
This volume is a compilation of essays presented at the ninth annual Wheaton Theology Conference of 2000. Biblical scholars from inside and outside of evangelicalism discuss the history and future of biblical theology. They take up three questions raised in biblical scholarship: (1) the diversity of biblical writings, (2) the conflict of theological themes in the Bible, and (3) the canonicity of the Bible.

First, the diversity of Scripture preserved within its pages has caused unresolved tensions. Some scholars explain such diversity to be the traces of competing theological viewpoints imperfectly combined in the compositional process of Scripture. They emphasize the pluralism of theologies within the Bible. Others propose a conceptualized basic theme that the different theologies have in common. Despite the great diversity of biblical themes, however, the task of biblical theology is to define their interrelationships in order to arrive at an intelligent coherence of the whole. That definition is based on the theological presupposition that the Bible was inspired by the one God, and the inspired product should be a theologically connected whole. Biblical theology is one of "a cohesive voice concerning God and His covenantal relationship with His people in order to address God’s people about their Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer and Judge" (17). To that end, the contributors respect the final shape of the text and believe that God has revealed himself in space and time for all ages. Because the task of a theology of the Old Testament may be the most difficult one that arises within the field of biblical exegesis, the first part of the volume deals with the place of the Old Testament in biblical theology.

Second, Christians rarely treat the Old Testament in its final Jewish canon, even though that was very likely the Bible of Jesus and the early church. Instead, they read the New Testament understanding into the Old Testament text. The traditional Christian way of reading the Old Testament, for example, makes use of the Law and the Prophets as prophetic witness to the advent of Jesus Christ, thus christologizing the Old Testament. The first and second comings of Jesus become the midpoint and endpoint of redemptive history. However, a theological awareness is increasingly arising that the Old Testament should first be treated and interpreted in its own right as the Hebrew Scripture lest specifically Christian interests and assumptions are prematurely and in unhistorical fashion read into the Old Testament writings.

Third, the focus of biblical theology is on the final shape of the scriptural text rather than on the pretext or the hypothetical history of the text. In addition, the canonical order is viewed as an inherent part of the text. As such, the shape of the canon may function as a structuring device for biblical theology. Doing biblical theology is successive intellectual activities of mapping out the content of the biblical witness and of seeing the development of this content throughout the Old and New Testaments without sacrificing one for the other.
As a whole, the contributors’ approach to biblical theology refuses to place the Old Testament against the New Testament, biblical theology against systematic theology, or the academic study of Scripture against the use of the Bible in the church. In relation to the problem of historicity, it is affirmed that revelation is integrated in history. History and revelation must not be divorced from each other. It is precisely in this matter that the Biblical Theology Movement of the mid-twentieth century deteriorated inwardly. In the end, it located revelation in the personal-subjective experience of divine encounter and separated the final object of theology from the final shape of the biblical text. The way to recover the significance of biblical theology for the theology of the church is, therefore, not to divorce revelation from history but to refocus the object of biblical theology on the Scripture as the deposit of that historical revelation.

—Yonky Karman


In this monumentally significant and comprehensive work, Kitchen—a specialist in Egyptology, archaeology, and the history and literature of western Asia—in an engagingly feisty and no-nonsense style, provides a step-by-step, point-by-point examination of the reliability of the Old Testament on the basis of the cold hard facts of historical evidence without regard to current “philosophical cranks (politically correct, postmodernist, or whatever else)” (xiv). The basic question before the court is simply: Are the Old Testament writings, in whole or in part, presenting us with genuine information from within 2000-400 B.C.? Thus, Kitchen is at pains to deal with “history, literature, [and] culture, not with theology, doctrine, or dogma” (3).

Kitchen begins his adjudication with an examination of the data from the period of the divided monarchy. He then continues forward on the timeline to a consideration of the evidence for the biblical accounts of the exile and return before shifting his chronological time machine into reverse (potentially causing reader-whiplash, though in good archaeological fashion) and hearing testimony from historical witnesses regarding the reliability of the Old Testament accounts of the united monarchy, the settlement in Canaan, the sojourn in Egypt, and subsequently the Exodus (for which he, inexplicably, seems compelled to offer explanations for the associated miracles in terms of exclusively natural phenomena—a tack unnecessary for his argument and surrendering too much to the antimiracle crowd). Next, he moves to the patriarchs, and, after a brief treatment of the phenomena of prophets and prophecy, the primeval proto-history. (This nonchronological approach seems a bit unnecessarily jarring, though he explains this as a logical movement from the period with most historical evidence to that with the least.) For those readers who have not the patience or the time to follow the proceedings in every detail, Kitchen conveniently ends each chapter with a summary or balance sheet, as he calls it, in which he weighs the evidence surveyed for or against biblical reliability.