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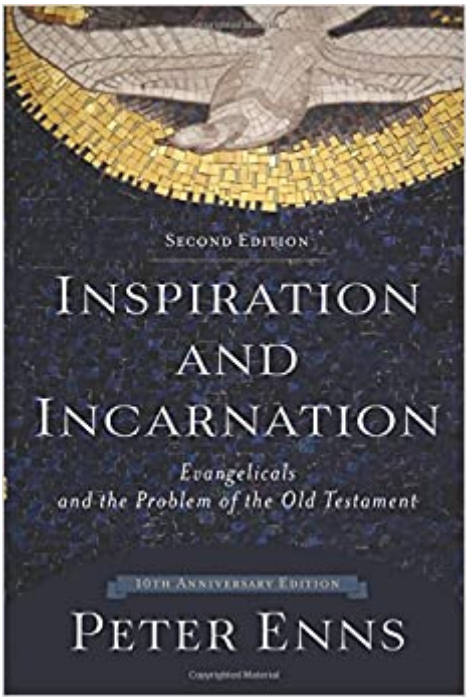
Inspiration And Incarnation: Evangelicals And The Problem Of The Old Testament



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Synopsis

How can an evangelical view of Scripture be reconciled with modern biblical scholarship? In this book Peter Enns, an expert in biblical interpretation, addresses Old Testament phenomena that challenge traditional evangelical perspectives on Scripture. He then suggests a way forward, proposing an incarnational model of biblical inspiration that takes seriously both the divine and the human aspects of Scripture. This tenth anniversary edition has an updated bibliography and includes a substantive postscript that reflects on the reception of the first edition.

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Customer Reviews

Inspiration and Incarnation addresses Old Testament phenomena that challenge traditional evangelical perspectives on Scripture and suggests a way forward. This tenth anniversary edition includes a substantive postscript that reflects on the reception of the first edition."Peter Enns has done the evangelical church an immense service by challenging preconceived notions of what the Bible ought to be by insisting on building his high view of Scripture on what God intended Scripture to be. When the first edition appeared, it started important and healthy conversations about the Bible in spite of efforts to dismiss or marginalize Enns's viewpoint. One does not have to agree with all his conclusions to understand why this book has helped and will continue to help many people to embrace Scripture as God's Word to us. Everyone who loves the Bible ought to read this important book."--Tremper Longman III, Westmont College"The first edition of Peter Enns's Inspiration and Incarnation has been a superb resource for helping students of the Bible take the human dimension

of this ancient text seriously. This second edition, with its profound concluding reflections on the nature of Scripture after ten years of responses to the first edition, promises to be even more effective in helping students of the Bible appreciate more fully the inscripturated Word made flesh."--Richard Middleton, Northeastern Seminary, Roberts Wesleyan College"I have used this book to great effect in the classroom. Divinity students welcome Enns's invitation to think theologically about history--how the historical 'problems' of the Bible may in fact be a crucial aspect of its theological witness. Of course, the incarnational analogy can be pressed too far, and there are other models on offer. But Enns's model is traditional, illuminating, hospitable to other models, and urgently needed by Christians still caught in late modern debates about inerrancy, inspiration, and revelation. This book continues to strike a chord that resonates."--Stephen B. Chapman, Duke University"Some of those most dedicated to biblical studies unfortunately begin from inadequate theological presuppositions. If everyone who identifies as a conservative evangelical would read and absorb this book, the field would be better for it--and so might the church and the world."--Christopher B. Hays, Fuller Theological Seminary

Peter Enns (PhD, Harvard University) is the Abram S. Clemens Professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. He has authored or edited numerous books, including The Bible Tells Me So and The Evolution of Adam.

Peter Enns's book, "Inspiration and Incarnation" may be the most honest contemporary theology book I've ever read. Just finished reading it for the second time. There is a total absence of pretense, no apparent axe to grind, and he's never afraid to say, "I don't entirely understand 'x' or 'y'," which means he's a rare theologian who is comfortable not only with the limits of his intellect, but also publicly admits them. Just a thoughtful scholar sitting down with the Bible and saying, "Let me see what this says, rather than telling it what it must be saying in order to fit into my presuppositions about it." If the nature of Scripture is a front-burner issue for you, it's an excellent read. If you're someone who wants to do theology honestly, it should be mandatory.

Good read. Interesting proposal of the Bible being compared to Jesus's incarnation. All analogies fall short, but this is a good perspective that keeps scripture in it's place as God's Word while explaining archaeology and historical discoveries. I especially liked the end when the author addressed critics responses to his thesis.

I felt like I had cold water thrown in my face. Peter Enn's book challenges me to read/interpret the bible honestly and at the same time explains why I see Christians debate and split over various miniscule issues. Refreshing.

Excellent presentation!! Enns discards the dogma allowing scripture to truly "talk" to us.

Some days you feel like the rope in a tug-of-war when you're a devout Christian with an interest in scholarship. From the right, the conservative school pulls mightily with inerrant force, insisting that you are sliding down the slippery slope to perdition if you think the Bible contains anything that cannot be upheld by the best in modern science and historiography. From the left, the modern scholarship team aims to win with cunning calculation, confident that well-aimed blows at the historical and scientific accuracy of the Bible will crumple the edifice of orthodox Christianity.Into the contest steps Pete Enns, professor of biblical studies at Eastern University, with the observation that both sides do agree on something quite notable: they both agree on the premise that Holy Scripture should conform to modern standards of historical and scientific accuracy as proof of its truth and inspiration. But why, Enns insists, must we accept that premise? God incarnate was a Palestinian rabbi who fully participated in the culture of his day. He broke bread; he didn't slice it. He wore sandals, not wing tips. He never heard of the Heisenberg uncertainty principle nor learned the math behind the Schroedinger equation. And yet by faith we look past the rough exterior of Christ's earthly existence to see God's very presence in his marvelous life, death and resurrection. Likewise, says Enns, the Bible bears all the typical cultural marks of ancient middle Eastern Jewish writers. They did not have receive divine revelation in a cultural vacuum. So if we are to accept the Bible that we have--not the Bible we wish we had, as Enns notes--we have to accept its setting in the ancient Hebrew culture, complete with their notions of how the world works, how to write history, and how to interpret a sacred text.No mere theorist, Enns wields his considerable scholarship in examining how ancient Near East (ANE) literature sheds light on the Bible's cultural context:* The wisdom literature, especially some passages in Proverbs, have remarkable parallels in ancient Egyptian wisdom texts.* The Genesis accounts of Adam and Noah have striking parallels with Akkadian mythology.* The decalogue is structured like a Hittite suzerainty treaty, and much of the Levitical law resembles the code of Hammurabi.Enns does not conclude that the Jewish Bible is just another ANE book, however, but rather demonstrates how critical differences in the Hebrew scriptures from the familiar cultural forms would be interpreted by contemporary audiences as significant, even audacious. These differences essentially constitute an literary claim of uniqueness,

which in turn points to the uniqueness of God's revelatory interaction with His covenant people. So, for example, the Genesis accounts assert a relationship between man and his Creator that is notably absent in the surrounding mythology, however similar other elements may be.The author then turns to the diversity often found in Scripture. It would be easier for us if the Bible were always perfectly consistent, but it seems the path to wisdom sometimes traverses competing propositions or narratives. Enns examines how different Proverbs say different things about dealing with the same phenomenon (for example, refute a fool vs. ignore a fool); how the narratives in Chronicles sometimes differ from the narratives in Samuel-Kings; and how the details of the law in Chronicles sometimes differ subtly but importantly from the Levitical formulation. Enns proposes that we must interpret these apparent discrepancies in the same way we view the Word of God made flesh. This incarnational model of scripture suggests that just as Christ entered into the messiness of our world, so the Bible as God's word enters into our messiness and by doing so shines as a glorious demonstration of God's amazing grace.Finally, Enns examines the way New Testament authors interpreted the Bible. Their hermeneutical method was much closer to that of their contemporaries than to the modern historical-grammatical method. Enns surveys second temple Jewish literature (Jubilees, Wisdom of Solomon, etc.) to note how Jesus' contemporaries saw their leaders and movements as echoes, or fulfillments, of the Bible's narrative arc. Likewise, many NT passages show that Paul and the Gospel writers were not adherents of modern exegetical methods. Rather, they exercised a christotelic hermeneutic; i.e., Christ was the goal (telos) of the Bible's hopes and narrative thrust.An in-depth postscript on the motivations for the book and on the arguments it has provoked accompanies the second edition. Enns agrees with his critics that the incarnational model does not function as an equivalent to Christ's nature, but it must be seen (as he intended it) as an analogy. Enns takes issue with the proponents of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, who claim that his book leads readers to reject Christian orthodoxy. Instead, he insists, it helps orthodox Christians faithfully move forward because they can reject the unattractive dilemma of choosing between scholarship without faith on the one hand, or faith in isolation from scholarship on the other. The essay serves as an excellent background to the conflicts over Biblical scholarship and the role his book plays in that context; in fact, I recommend that readers start with the postscript before opening chapter one.Inspiration and Incarnation provides an illuminating overview of Biblical scholarship and how it contributes to our understanding of Christian faith--and how we might live it out in the cultural context of our day. I would have appreciated a deeper discussion of the history of the incarnational model of the Scripture, which apparently originated with Athanasius. At the end of each chapter Enns does provide an annotated bibliography to relevant work by other scholars

(including resources on the incarnational model), however. He also provides a helpful glossary to Biblical scholarship newcomers. Consequently, it is not just seminarians who can profit from the book; Sunday School classes, Bible study groups, or a reader who just wants to figure out how Christian faith interacts with Biblical scholarship can also learn a great deal. Highly recommended.==========The publisher provided a review copy of the book in return for my honest review.

An interesting book that challenges stale thinking and spirituality. What it does is make the horizon for biblical understanding infinite in possibilities. I very much enjoyed the premise even when some of the details were just beyond my reach.

Excellent synopsis of the problem with regards to a simple interpretation of the Bible. Discussed many issues pertaining to the belief that the Bible is inerrant. It was written/ edited by human beings , although the author stressed the significance of unique God's interaction with the Bible authors.

Loved this book.

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