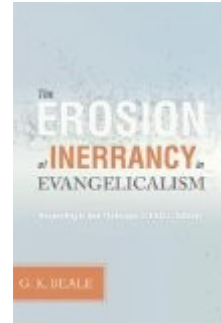


The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority

Author: G.K. Beale
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In recent years, Evangelicalism has seen a number of challenges to the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. Chief among these have been new insights into the cultural and historical background of the Old Testament provided by newly found ancient Near Eastern sources (ANE for short). A recent turmoil was raised by a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary named Peter Enns who published a controversial book *Inspiration and Incarnation*. Eventually he was deemed to have violated the Westminster Confession of Faith in his views and was removed from his teaching post at Westminster.

In scholarly journals, G.K. Beale responded to Enns' book and open questioning of the popular understanding of biblical inerrancy. Enns and Beale responded back and forth to each other in a series of journal articles, which in a slightly emended form make up the first four chapters of this book. I'm glad that G.K. Beale chose to put the discussion in a book for a wider Evangelical audience, as he has done us all a great favor. His book, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* addresses this issue head on and offers a confessionally faithful model of approaching ANE parallels to Scripture.

I must admit that when I began this book, I was skeptical of Beale's position and open to what Enns had to say. By the end of the book, I realized that Enns had indeed erred, and that Beale represented a careful scholarly approach worthy of consideration. Still, the objection could be raised that Beale is making a mountain out of a molehill and is just interested in muddying Enns' image, even as he threatens the scholarly Evangelical community with the same if they dare tip the sacred inerrancy cow. Such is not the case however. Let me allow Beale to explain his rationale for the book:

... most of the problems that [Enns] poses are not that hard to solve, though he gives the impression that they are difficult to square with a traditional view of inerrancy. Indeed, this is partly why I felt a burden to write the review (of Enns' book) that I did. Instead of helping people in the church gain confidence in their Bibles, Enns's book will likely shake that confidence—I think unnecessarily so. (pg. 66-67)

After laying out the issues, Beale jumps right in to the back and forth between Peter Enns and himself. He splits the discussion into two topics: recent OT studies' developments and the study of the Old Testament in the New. For each he gives his rejoinders to Enns and Enns' responses. While at times the back and forth leaves the typical reader dazed and confused (at times one feels like he's looking over the various scholars' shoulders or that the discussion is moving on too quickly to follow), key issues and main points are driven home through these first four chapters. Differing approaches to ANE myths and their implications for Genesis, and second Temple Judaistic hermeneutical principles and their bearing on our understanding of the New Testament are fleshed out.

After the various approaches are displayed through the back and forth of chapters 1-4, the book moves on to the unity of Isaiah as a case study. Will we trust the Bible's witness to itself when it comes to Isaiah's unity, or move with the scholarly winds and deny that which Jesus and the apostles appeared to assume? While Beale is a NT scholar, he handles the Isaiah question capably, referring to recent scholarly evangelical assessments on this point.

Beale then provides a fascinating discussion of Gen. 1 and a biblical cosmology model in the form of the universe as God's temple. In this section, Beale really shines as he develops a compelling case for the tabernacle, Temple and indeed Eden and the universe as a whole as all being models of God's true cosmic temple. This applies to the book in general because to understand Gen. 1-2 as a temple cosmology allows one to assimilate insights from ANE studies without defaulting to teaching that the early chapters of Genesis are intended to be taken as a myth.

Two appendices are also provided. One is a rather detailed discussion of postmodernism, epistemology and the like. The second is an exposition of the Chicago statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

This book is not for the average reader. Beale develops a case and brings you into the world of Biblical scholarship today. He explains how one can maintain a high view of Scripture and assimilate insights from scholarship successfully. He also warns of the dangers of forsaking inerrancy. I learned a ton in reading this book, but the part I enjoyed the most was when Beale left polemics aside and focused on a positive development of his cosmic temple idea concerning Gen. 1-2. Beale has written an entire book on that subject (*The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*), and I'm interested in picking it up soon.

I recommend this book, but have to admit it was put together in a piecemeal fashion. Still it has great value and needs to be read by anyone interested in OT scholarship.

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