

CHAPTER 9

CRITICAL METHODOLOGIES

Introduction

According to Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton (*Old Testament Today: A Journey from Original Meaning to Contemporary Significance*) the critical methodologies have been developed to address the following question:

- How should we approach the various literary genres we find in the Bible?
- Was each book written at one sitting, or was there a longer process of composition?
- Could there have been previous editions of some of the books that have gone through stages of editing to reach the form in which we now have them?
- Do some of the books incorporate texts of one genre into the context of another genre?

“Critical scholarship” and “criticism” refer to the exercise of an expert sense of judgment about the text.

- Both conservatives and liberals use critical methodologies in their hermeneutics.
- The difference between the liberal and the conservative is his opinion of the text.

Some terminology:

- Diachronic – attempt to reconstruct the ways and means by which the text came to be in its present form (also called historical-critical)
- Synchronic – seek meaning in the form the text currently possesses; view text as self-sufficient, requires no outside information for interpretation (also called as literary).

Textual Criticism

- Designed to find errors that may have crept into the text through centuries of copying.

- The goal of the textual critic is to restore the text to its original canonical form.
- In the OT, there aren't as many manuscripts available. Thus, some of the corrections are done based on common sense and repeated accounts.
- The LXX also plays a very important part in the textual criticism of the OT.
- The NT has a wealth of manuscript evidence, both in Greek and in ancient translations. It is the best attested ancient writing.

Source Criticism in the OT

Sources were used in the compilation of some books in the OT:

- Chronicles and Kings name sources that were available to them.
 - The Book of the Annals of Solomon

1 Kgs 11:41 – Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, all that he did, and his wisdom, *are* they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon?
 - The Records of Gad the Seer and the Book of Nathan the Prophet

1 Chr 29:29 – Now the acts of King David, first and last, indeed they *are* written in the book of Samuel the seer, in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer.
- Joshua also used sources (the Book of Jasher)

Josh 10:13 –So the sun stood still, And the moon stopped, Till the people had revenge Upon their enemies. *Is* this not written in the Book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go *down* for about a whole day.

Source criticism seeks to identify which sections of a given book belong to which hypothetical source and then analyze the source.

Sections are assigned to different sources on the basis of perceived differences in style among different parts of the book.

If the source critic deems that something is too theologically advanced, then he might assign a different source to that portion.

- Centralized place of worship
- Festivals
- The Aaronic priesthood

- Monotheism Future restoration of Israel

When the source critic finds what the source is, then he studies that source.

Source criticism says that many books in the OT are made out of other books. An example is the Pentateuch of Moses, said to be the result of a complicated editorial process involving four original sources, J, E, D, and P.

Source Criticism in the NT

While some source criticism is used in the study of Acts and the epistles, by far the greatest field is the study of the Synoptic Gospels. There are several primary theories:

- Individual gospel theory
- Two-source theory
- Four-source theory
- Griesbach theory
- Memory theory

Some of these can overlap, such memory theory and the individual gospel theory.

Form Criticism

- Concerned with identifying the oral history of the various parts of the text (singular *pericope*, plural *pericopes*, pronounced pə-rí-co-pe).
- Many sections of any book had functions in society in oral form that differ from their use in the present context.

Redaction Criticism

- Attempts to identify the logic and intent of the editor (redactor) who brought all the different sources together.
- The redaction critic looks at the final form of the text and tries to identify how the redactor reworked and reinterpreted the original sources.
- The JEDP source theory of the origin of the Pentateuch is the application of redaction criticism.

- In the Synoptic Gospels redaction critics discern individual theologies of each Gospel writer and of each of his sources.

Historical Criticism

- Attempts to reconstruct the events that are behind the biblical narratives.
- The OT narratives were produced with a theological motive or agenda, so they do not clearly or completely present details of the actual events.
- The historical critic tries to answer, “what did really happen?”
- Accounts such as David fighting Goliath, or the exploits of Samson, are legendary and the critic needs to find the “kernel” around which these legends were built.

Rhetorical Criticism

- Attempts to discover how the form of the literature aids the content in communicating the intended message.
- The critic looks for chiasms, inclusio (similar lines in the beginning and ending of section), etc.
- The critic identifies poetry and prose and sees how the style expresses the author’s thought.

Structural Analysis

- Focus solely on the literary character and features of the text to derive their meaning.
- Emphasis is put on plot, character development, use of motifs, vocabulary, syntax, etc.
- Excludes historical and archaeological backgrounds.

The Canonical Approach

- Everything besides the final form of the text is ignored.
- What really matters is the text we have today because that is the text that the community of faith has available to it.

Evaluating Critical Methodologies

Each methodology has tools that may be useful for the Bible-believing student to understand the biblical text. These may be used moderately and with caution as aids in interpretation.

Methodology that asserts that the text need not be factually true or may be inauthentic is not appropriate. Such methodology produces extreme skepticism about the actual contents of the text.

When interpreting the text, we must keep in mind that it is written in popular language, to be understood by the people. We should not expect esoteric meanings to be unearthed by applying hitherto unknown tools or methods.