁷ David M. Fowler, *The CBD Guide to Bible Reference Resources* (Prince Press: n.p., 1998), pp. 55-56.

Criteria for Inclusion in the Study of Admirable Commentaries

The criteria I have adopted as to which commentators to include in these lectures is first, that their theological stance be evangelical (I take this in the categories of the Reformation *solas*); second, that their works are either multiple volume sets or composite multiple volume sets or at least include commentaries or works on several scripture books; third, that they represent a wider European context to educate us in the larger scope of evangelical interpretation; and fourth, as much as possible, that their works are available in reprint form or fairly readily available in good libraries. In lecture one (Part I) we concentrated upon the Puritans (The Two Matthews) and the Germans (Johann Bengel, The Exegete of Pietism; Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, The Champion of Biblical Orthodoxy; and Johann Peter Lange, Germany's Outstanding Conservative Bible Scholar). In this second lecture (Part II), we turn now to Scotland and select evangelical biblical interpreters there.

The Seventeenth Century Scottish Expositors Series

I commence with the hallmark of Scottish expository studies, what often has been called the Scottish Covenanters Series.

Generally today very few are acquainted with this impressive seventeenth century Scottish publishing venture. Although particular authors may be known, few are aware of the intended series as a whole. It would be a tremendous series to have in its entirety for study in rhetoric, exegesis, devotional material, theology, and historical theology. I am amazed that a team of editors has not taken up the task. The series was the brainchild of David Dickson (c.1583-1663) the noteworthy Scottish Presbyterian divine, revival preacher, and author. It was compiled to “provide a series of expositions covering the whole Bible, with concise, straightforward commentary for all”.⁸ By

⁸ *DSCHT*, p. 310. It appears the original intention was not to cover every book of the Bible but “of the principal books in the Old and New Testament”. So it reads in the preface to James Durham's, *An Exposition of the Book of Job* as quoted by George Christie, “Scripture Exposition in Scotland in the

this was implied all the laity, school masters, students of divinity, and ministers. Generally a brief synopsis is given and then devotional instruction follows on a few verses at a time. The series did not aim at providing alternative interpretations but gave one single meaning. Sometimes it ends with a restatement, which often develops the argument in a scholastic fashion. The series represents a period of the Golden-Age of Scottish Presbyterianism of the 1650's and 1660's and should be a series well known by Presbyterians. The series has been charged with having certain defects beyond the obvious distance of time – the overall context of the text and book can be ignored or diminished, thus failing to connect “the natural thread”.

You may know Dickson as one of two authors who was attributed with writing “The Sum of Saving Knowledge”. He was born to a wealthy merchant father in Glasgow, served in Irvine where great revival occurred, and suffered for his convictions by being banished two years because he opposed episcopacy. Dickson also was the first writer to compose a commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith. It was first published in Latin and later in English as *Truth's Victory Over Error* – a work extremely rare to see today in the original editions. I have examined copies in Scotland and the only copy I have found in Canada is at the University of Toronto in the Fisher Rare Book collection. Dickson also served as second Divinity Professor at the University of Glasgow, where he concentrated on the expository study of Scripture.

Dickson obviously did the “lion's share” of the series, yet he managed to induce others to join him. Why? The answer they felt to be simple – there was a dearth of such plain and short expositions available in Scotland. Banner of Truth keeps David Dickson's commentary on the Psalms in print and I believe if you turn to Psalm One you will see the style and intention. Who were the other authors? I list them here below:

David Dickson	<i>Epistles</i> , 1640
	<i>Hebrews</i> , 1637

Seventeenth Century” *RSCHT* I (1926), p. 97 in distinction from the article in *DSCHT*. I conclude the intention shifted to every Bible book as time passed.

	<i>Epistles of Paul, James, Peter, Jude</i> – Latin, 1645 English, 1659
	<i>Matthew</i> , 1647
	<i>Psalms</i> , 1653-1654
George Hutchison	<i>Twelve Minor Prophets</i> , 1653, 1654, 1657
	<i>John</i> , 1657
	<i>Job</i> , 1669
James Ferguson	<i>Philippians and Colossians</i> , 1656
	<i>Galatians and Ephesians</i> , 1659
	<i>1 and 2 Thessalonians</i> , 1674, 1675
Alexander Nisbet	<i>1 and 2 Peter</i> , 1658
	<i>Ecclesiastes</i> , (1660 ready, delayed until 1694)
James Durham,	<i>Revelation</i> , 1658
	<i>Song of Songs</i> , 1668
	<i>Job</i> , 1759 ⁹

Dickson acknowledged that other commentaries did exist, but they were too large, too expensive, or too detailed. Most of Dickson's commentaries originated as class expositions to students at Glasgow or Edinburgh, with the exception of Hebrews. There were some other commentators contemporary with Dickson who were not specifically invited by Dickson to join in the series. One such writer was William Guild, who Henry Sefton called a "reluctant Covenanter". Amongst his writings were commentaries on the Song of Songs, Revelation and II Samuel. This last commentary Guild dedicated to John Owen. Another name noticeably absent from the series was Robert Leighton. Leighton's father was a notable Covenanter, but Robert took a more moderate approach. In many ways Robert Leighton's commentary on I Peter fits many of the

⁹Christie, "Scripture Exposition in Scotland", pp. 98-111 and *DSCHT*.

James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland*, original 1872, revised 1888 (Edinburgh:Knox Press, 1982), pp. 16 - 17.

qualities of the “Scottish Covenanter Expositor’s Series”. Some authors’ works were never published but were part of Dickson’s plan. These include works by Robert Blair, Robert Douglas and Samuel Rutherford. Unfortunately these *MS* have been lost.

Today the Bible student can still benefit from four commentaries currently in print from this famous seventeenth century Scottish series:

- *Psalms*, David Dickson¹⁰
- *Song of Solomon*, James Durham¹¹
- *1 & 2 Peter*, Alexander Nisbet¹²
- *Revelation*, James Durham¹³

We have already referred to Dickson on the Psalms. Durham on the Song of Solomon takes a Christological allegorical approach to the book. Spurgeon wrote of it: “Durham is always good, and he is at his best upon the Canticles. He gives us the essence of the good matter. For practical use this work is perhaps more valuable than any other Key to the Song.”¹⁴ The Song of Songs was of great interest to many Scottish Covenanters and others who followed them. They did not adopt a literalistic approach towards it. (Students should note that many also set it to metre, such as Ralph Erskine in volume seven of his *Collected Works*, although noticeably not reprinted in the twentieth century reprint edition.) Durham was Dickson’s colleague in drafting “The Sum of Saving Knowledge”. His commentary on Revelation is based upon his Sunday morning lectures before the service or sermon. It represents the historicist viewpoint and the older tradition of post-millennialism. Some argue that certain contemporary schools of post-millennialism are developments of

¹⁰ David Dickson, *Psalms* original 1653-1655 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1959).

¹¹ James Durham, *Song of Solomon* original 1653-1655 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965).

¹² Alexander Nisbet, *1 & 2 Peter* original 1653-1655 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985).

¹³ James Durham, *A Commentary Upon the Book of Revelation* original 1658 (Willow Street, Pennsylvania: Old Paths, 2000).

¹⁴ Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries*, pp. 112-113.

such a school as Durham. Others would argue that they are rather a radical departure from Durham's post-millennialism. I leave it with the reader and have not yet seen these two theses adequately dealt with. Spurgeon wrote of Durham's commentary on Revelation: "After all that has been written, it would not be easy to find a more sensible and instructive work than this old-fashioned exposition. We cannot accept its interpretations of the mysteries, but the mystery of the gospel fills it with sweet savour."¹⁵ Lest you think it too dated, let me say you will be shocked to see how contemporary he is, and you will see that there is still more to mine from this old Scottish Covenanter. Durham grew up the son of a Scottish Laird, yet nowhere reads like a country gentleman, but breathes piety and grace. Four works by James Durham which were never in this Scottish Covenanter's Expository series have recently been published: *Christ Crucified: The Marrow of the Gospel in 72 Sermons on Isaiah 53*; *An Exposition of the Ten Commandments*; *Concerning Scandal*; and *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*. The reissue of these four books shows a revived interest in Durham.

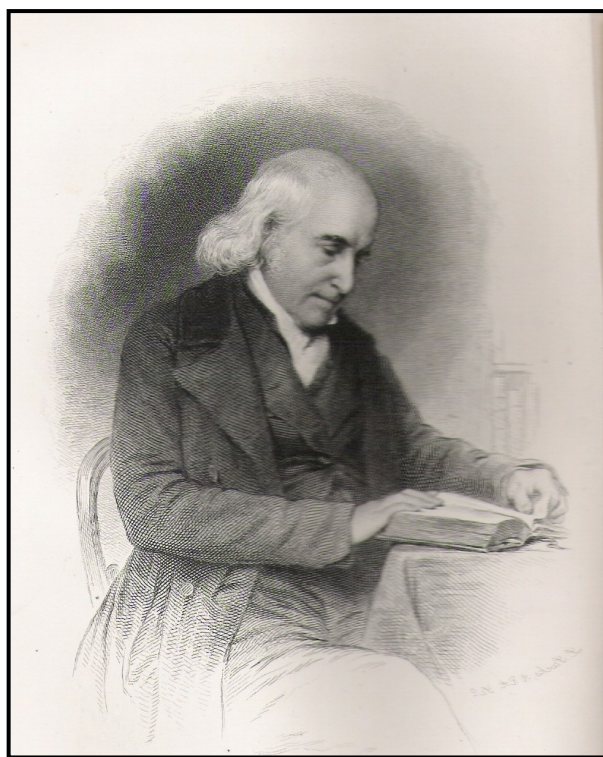
Very little is known of Alexander Nisbet's life. (I draw your attention to the fact that *1 and 2 Peter* remains in Banner's "Geneva Series" today.) I challenge all of you to dip into one of these four commentaries – taste what our forefathers really said. You will see in their own style a plainness, a piety, and an effort to encourage all to engage in scriptural study. Some of these writers were Professors of Divinity in the Scottish Universities, but there was a closeness to the church and her needs.

John Brown of Broughton Place: A Scottish Master Exegete

We now move from the seventh century to the nineteenth century and to John Brown of Broughton Place (1784-1858). He belonged to that great Brown "clerical dynasty" of Secession Presbyterians, being the grandson of the famed John Brown of Haddington and son of John Brown of Whitburn. There was an amazingly bibline thinking and writing style in these Browns. Brown of Haddington, the Professor of Divinity for twenty years,

¹⁵ Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries*, p.199.

produced the famous *Self-Interpreting Bible* with its exhaustive “Thompson-like” chain reference system, hermeneutical rules, notes, and concordance, all with an experimental Calvinistic tone. He was also the author of a noted systematic theology, which was “jam-packed” with scripture references within the traditional *loci* of a Reformed theological tome. Brown of Haddington certainly knew the scriptures and wanted to expound them. His son used his pen very much as a devotional writer in the spirit of a Matthew Henry. Thus it is no wonder that this third Brown of Broughton Place became the great master of experimental Calvinistic exegesis. Never lose sight of what is being built generation to generation in our covenant homes and what a blessing they are to the nation. Every time I think of these Brown men I think of what a blessing they were to the Scottish people.



John Brown of Broughton Place

Brown of Broughton Place, who served this Edinburgh Church from 1829 to 1858 and was also Professor of Biblical Exegesis, has been sadly forgotten by many today. Yet he was truly one of the great evangelicals in Scotland in the nineteenth century. Yes, he had his faults, but I suspect he has been eclipsed by many others when he should not have been. As a prince of biblical exegesis he gave something to Scotland – he turned the Scottish Church “back and forward” to a recovery of rigorous exegesis. It was William Cunningham, (a respecter of Brown) who credited him as having “formed a marked Era in the history of scriptural interpretation in [Scotland]”. What was this “marked Era”? It built upon the best of the previous Scottish expositors, and it was in keeping with a zeal that theology had to flow forth from solid exegesis. Brown’s goal was to strive for “the exact meaning” yet always with devotion. He did this before the rise of the German higher critics and their influence upon the Scottish exegetes.

There is one story which I must recount about Brown. Cairns relates that a change came over Brown’s preaching after 1816. Before there was stress upon rhetorical style and impression; now he was concentrated, urgent, moving, keen, searching and with a tremendous passion for the unconverted. It was in 1816 that his wife of nine years died, leaving him with four children. He was to remain a widower for nineteen years before his second marriage.

Brown was appointed Professor of Exegetical Theology in 1834 in the United Secession Divinity Hall. The plan adopted by the Synod in 1834 was that the students in the junior class of 1834 were to have select scripture books critically expounded to them in the reorganized plan of Synod for the United Secession Hall. This became the focus of Professor Brown’s classes. He gave John McKerrow a description of the class he was conducting for McKerrow’s *History of the Secession*. In the Old Testament Scriptures Professor Brown gave lectures on the history of creation, the fall of man, select Messianic Psalms (numbers 2, 16, 18 and 110), and the Messianic prophecies in Isaiah (chapters 11, 52, 53, etc.). In the New Testament he gave “minute critical exposition” of Christ’s Discourses in the four

Gospels, and lectures on Romans, Galatians and Hebrews. He desired to provide more lectures from Acts and the New Testament prophecies and on the Messianic predictions in the Old Testament but could not take these up as there was insufficient time with only two sessions allotted to such.¹⁶ Professor Brown took two to three hours each weekday that the Hall was in session and divided this time equally between lecturing and student discourses. Student exercises were exegetical and were always followed by his critical comments, and each student prepared and delivered one each session in his junior years. These were still delivered *memoriter* and were to be “pieces of strict exegesis; a clear exposition of the words, phrases, and sentiments of the passage with a statement of the reasons on which the exposition is founded”.¹⁷

In reviewing McKerrow’s written account received from Professor Brown, a quick comparison to the published works of Professor Brown reveals a virtual identical listing. Wayne McCoy’s doctoral thesis of 1956 furnishes the best bibliography of the published works of Brown. McCoy divided Brown’s works into four categories: books, pamphlets, articles and essays, and works edited by Brown. The bibliography is eight pages in length and accords with what McCoy says about Brown as being very “industrious”.¹⁸ Under Brown’s published works on the Old Testament can be found his *The Sufferings and Glories of the Messiah: An Exposition of Psalm XVIII, and Isaiah LII:13-LIII:12*.¹⁹ There are no published lectures from Brown on Genesis. All of the lectures he gave on the New Testament were later published:

- *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ:*

¹⁶McKerrow, *History of the Secession Church*, p.798.

¹⁷McKerrow, *History of the Secession Church*, p.799.

¹⁸Wayne Livingston McCoy, “John Brown of Edinburgh (1784-1858), Churchman and Theologian” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1952), pp.295-302. I will not list here or in this bibliography all the printed works of John Brown of Broughton Place but rather refer the reader to the bibliography in McCoy’s thesis.

¹⁹John Brown (of Broughton Place), *The Sufferings and Glories of the Messiah: an Exposition of Psalm XVIII, and Isaiah LII:13-LIII:12* (Edinburgh, 1853).

Illustrated in a Series of Expositions (1850)

- *An Exposition of the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews (1862)*
- *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians (1853)*
- *Analytical Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans (1857)*²⁰

The *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ* has been selected for brief comment to gain further insight as to Professor Brown's contributions to the United Secession Divinity Hall. These expositions must be viewed as often having originated in the pulpit of Broughton Place Church and then "re-worked" for the students by adding "philological discussions of the Hebrew and Greek texts, the detailed opinions of authorities on all controverted questions of interpretation, and the nomenclature of Biblical Exegesis". Thus, these lectures were utilized in the pulpit and in the Divinity Hall.²¹ Hence the world of the church was not far away in these lectures, something for which Brown did not apologize, because merely critical discussions in a Divinity Hall without piety turns the study of Scripture into an intellectual pursuit.²² The lectures in the Hall had a quality of godliness, humility, and solemnity about them, for the Scripture was revered and a love for Christ came through in all that was studied.²³ The overall thrust of these volumes is clearly evangelical and Christ-centred. They are not devoid of piety, yet they also contain "*scholia*, on particular words and phrases", continuous comment and "illustrated analysis". Brown states that "in all the Discourses, Exposition

²⁰John Brown (of Broughton Place), *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Illustrated in a Series of Expositions*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1850).

John Brown (of Broughton Place), *An Exposition of the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews*, ed. David Smith, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1862).

John Brown (of Broughton Place), *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh, 1853).

John Brown (of Broughton Place), *Analytical Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Edinburgh, 1857).

²¹McCoy, "John Brown of Edinburgh", pp.223-224.

²²McCoy, "John Brown of Edinburgh", p.224.

²³McCoy, "John Brown of Edinburgh", p.249.

will be found to be the staple; whatever is doctrinal, experimental, or practical, being presented as the result of the application of the principles of strict exposition to the passage under consideration”²⁴.

In the “Preface”, Brown stated which works he had found most helpful in doing the exposition, but the definitive list of works consulted can be found in the third index, “Authors Quoted or referred to”. This list contains reference to almost three hundred different authors and in essence can be viewed as a working bibliography. Of these three hundred authors, several are referred to numerous times throughout the volumes. Those who were referred to most often by Brown were: Augustine, Bengel, Beza, Brewster, Calvin, Campbell, Chrysostom, Erasmus, Fuller, Grotius, M. Henry, Josephus, Kuinoel, G. Lawson, Lightfoot, Luther, Neander, Olshausen, J. Brown Patterson, Quesnel, Scott, Pye Smith, Tholuck, Trench, and Wetstein.²⁵ And of these in this list of “those most often referred to”, the top three were Bengel, Olshausen and Tholuck, with Bengel and Tholuck leading the number. Brown in many ways was a Scottish counterpart to these German pietists/scholars, although he never held a university appointment. Cairns believed that Brown’s *Discourses* represents the greatest unified work on the discourses in the English language.

Brown’s approach in his lectures was to not give lectures on the principles of hermeneutics but rather to apply such principles in class by expositing large portions of scripture. McCoy stated that Brown’s two questions were, “What was this oracle in sense to those who first received it?” and, “What is it still to us?” Further, his plan of exegesis was ““to make the Bible the basis and test of the system’ of theology and not ‘to make the system the principal and, in effect, sole means of the interpretation of the Bible.””²⁶

²⁴John Brown (of Broughton Place), “Preface”, in *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, original 1850, second edition 1852 enlarged (Edinburgh, 1990), pp.v, ix.

²⁵Brown, “Index III – Authors Quoted or Referred To,” in *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord*, III, pp.505-507.

²⁶McCoy, “John Brown of Edinburgh”, p.264.

Commenting upon Brown's exegetical work, McCoy stated that Brown largely limited it "to philological, grammatical, or linguistic criticism... [and] To Lower, Higher and Historical Criticism, he contributed little or nothing." He read the German writers' works, which were written in Latin or made available in English translation, as he did not read German. This led McCoy to his conclusion that by the time Brown's exegetical lectures were actually published they were "already outdated."²⁷ By this McCoy meant that Brown wrote and published prior to the time when the German Higher Critical writings were introduced to Scotland and McCoy argued that Brown must be read within his time period. McCoy attributed Brown a special place in what he called "the general forward movement in exegetical theology in Scotland" in that Brown helped originate this movement.²⁸ William Taylor, in *The Scottish Pulpit From the Reformation to the Present Day*, said much the same concerning Brown's influence upon exegesis in Scotland:

...the name of John Brown marks the beginning of an era not only in his own denomination, but in Scotland generally. He was in that country very much what Moses Stuart was in New England, the regenerator, if not the father, of exact Scriptural exegesis, and for that he deserves to be held in lasting honor.²⁹

McCoy's words concerning Brown's place in Scottish exegesis in the nineteenth century are accurate. Brown certainly did inaugurate a new era in exegesis and this continued to develop and came "to supersede his work".³⁰ Brown certainly represents a movement to interpret the Bible historically and represents in Scotland the early steps in the nineteenth century towards the

²⁷McCoy, "John Brown of Edinburgh", p.264.

²⁸McCoy, "John Brown of Edinburgh", p.264.

²⁹McCoy, "John Brown of Edinburgh", p.258. McCoy is quoting from William M. Taylor, *The Scottish Pulpit from the Reformation to the Present Day* (London, 1887), pp.227ff.

³⁰McCoy, "John Brown of Edinburgh", p.259.

historical-critical method of biblical interpretation. Glenn Miller wrote that it was Freidrich Schleiermacher who was “the first notable Reformed thinker to struggle with the new approach...”³¹ It is not unusual to read that Brown viewed Schleiermacher with very positive accolades and mentioned him in the introduction to his *Discourses of Our Lord*.³²

In examining the *Discourses and Sayings of our Lord*, there are a total of twenty-five expositions. However, the twenty-fifth exposition has twenty-two “parts”, each of which on average is fifteen pages in length, thus making them separate expositions or lectures in themselves. Also, just because he numbered them Exposition I, Exposition II, etc. does not mean that these expositions each constituted one lecture in the Divinity Hall. Several of these would likely have been three or four lectures in the Divinity Hall.³³ These published lectures interpret scripture

³¹Glenn Miller, “Theological Education”, *ERF*, p.365.

³²Brown, “Introduction”, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, I, p.vi. Brown saw Schleiermacher as opposing the German rationalists and emphasising a personal Saviour – “the soul of revealed religion”.

³³For example, Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ*, I, “Exposition I”, goes from pages 1 to 52, yet is subdivided into:

- Introduction (1-11)
- I. Of the Messiah (12-15)
 - 1. The Son of God
 - 2. The Son of Man
 - 3. Sent by the Father
- II. Of the Design of the Messiah’s Mission (15-18)
 - 1. Negatively - not to condemn the world
 - 2. Positively - to save the world
 - (i) That the world may not perish
 - (ii) That the world may have eternal life
- III. Of the Means by Which the Design of the Messiah’s Mission was to be Accomplished.... Figuratively.... Literally (18-22)
- IV. Of the Manner of Obtaining the Blessings Procured by the Messiah: Figuratively... Literally... (22-27)
- V. Of the Primary Source of this Economy of Salvation, the Love of God to the World (28-36)
 - 1. The love of God, the origin of the plan of salvation
 - 2. The love of God to the world...
- VI. Of the Guilt and Danger of those who do not Avail themselves to this Economy of Salvation (37-47)
 - Notes A, B, C, D, E (47-52)

by scripture, thus making reference to other scripture passages, and either cite these passages in the text or as footnotes. The footnotes often refer to authors consulted and quite often include a quotation from these authors, in Latin, English, French, Greek, or Hebrew. The “Notes” are quite extensive and are usually comments directly upon the Greek text explaining its meaning, difficulties, and how it was treated by the Church Fathers, Reformers, etc. The “Notes” show that Brown had a vast acquaintance with the authors in his massive library.³⁴

In reading the titles of Brown’s expositions, it becomes clear that several of these were particularly valuable in Brown’s opinion for students training for the ministry. For example, Exposition XII, “The Church and Its Office-Bearers – True and False” (John 10:1-9) and Exposition VI, “The Christian Ministry; And the Character and Destiny of Its Occupants – Worthy and Unworthy” (Luke 12:35-37, 41-47).³⁵ Brown’s audience of the junior classes of the Divinity Hall were the recipients of such teaching and it was more than exegesis. It was exhortation, encouragement, and a call to self-examination. The strains of his grandfather, John Brown of Haddington, can be detected in the spirit of these expositions. We know that he continued to use his grandfather’s “Address to Students of Divinity” in the United Secession and in the United Presbyterian Divinity Halls and had it reprinted.³⁶ The Hall existed for the formation of men for the ministry who were spiritually right with God and whose characters reflected maturity for office. The study of Divinity was not a mere academic or intellectual pursuit. Yet in saying this he attempted to be as precise as possible in his lectures. For example, on that twelfth exposition “The Church and Its Office-Bearers – True and False”, he opens up the lecture with a

³⁴These statements are based upon a summary analysis of “Exposition I”, outlined in footnote 18 above.

³⁵Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ*, II, “Exposition XII”, pp.90-106.

Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ*, I, “Exposition VI”, pp.387-410.

³⁶John Brown (of Broughton Place), *Hints to the students of Divinity: An Address at the opening of the Annual Session of the Theological Seminary of the United Secession Church* (Edinburgh, 1841).

discussion on the distinction of John 10 as not a parable but that of an “allegorical discourse” with reference to Olshausen’s views on this distinction. This type of discussion has a fairly modern ring about it, as is evidenced by similar discussions in Craig L. Blomberg’s *Interpreting the Parables*, where a parable’s relation to an allegory is discussed.³⁷

John MacLeod makes an excellent conclusion about the exegetical place of John Brown of Broughton Place:

He did as much as any man in his day to advance the credit of that type of interpretation – the grammatical and historical one – which prevailed at the Reformation with Calvin as its most illustrious exponent, not which subsequently passed under an eclipse owing to the length to which the divines tended to go in applying the Analogy of the Faith to the decision of questions in the field of Exegesis.³⁸

The last word I give to Brown’s biographer, John Cairns:

Yet the works which live are those which ripen slowly, as the fruit of years of toil, and which, calmly disregarding ephemeral tastes and fashions, connect themselves with permanent necessities and interests. Nothing is more enduring in Christian literature than commentary, which unites the qualities of *solidity*, *clearness*, and *devotion*. These marks Dr. Brown’s expository writings bear... [*italics mine*]³⁹

³⁷Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1990), pp.29ff.

³⁸ John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1943), p.253.

³⁹ John Cairns, *Memoir of John Brown, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1860), pp.309-310.

Next we move from Brown of Broughton Place to another noteworthy nineteenth century biblical interpreter in Scotland, Patrick Fairbairn.

Patrick Fairbairn: Scotland's Master of Hermeneutics

As we noted, some of the men God greatly used in the production of the Scottish Covenanters Expository Series came from families of wealth and security. In contrast, Patrick Fairbairn came from a family of simple farming folk. He was born in Hallyburton, Berwickshire in the Scottish Lowlands in 1805. He studied at Edinburgh University, working his way through as a family tutor in Dalry, Ayrshire. In 1830, at age 25, he was ordained and sent to serve a Church of Scotland charge in the most northern Orkney Islands – North Ronaldsay. (Note that most young men for the Scottish ministry were tutors before ordination and many had little say as to their first appointment – old style Scottish Presbyterianism!) Few willingly sought to go as ministers to Orkney as it was known as a difficult field where the men were termed “wreckers” of ministers.⁴⁰ He stayed seven years, and during that time a slow and steady spiritual transformation occurred. Fairbairn belonged to that growing party of evangelicals within the Church of Scotland in the 1830's – the prelude to the Disruption.

During these seven years in Orkney he married and was engaged in an intensive period of study, taking up German and Hebrew – teaching himself – and undertaking translation work from the German writers V. Steiger and E.W. Hengstenberg on the Psalms and Revelation.⁴¹ This itself is reflective of a minister who was well disciplined and methodical in study. Many others after their ordination have been intense in studies to refine their knowledge and understanding in the initial years of ministry. Seminary cannot afford all knowledge; it prepares and lays a foundation but that must be built upon. The initial years in

⁴⁰ The Presbyterian ministry in Orkney is very interesting reading. See, Frank D. Bardgett, *Two Millenia of Church and Community in Orkney* (Edinburgh, Cambridge, Durham: Pentland, 2000).

⁴¹ See, E.W. Hengstenberg, *The Revelation expounded for those who search the Scripture*, trans. Patrick Fairbairn, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1851-1852).

ministry must be well guarded and should not be the time for outside pursuits. Also, note the authors he selected to master were leading German exegetes and no doubt were key to the great writing and teaching ministry, which Fairbairn was destined to have.⁴²

After being in the Orkneys, he moved to a parish in Glasgow and then to a small village, Saltown, where in 1843 he left his manse and church building to labour with the Free Church of Scotland. He was but one of many ministers who bore the cost of leaving the security of the national church for conscience and principal. With the Disruption quickly followed the question of where to train the ministers. New College was established in Edinburgh and Free Church Colleges were also begun in Aberdeen and Glasgow. Fairbairn was by this time widely regarded as a Bible specialist and so in 1852 he was appointed to the Free Church College in Aberdeen. Later he was transferred to the Free Church College (Trinity), in Glasgow, where he was the first Professor of New Testament, then Principal. In essence, Fairbairn was the founder of the Glasgow Free Church College. (This physical college was noted for its famous Lombard Tower.)

I would classify Fairbairn's literary contributions (many of which were done while still in the pastorate) to either books on hermeneutics or Bible commentaries proper. Fairbairn became a Scottish giant in the field of biblical hermeneutics throughout the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Hermeneutics, being the science of interpretation, was of great concern to him, in particular the relationship of the Old and New Testaments. Today we might view him as somewhat verbose or Victorian, nevertheless he remains the classic conservative author on this subject. His *Typology of Scriptures* appeared as two volumes in 1845 and 1847 and *The Interpretation of Prophecy* appeared first in 1856. Nick Needham described Fairbairn's *Typology of Scripture* as his *magnum opus* and is "still the standard reformed text on the subject." In this work Fairbairn argues that,

⁴² *DSCHT*, pp.313-314.

There were many more Old Testament types than were mentioned in the New Testament, although castigating the mentality, which finds types everywhere. Most of the second volume is devoted to a detailed analysis of the typology of the Mosaic law, the tabernacle and the sacrificial system...⁴³

Fairbairn charges that “The Typology of Scripture has been one of the most neglected departments of theological science.”⁴⁴ He certainly did all he could to correct this and issued his *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, which went through two editions as a sequel to his *magnum opus*. [Typology is “a way of setting forth the biblical history of salvation so that some of its earlier phases are seen as anticipations of later phases” (*NBD* Second Edition, p. 1226.), e.g. the Exodus, the creation, the restorations and typical persons. As Augustine stated it, it is to see that “In the Old Testament the New Testament lies hidden; in the New Testament the Old Testament stands revealed.”]

It is interesting that the liberals continue to look back to Fairbairn’s *Hermeneutical Manual* of 1858 as more valuable than his work on typology and prophecy. The reason lies in the Christology in *Typology* and *Prophecy*, which, no doubt, is offensive to liberals. Yet few conservatives today know about Fairbairn’s outstanding *Hermeneutical Manual*. Ernest Best summarizes Fairbairn’s four hermeneutical rules, and I quote them here in full:

- 1) The exegete must be in sympathy with what he is interpreting; he consequently rejects the approach of the rationalists because of their refusal to accept miracle.
- 2) The exegete must seek and accept the simple grammatical meaning of the words while at the

⁴³ *DSCHT*, pp.313-314.

⁴⁴ Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, fifth edition (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1870), I, p. 17.

same time be aware that his own doctrine may affect the way he reads the words.

- 3) Since the New Testament writings are simple any explanation must be simple, though to achieve this much careful study would be necessary.
- 4) It is the current usage of words that is important rather than their etymology. (Had some biblical scholars paid more attention to this last principle in the middle of our century, fewer culs-de-sac would have been explored.)⁴⁵

Fairbairn recognizes that difficulties remain, and he wrote further on this and then proceeded to deal with specific New Testament examples, such as the relationships of the genealogies in Matthew and Luke.⁴⁶

We continue to use Louis Berkhof's *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, and the reader will note that Berkhof refers to Fairbairn's writings on *Typology* and *Prophecy* when Berkhof summarizes how to deal with the typical and prophetic.⁴⁷ Thus our ongoing debt to the seminal work of Fairbairn needs to be acknowledged and appreciated in today's evangelical hermeneutical classes. I believe we could summarize the field of hermeneutics as follows: Fairbairn was dominant for about 100 years (say to 1950), then Louis Berkhof for the next 40 or so years. Currently we are in the midst of "the new hermeneutic" and suffice it to say, Fairbairn and Berkhof still have much to offer as solid texts for the field. My personal advice is to study Fairbairn and Berkhof, which are "classics" and wait to see how things will work out with the more recent works. In saying this I

⁴⁵ Ernest Best, "The Study of the New Testament in Glasgow from the Disruption to the First World War" in *Traditions of Theology in Glasgow 1450-1990*, ed. W. I. P. Hazlett (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1993), pp.31-32.

⁴⁶ Best, p. 32.

⁴⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, original 1950 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), pp.148, 154.

am not underestimating all newer works – but is a divinity student ready to pass judgment at this stage? Time is needed.

Fairbairn was a consistent evangelical in his affirmation of the Bible's divine inspiration, authority, and unity. However he knew that scripture could be distorted by evangelicals also, therefore it was absolutely important that students of divinity have a proper biblical hermeneutic. One must hold to the "analogy of faith" as formulated in the Westminster Confession of Faith I:IX. Next one must approach New Testament passages, which draw upon the Old Testament asking if a contrast or a continuity or both is being given. Fairbairn teaches us to never denigrate the Old Testament nor Judaize the New Testament.⁴⁸

His instructions on interpreting the parables of Jesus in the *Hermeneutic Manual* of 1858 are absolutely remarkable despite their age. Fairbairn's rules here are tightly reasoned and exhibit an exactness which rivals the contemporary work by Craig Blomberg.⁴⁹

Next I turn to Fairbairn's hermeneutics applied in the Bible commentaries which he wrote: *Jonah* (1849), *Ezekiel* (1851), and *I and II Timothy and Titus* (1874). Today we can be very happy to see that Banner of Truth Trust has just issued a beautiful new edition of Fairbairn's commentary on I and II Timothy and Titus, (2002). It contains Fairbairn's actual notes to his divinity students on the subject of Pastoral Theology for the seniors preparing for Christian ministry.⁵⁰ (You will notice that Fairbairn rightly levels those who dispute Pauline authorship, and you will be struck by his own translation of the epistles.) The commentary, which Spurgeon writes "is about as complete a guide to the smaller epistles as one could desire", is in my estimation of outstanding caliber and easier to follow than

⁴⁸ "Publishers Introduction" in *Scriptural Interpretation* an abridgement of Patrick Fairbairn's *Hermeneutical Manual* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1994), p.1.

⁴⁹ *Scriptural Interpretation*, pp. 23-29. See, Fairbairn, p. 28 "In their nature, parables are a species of allegory, or symbol..." Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 1990).

⁵⁰ Patrick Fairbairn, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, "Geneva Series", original 1874 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), p.vii.

George Knight's worthy commentary. I share with you but one verse – I Timothy 5:17. You will no doubt be familiar with the verse. Fairbairn gives his translation, background on the controversy here, basic word studies, then his conclusions and ends with a full discussion on “double honour”. It is helpful to know some Greek, but not essential, yet nuance could be missed. The commentary goes very nicely with his work, *Pastoral Theology*, which was published the next year. We will have to wait to see if Banner of Truth will issue it in logical sequence.

Briefly, his work on *Ezekiel* is a good treatment but not always easy to read.⁵¹ It went through three separate editions – which speaks of its popularity. Fairbairn's eschatology was shared with David Brown of the Free Church College, Aberdeen, both being historic post-millennial.⁵² The commentary on Ezekiel keys in upon developing an interpretative model, thus not being chiefly concerned with a “verse-by-verse” commentary. It is full (502 pages) and shows an obvious indebtedness to German writers, applauding again, Hengstenberg's brief comments on Ezekiel in his Christological study. Spurgeon makes this point on Fairbairn's *Ezekiel*: “Dr. Fairbairn has a cool judgment and a warm heart; he has cast much light upon Ezekiel's wheels, and has evidently felt the touch of the live coal, which is better still.”⁵³ I am sorry I know nothing about the *Jonah* commentary and conclude that the Banner editors went with Hugh Martin's *Jonah* commentary perhaps for its superiority.

Fairbairn joins the galaxy of the great Free Church expositors of the nineteenth century who are rigorous, reliable, solid, and consistently evangelical. You should mine them and add them to your shelves. You will find in print in the Geneva Series of Commentaries:

Andrew Bonar, *Leviticus*

Hugh Martin, *Jonah*

⁵¹ Patrick Fairbairn, *Ezekiel, and the Book of His Prophecy: An Exposition* third edition (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863). Original 1851.

⁵² John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1943), p. 279. The nineteenth century Princeton divines also highly esteemed Fairbairn's work.

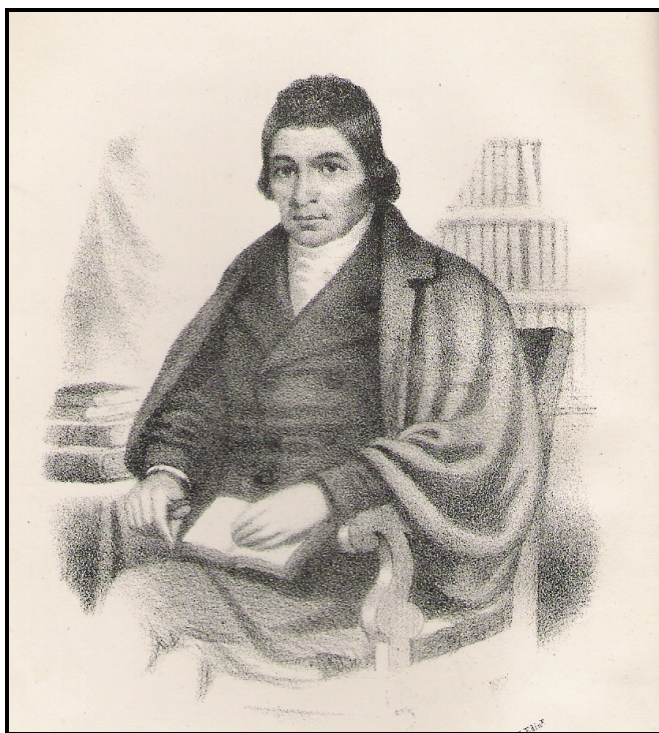
⁵³ Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries*, p.125.

David Brown, *The Four Gospels*

Robert Candlish, *I John*

And, of course, Patrick Fairbairn, of whom I give the epitaph “Scotland’s Master of Hermeneutics,” reminds us, it is not sufficient simply to say, “It is inspired.” The Book must be properly interpreted.

George Lawson: A Pious Expositor in the Great Chain



I would be amiss if I did not make brief comment upon one other Scottish expositor of the early nineteenth century – George Lawson (1787-1820). Lawson was born into an Associate family, was privately tutored by John Johnstone, and proceeded to the University of Edinburgh. We know that he completed his Hebrew studies under James Robertson while at the University.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ J. MacFarlane, *The Life and Times of Dr. Lawson* original 1862 (Edinburgh: Wm. Oliphant, 1880), pp. 14-15; 30-37.

He then attended the Associate Divinity Hall for one session under Professor Swanston at Kinross. Upon the Professor's death, he attended the remainder of his theological studies under Professor John Brown of Haddington (I believe for three sessions). He then was licensed in 1769 at age 21 and remained a probationer for two years.⁵⁵ He was ordained to the Associate Church in Selkirk in 1771 and remained there until 1820, the time of his death. In 1787 he was made Professor Brown's successor, a position he held until his death. George Lawson has the distinguishing feature of being the first Seceder to receive a D.D. from a Scottish university, being awarded such in 1806 by Marischal College, Aberdeen.⁵⁶

Lawson was recognized by many of his contemporaries and by several of his students as possessing vast scholarship. He was given the nickname "the Christian Socrates". His knowledge of the classical authors and the Church Fathers was attested to by many, as was his use of the scriptural languages and French. Several of his students gave testimony of his favourite authors and his exacting knowledge of their writings. These included the works of Chrysostom (in Greek), Owen, Massillon and Saurin (in French), Jonathan Edwards, Campbell, Traill, Boston, Brown of Haddington, Plutarch's *Lives* and Homer.⁵⁷ His ability to quote from memory large sections from the Hebrew and Greek texts of scripture and the sermons of Ralph Erskine no doubt also contributed to Lawson's reputation.⁵⁸

Robert Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church 1733-1900*, I (Edinburgh: David M. Small, 1904), p.44.

⁵⁵ MacFarlane, *Life and Times of Dr. Lawson*, pp.30-44.
DSCHT, p.474.

⁵⁶ Small, *History of the Congregations of the UPChurch*, II, pp.441-442.
MacFarlane, *Life and Times of Dr. Lawson*, p.54.

"Minutes of the Proceedings of the Associate Synod, 1766-1787" (May 2, 1787), MS, National Archives of
Scotland, p.2043.

⁵⁷ MacFarlane, *Life and Times of Dr. Lawson*, pp. 205, 283-284, 288, 210-212.

⁵⁸ MacFarlane, *Life and Times of Dr. Lawson*, pp. 234, 235. It is very disappointing that John MacLeod completely ignores Lawson's contributions in the field of Scottish expository studies. See, MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, pp.237-238.

Lawson's strength as a Professor was clearly in the field of Bible exposition. Virtually all the published material we have by him is in this field. One published account of his labours here is as follows:

The Dr. was accustomed also, every session, to make his pupils read with him, and critically analyze a part of the Holy Scriptures in the original Hebrew and Greek. Pertinent questions were proposed by him, on such occasions, leading at once, to the formation of the sound critic, and the edifying practical exposition of the divine word. The continued study of the original languages of the Holy Scriptures, and of their criticism, and of the practical use of the sacred volume, were thus strongly recommended. A laudable ambition to excel in these important exercises was excited and kept alive, and, in many cases, led to very valuable results.⁵⁹

Prior to his death Lawson saw published three works, which were related to either his divinity classes or congregational lectures:

- *Discourses on the Book of Esther* (1804)
- *Lectures on the Book of Ruth* (1805)
- *Lectures on the History of Joseph* (1807-1808)

After his death came his *Exposition of the Book of Proverbs* (1821) and *Discourses on the History of David* (1833). Upon his death Lawson left 80 manuscript volumes, which makes me speculate that perhaps he planned to produce a full devotional commentary set but never did. Unfortunately these volumes have been lost.

Let us examine Lawson's *Proverbs* to see what features emerge. It is not a critical work on the text of Scripture, but rather is full of instruction for Christians and is "pious and

⁵⁹ Quoted from the *Christian Repository* in John McKerrow, *History of the Secession Church* (Edinburgh: Fullarton, 1841), pp.789-790.

sensible, full of sound doctrine and salutary admonition and instruction.” Thomas Horne writing on it and on *Joseph* and *Ruth* claimed that:

There is rarely anything of a critical nature to be found in them, which indeed was not the writer’s object; but they everywhere discover a minute acquaintance with the Bible and the human heart, and reflect a deep concern to profit the reader. The style is plain and the illustrations very brief.⁶⁰

With Proverbs, Lawson made a brief introduction of one to two paragraphs for each of the first nine chapters, followed by a verse-by-verse exposition. With the remainder of Proverbs he gave a verse-by-verse exposition without chapter introductions, nor did he attempt any categorical efforts of the proverbs by grouping them or arranging them by theme. There are absolutely no other commentaries mentioned and only about ten times does he refer to textual matters or to the LXX text.⁶¹ The chief references are to other scriptural texts and these are referenced at the bottom of the page as footnotes. The next major category of reference would be to the Greek philosophers, or to Greek culture, and on occasion also to Roman antiquities. This was not surprising due to Lawson’s knowledge of the classics. Upon occasion Lawson made very obvious anti-Roman Catholic applications, which were reflective of his theological perspective.⁶² Other references beyond the classics are limited to single references and include Dodderidge, Augustine, and Latimer but are merely illustrative and not of a deep theological

⁶⁰ Cyril J. Barber, in his “Forward” to the 1984 reprint of George Lawson’s *Proverbs* is quoting from Thomas Hartwell Horne’s, *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* but Barber fails to identify which edition and the page number he is referring to in Horne. See, Cyril J. Barber, “Forward”, in George Lawson, *Proverbs*, original 1821 (Grand Rapids, 1984), p.vii.

⁶¹ George Lawson, *Proverbs* original 1821 (Grand Rapids, 1984), pp. 176, 363, 366, 2-163. All references below are to the 1984 edition.

⁶² Lawson, *Proverbs*, pp.394, 447.

nature.⁶³ Lawson's chief point was to explain the text and bring forth applications that would be illustrative of Christian Morality based upon the moral law. Thus his expositions view the law as showing man's sin and then for the Christian, as being a guide for righteous living. Lawson aimed at bringing a Christ-centered perspective to the book and probing the heart of the reader, often by asking questions by way of application, not unlike the preacher in a sermon.⁶⁴

For covenantal theologians, Proverbs 22:6 and its interpretation reveal two things: first, how the book of Proverbs is approached hermeneutically, that is, as principle and precept or as promise; and second, the stress of the writer's covenantal position. Lawson treated Proverbs 22:6 as principle and not presumptively, thus telling the reader a great deal.⁶⁵ He did have a hermeneutic fixed in expositing Proverbs, and he also had an experimental piety as a Calvinist that was not presumptive.

Lawson evidently used the book of Proverbs regularly in the Hall to draw forth illustrations on "duties". On occasion this can be discovered in Lawson's commentary, where he wrote that this proverb may be applied this way to the minister and in that manner to the congregation.⁶⁶ Whether or not he did an extensive lecture series at the Hall of Proverbs cannot be proven from the published book. Perhaps it originated as a book from the manuscript of his congregational lectures more than directly from Hall lectures, other than as occasional exhortations on "duties". Likewise, Lawson's books on Joseph, David, and Ruth were no doubt incorporated in some way into the Hall's curriculum. However, it cannot be asserted with certainty that they were Hall lectures. Belfrage testified that Lawson, in his Bible lectures,

⁶³ Lawson, *Proverbs*, pp.511, 867.

⁶⁴ Lawson, *Proverbs*, p.168 "Salvation is by grace through faith, and this faith works by love, producing universal obedience to the law of our Creator and Redeemer. This law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments, and published with more particularity in this divinely inspired body of Christian morality." From the introduction to the second portion of Proverbs at chapter ten.

⁶⁵ Lawson, *Proverbs*, pp.585-588.

⁶⁶ MacFarlane, *Life and Writings of Dr. Lawson*, p.299 and Lawson, *Proverbs*, p.379.

provided well researched Bible background material on the history of the Holy Land, and no doubt such would have included Joseph, Ruth, and David.⁶⁷

Lawson's other main biblical work which went through different editions and printings is now entitled *The Life of Joseph*.⁶⁸ Its original title was *Lectures on the History of Joseph*, although this title should not necessarily be interpreted to mean that in its original form it appeared in lecture format in the Divinity Hall at Selkirk. Rather, Lawson was using the word "lecture" here in the old Scottish tradition of a continuous Bible exposition given in Lawson's case at the "forenoon" of the Sabbath.⁶⁹ In all likelihood these "lectures" on Joseph were from these Sabbath lectures and not from the Hall discourses (lectures). Lawson prefaced this published volume on Joseph by giving an exhortation to parents that: "May not this book assist parents in speaking of it to their little ones, in a manner fitted to insinuate into their minds some of the most important lessons of religion."⁷⁰ This confirms that these lectures on Joseph were aimed at the breadth of an assembled congregation, not Hall lectures. The book contains several sermons in the "Appendix" of lectures entitled "Lectures on the Blessings Pronounced by Jacob on His Twelve Children", a series of seven lectures covering Genesis 49:1-33. The series of lectures on Joseph covers Genesis 37:1-48:22 and chapter 50. The purpose of the volume was certainly not to show forth critical Hebrew exegesis, although Lawson clearly interacted with the Hebrew text, but the purpose was a devotional verse-by-verse exposition for a congregation. If anything, the expositions on Proverbs come closer to the Hall than his lectures on Joseph.

⁶⁷ Henry Belfrage, "A Short Account of George Lawson", in *Discourses on the History of David* (Berwick, 1833), p. xvi.

⁶⁸ George Lawson, *The Life of Joseph*, original 1807 (Edinburgh, 1988).

⁶⁹ MacFarlane, *Life and Times of Dr. Lawson*, p.134.

⁷⁰ Lawson, *Life of Joseph*, p. xv.

Lawson's Bible lectures would be similar to the Bible notes recently published on Genesis done by William Still, the noted evangelical Scottish expositor of the twentieth century. William Still, *Theological Studies in Genesis and Romans* "Collected Writings of William Still" eds., David C. Searle, Sinclair B. Ferguson Vol. III (Edinbutgh/Fearn, 2000).

In conclusion, with George Lawson, we can say here was a Seceder making scriptural exposition centre-stage and not confining himself to systematic theology. With John Brown of Broughton Place there is a worthy successor and a superb exegete. George Lawson must be viewed as a link in this chain of Scottish exegetes of the evangelical Presbyterian fold. Lawson was not a father of the great exegetical movement in Scotland in the nineteenth century but part of a “link in the chain” of Secession exegetes. Spurgeon summed it up well with his pithy remark on Lawson’s *Ruth* – “By a man of great genius. Simple, fresh, and gracious. Nothing critical or profound may be looked for, but wise and sound teaching may be gleaned in these pages.”⁷¹

Conclusion

If you are just beginning to build your library of commentaries, carefully review what has been said here. As a minimum, make sure you have John Brown’s *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord* and *Galatians*. Next, obtain Fairbairn’s *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*. Then try to add Bonar’s *Leviticus* and Lawson’s *Joseph*. This will make for a solid start to your library.

Recall that these are only helps – they are not the Bible. Learn to use them diligently and with meditation. Ponder what they say. Give them time and be gracious – men have walked in the Way before us. Do not treat them such that you live in their world, but take from their age the timeless and walk in that.

⁷¹ Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries*, p.66.