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Is Scripture Still Holy?: Coming of Age with the New Testament, by A.E. Harvey

Review by Jonathan Huang

A.E. Harvey's book, *Is Scripture Still Holy?: Coming of Age with the New Testament*, is a small book, hardly daunting at a first glance. However, the question that A.E. Harvey attempts to answer in a span of just 150 pages is one that has puzzled Christians for years and has become more salient under an increasingly critical culture. It is the question of how Scripture – particularly the New Testament – can be regarded as “holy” and “authoritative” if age-old assumptions about its literal inerrancy are deconstructed with modern interrogative analyses. Harvey's book, however, asserts that the New Testament is indeed still relevant and authoritative through the use of historical contexts in an effort to understand the writers' intent.

Harvey follows a clear outline in his book, analyzing the historical veracity of the New Testament, moving on to the philosophical and moral components of those Scriptures, and finally analyzing the figurative and literary styles of the Gospels and epistles. Certain passages tend to be lengthy and dense, and somewhat repetitive. However, Harvey makes up for his lack of innovation with a comprehensive look into the studies on Biblical authority.

In the book, Harvey lays out the historical foundations of the New Testament and shows how, according to the standards of the time, the Gospels and the book of Acts were considered historically valid and accurate, despite various discrepancies in details. Speaking to skeptics, dubious of the claims in the New Testament regarding the miraculous acts of Jesus and his disciples, Harvey argues that “to try and detach these claims from the portrait of [Jesus] given in the gospels... is to risk leaving nothing of substance that we can recognize as the same Jesus who has left his mark on history” (39).¹ The Jesus that gripped the minds of people for centuries must have been based on some historical truth, and must have been remembered with respect and faithful representation. Regardless of his divinity, Jesus became a highly influential and preeminent figure in human history. Harvey shifts the focus of Biblical studies from trying to validate the literal interpretation to seeing the “literary impact,” as he calls it, of Jesus as presented in the New Testament.

Similarly, in analyzing the Gospels and the epistles of Paul and Peter, Harvey diverts attention away from whether or not certain Biblical statements have

¹ A.E. Harvey, *Is Scripture Still Holy?: The Coming of Age with the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 39.

been fulfilled literally. Instead, he asks the question of what the authors' original intentions were – whether idiomatic or metaphorical – and how those shape the messages they create, in addition to how they might have been stirring their readers toward faith in the unseen return of Christ. He traces the development of the Christian movement from its early stirrings to its later activities through Paul's epistles, and shows how, despite a significant shift in Paul's understanding of the second coming of Christ, the apostle exhorts people to carry out their faith believing in the unseen. This, argues Harvey, is the power that gives the New Testament its authority.

I found this book engaging, although dense at times, and overall enlightening. Harvey does a good job addressing questions that jaded churchgoers have forgotten to answer or struggling believers are trying to resolve. He revitalizes the lens through which the New Testament is seen and read, and in doing so helps refresh the power of the words that come with it.

WORKS CITED

Harvey, A.E. *Is Scripture Still Holy?: Coming of Age with the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012.