SOFTWARE & TECH

Herschel Hobbs Bible Commentary

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Introduction to the Herschel Hobbs Bible Commentary

For generations of pastors, teachers, and serious Bible students, the name Herschel Hobbs has been synonymous with clear, faithful, and accessible biblical exposition. The Herschel Hobbs Bible Commentary stands as a monumental work of evangelical scholarship, offering verse-by-verse insights that bridge the ancient world of Scripture with the practical needs of modern believers. Unlike many dense academic commentaries that can intimidate the average reader, Hobbs' work is renowned for its readability, doctrinal soundness, and pastoral warmth. This article explores the man behind the commentary, the distinctive features of his approach, and why this resource continues to be a trusted guide for those seeking a deeper understanding of God's Word.

Dr. Herschel H. Hobbs (1907–1995) was a towering figure in Southern Baptist life, serving as pastor of First Baptist Church in Oklahoma City for over two decades and as president of the Southern Baptist Convention. He was also a beloved professor and a prolific writer. His commentary series, originally published in the mid-20th century, has been updated and reprinted, remaining a staple for conservative Christian study. In an era of countless study Bibles and digital resources, the Herschel Hobbs Bible Commentary holds a special place for its combination of scholarly rigor and heartfelt devotion.

Who Was Herschel Hobbs? A Legacy of Biblical Fidelity

Early Life and Ministry

Born in 1907 in rural Alabama, Herschel Hobbs grew up with a deep love for Scripture. He earned degrees from Howard College (now Samford University), the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and later received honorary doctorates. His pastoral ministry began in small churches, but his powerful preaching and clear teaching quickly drew attention. By the 1940s, he was a nationally recognized voice, and his radio program "The Baptist Hour" reached millions.

Hobbs was not merely an academic; he was a pastor who understood the struggles of everyday Christians. This pastoral heart permeates his commentary. He wrote not to impress scholars but to illuminate the text for people in the pews. His style is conversational yet precise, explaining difficult passages without oversimplifying them.

Contributions to Biblical Scholarship

Herschel Hobbs served on the committee that produced the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and was instrumental in the development of the Holman Christian Standard Bible. His theological commitments were firmly rooted in conservative evangelicalism: he affirmed the inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Christ, and the necessity of personal salvation. These convictions are evident throughout his commentary, which consistently points readers to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

Overview of the Herschel Hobbs Bible Commentary

Structure and Scope

The Herschel Hobbs Bible Commentary is a multi-volume set that covers every book of the Bible. Each volume provides:

- Introduction to each book: Historical background, author, date, and major themes.
- Verse-by-verse exposition: Detailed explanations of the biblical text, often with word studies from the original Greek and Hebrew.
- Practical applications: How the passage addresses modern life, ethics, and spirituality.
- Outline and summary: A clear structure to help readers grasp the flow of each book.

Unlike some commentaries that get lost in technical minutiae, Hobbs keeps his focus on the big picture. He often summarizes entire sections before diving into specifics, making it easy to follow the biblical narrative.

Key Features That Set It Apart

1. Clarity and Accessibility: Hobbs avoids unnecessary jargon. Even complex doctrines like substitutionary atonement or eschatology are explained in plain English.
2. Pastoral Sensitivity: Many entries include devotional reflections. Hobbs frequently addresses the emotional and spiritual needs of readers.
3. Conservative Theological Stance: For those seeking a commentary that upholds traditional evangelical doctrines, this is a reliable resource.
4. Use of Original Languages: Hobbs often references Greek and Hebrew terms, but he translates them and explains their nuances so that even beginners can benefit.
5. Application-Oriented: Every chapter ends with "Life Lessons" or "Thoughts for Today," bridging the ancient text to contemporary life.

A Deep Dive into the Commentary's Approach

Hermeneutical Principles

Hobbs employed a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, meaning he sought to understand the original meaning of the text as intended by its human authors, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He was careful to consider cultural context, literary genre, and authorial intent. For example, in his commentary on Revelation, he offers a balanced view, presenting both preterist and futurist interpretations but ultimately affirming the sovereignty of God over history.

He also emphasized the unity of Scripture. Hobbs constantly connected Old Testament passages to their New Testament fulfillments, showing how the entire Bible points to Christ. This christocentric approach makes his commentary particularly valuable for preaching and teaching.

Handling Difficult Passages

One of the strengths of the Herschel Hobbs Bible Commentary is its honesty about challenging texts. When encountering apparent contradictions or difficult doctrines (such as divine judgment or the imprecatory psalms), Hobbs does not sidestep them. Instead, he offers reverent explanations, acknowledging where interpretations differ while maintaining a reverent tone. For instance, in his commentary on Joshua and the conquest of Canaan, he discusses the moral implications while affirming God's righteous judgment.

How the Commentary Benefits Different Audiences

For Pastors and Preachers

Busy pastors find the commentary invaluable for sermon preparation. The verse-by-verse format allows for quick reference, while the theological insights provide depth. Many preachers have noted that Hobbs' exegesis

often yields fresh angles on familiar passages. His outlines are also helpful for structuring sermons and Bible studies.

For Sunday School Teachers and Small Group Leaders

The practical applications and discussion questions at the end of each section make it easy to lead a group. Teachers appreciate that Hobbs explains the background in a way that is understandable for laypeople, without requiring prior theological training.

For Personal Devotion

Because of its devotional tone, many Christians use this commentary as a daily guide. Reading a short passage of Scripture along with Hobbs' exposition helps deepen one's understanding and prayer life. The commentary encourages meditation on God's character and promises.

For Students of Theology

While not as technical as some academic commentaries, the Hobbs series provides a solid foundation for college and seminary students. The careful attention to original languages and historical context prepares students for more advanced study. It is often recommended as a first commentary for those beginning systematic exegesis.

Comparison with Other Popular Commentaries

The Herschel Hobbs Set vs. The MacArthur Study Bible

John MacArthur's study Bible is also theologically conservative and practical, but it is a single volume with shorter notes. Hobbs' multi-volume set offers far more depth per passage. MacArthur tends to be more precisely Reformed in his Calvinistic leanings, while Hobbs represents a more mainstream Southern Baptist Arminian perspective.

Hobbs vs. The Expositor's Bible Commentary

The Expositor's Bible Commentary (revised by Frank Gaebelein) is more academic, with contributions from multiple scholars. It is excellent for detailed study but can be dry. Hobbs is more consistent in voice and pastoral tone, making it more suitable for devotional reading.

Hobbs vs. Matthew Henry's Commentary

Matthew Henry (17th century) is a classic but his language is dated. Hobbs offers modern English and contemporary applications. For readers who want the devotional warmth of Henry with updated scholarship, Hobbs is an ideal alternative.

Practical Tips for Using the Herschel Hobbs Bible Commentary

1. Start with a Book You Know: If you are new to Hobbs, pick a familiar book like the Gospel of John or Romans. See how his commentary illuminates verses you already love.
2. Read the Introduction First: Do not skip the introductory material for each book. It provides crucial context that makes the verse-by-verse section richer.
3. Use it with a Bible Open: Read your chosen Bible passage, then read Hobbs' explanation. Underline insights and note any cross-references.
4. Combine with Prayer: Before reading, ask the Holy Spirit to teach you through the commentary. Hobbs himself emphasized that human scholarship must be illuminated by divine revelation.
5. Share What You Learn: Whether in a class or casual conversation, discussing your discoveries helps cement them and blesses others.

Where to Find the Herschel Hobbs Bible Commentary Today

The original print editions are often available used through online booksellers and Christian bookstores. Many digital platforms, such as Logos Bible Software and Olive Tree Bible App, have incorporated the Herschel Hobbs Commentary into their libraries. Some editions have been rebranded as the "Herschel H. Hobbs Commentary" or included in larger collections like "The Preacher's Commentary" series. Always check the publisher (originally Broadman Press, now part of B&H Publishing) to ensure you are getting the authentic Hobbs work.

Conclusion

The Herschel Hobbs Bible Commentary remains a treasure for the Christian community. Its blend of scholarly integrity, pastoral care, and accessibility makes it a reliable companion for anyone who desires to understand Scripture more deeply. In a world filled with noise and competing voices, Hobbs' steady, Christ-centered exposition points readers back to the timeless truths of God's Word. Whether you are preparing a sermon, leading a Bible study, or simply seeking to grow in your faith, this commentary offers rich nourishment for the soul. As Herschel Hobbs himself often said, "The Bible is the Word of God; let it speak." And his commentary, with its faithful exposition, helps ensure that its voice is heard clearly and powerfully today.

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