



Believing Criticism: Understanding the Tools and Temptations of Contemporary Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation

Richard L. Schultz

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How should evangelicals respond to the contemporary methods and approaches of biblical (and, specifically, Old Testament) criticism? What are the possibilities and limits of evangelical appropriation of historical-critical methods?

So far, two contrasting but equally troubling attitudes prevailed among evangelical biblical scholars toward biblical criticism---anti-critical rejection and un-critical acceptance. Building on many years of study and experience of engaging biblical criticism, Richard Schultz develops and advocates what could be described as 'believing criticism,' that is, a cautious and reasoned adaptation of specific methods, perspectives, and questions that have arisen in the course of a century and a half of biblical criticism.

This book offers theological students a comprehensive but clear introduction to the developing enterprise and diverse methods of OT criticism that will enable them to discern its impact on biblical interpretation and investigate its claims. In addition to being informational and analytical, the book encourage students to enrich their interpretive approach to texts by adding the various tools of biblical criticism, though sometimes in a modified form, to their exegetical toolbox.

Richard Schultz advocates his approach in a twofold way addressing both anti-critical rejection and uncritical acceptance of biblical criticism by evangelical scholars. On the one hand, he demonstrates that a major impetus for the development of individual critical methods was the concrete phenomena of the text---'bumps' and 'holes' in the text---whose origins these methods sought to explain. Schultz counters a common conservative perception that biblical critics are simply skeptics (or worse) whose primary purpose is to undercut biblical authority by exposing (or even inventing) flaws. Furthermore, he counters the conservative claim that biblical criticism's poisoned ideological roots necessarily will produce poisoned fruits.

On the other hand, Schultz illustrates how the growing, and sometimes unreflective, adoption of critical methods by evangelical scholars can readily allow the 'humanness' of the text to eclipse its 'divine' dimension in ways that undercut traditional views of Scripture. As a result, at times, evangelical biblical scholarship is nearly indistinguishable from the approaches of the secular academy---an alarming trend that calls for greater caution in this area.

The focus of book is methodological rather than historical, and evaluative rather than summative. It describes, illustrates, analyzes, critiques, and compares, in turn, each of the 'dominant dozen' methods of contemporary OT criticism from a consistent evangelical perspective that simultaneously acknowledges the divine origin and human processes that combined to produce the Old Testament canon. Without neglecting the role and contributions of the pioneers and major proponents of the individual methods, it gives less attention to the current status of scholarly research and more to the hermeneutical questions raised by the 'progress' of biblical criticism.

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