



Ways into the OT

A Brief Overview of the Different 'Criticisms'



Source Criticism

- AKA The Documentary Hypothesis, Source Criticism is concerned with who wrote the OT (and mainly the Pentateuch).
- It suggests there were several different authors involved in many of the books and that they had particular things in mind.
- The ‘sources’ (or authors) have been named Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist and Priestly (J, E, D, P) – next slide expands.
- This form of criticism became very detailed and complicated and some of its later ideas are now considered not quite so robust, but its basic premise is still very much respected.

Source Criticism cont....

- Jahwist: Name for God: Yahweh, Style: flowing narrative style with concentration on lives of Patriarchs, God: describes God in human terms. Possible date of writing: 950-850
- Elohist: Name for God: Elohim; Style: epic with a strong moral tone; describes God in terms of awe – frequent references to fear of God; God often speaks in dreams; possible date of writing: 850 - 750.
- Deuteronomistic: Name for God Yahweh; style: no narrative, rather a collection of exhortatory and legal material; long speeches; stress on Jerusalem; God: speaks of God as a God of Covenant; possible date of Writing: 622 onwards.
- Priestly: Name for God: Elohim; Style: Interest in dates and order, genealogies, ritual and law, God viewed as transcendent; Possible date of Writing: late exile/ early post exile before Ezra

Form Criticism

- Sees the OT as a collection of writings that contains a variety of genres.
- Examines the genre, the meter and style of a passage and always asks the question ‘Where might this have come from in the life of the Hebrew peoples?’ – formal name for this is *Sitz in Leben* or *situation in life*
- Always worth keeping this in the front of your mind when reading the OT: what genre is the is passage? Where might it have come from in the life of the Hebrew peoples (worship, coronation, war etc)?

Literary Criticism

- Sees the OT as literature and focuses on the ways in which literary techniques are used to emphasize particular points and make stories memorable
- Like Form Criticism, it looks at genre, but also at other things, such as the use of symbol, metaphor, simile, poetry, repetition, parallel panels, chiasmus etc.

Narrative Criticism

- Again looks at the OT as ancient literature but focuses particularly on ‘narrative’ (or story) and looks for elements we find in stories which have been used to make points and tell us about God and the Hebrews’ relationship to God
- Elements looked for are narrator, plot, characters, setting, style, interpretation.
- Much of the OT can be viewed in this light and a great deal can be gained from looking at it this way.

Unifying Themes

- Another way of looking at the Pentateuch is to identify unifying themes within it. This approach is mainly based on work of N Lofink and D Clines. They approach it slightly differently and Clines seems to have won the day in most circles.
- Clines argues that the Pentateuch is mainly concerned with the partial fulfillment of the blessing promised to Abraham, Issac and Jacob, and has three main elements: (1) posterity , (2) divine/human relationships (3) land.
- These three things are interdependent: a promise from God straight away forms a divine/human relationship, this gains value by being for posterity and includes land for security.

Other Forms of Criticism

- There are many other ways of looking at the bible which we're not going into in this course in any depth but it's worth at least knowing the names of the following (you can find more about them on bibledeuces website or by googling them if you want to):
- Feminist Criticism
- Liberationist Criticism
- Redaction Criticism
- Historical Criticism
- Archeaological Criticism
- African American Criticism

Why So Many Methods?

- No one hypothesis is ever without fault or complete in itself and understandings continue to develop and grow as we seek to better comprehend an ancient text
- We can gain something from all the different ways of looking at scripture – they help us to be better readers, teachers and preachers
- Although every hypothesis has its flaws we don't 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'! We can learn something from all the different ways people over the centuries have tried to understand our wonderful and much loved scriptures – each of us 'working out our faith with fear and trembling'.