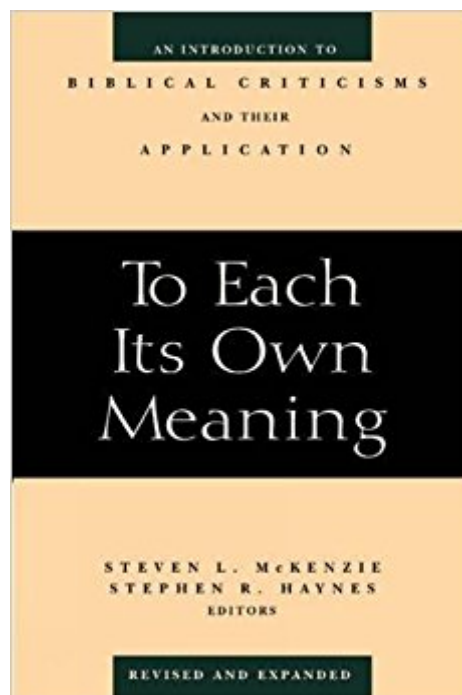




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# To Each Its Own Meaning, Revised And Expanded: An Introduction To Biblical Criticisms And Their Application



## Synopsis

This volume introduces the reader to the most important methods of biblical criticism. It serves as an indispensable handbook for the work of students approaching biblical studies for the first time and for the professional interpreter of scripture who wants to understand the latest currents in biblical scholarship.

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## Customer Reviews

Steven L. McKenzie is Professor of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. He is the author of *All God's Children: A Biblical Critique of Racism* and coeditor of *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*. Stephen R. Haynes is Professor of Religious Studies at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. He is the author of *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* and *The Bonhoeffer Legacy: Post-Holocaust Perspectives*.

This is a truly wonderful introduction to critical reading approaches within biblical studies. The material is dense and at the masters level should be covered within a classroom setting. This will be a book to which your students turn again and again throughout their graduate career and beyond.

The book is very informative and exceptional with answering questions on methodologies of writing papers

My book club and I will love reading this book. Thanks for sending it in a timely manner.

very good

Kugel's "To Each Its Own Meaning" was a part of the reading list for my MA program in Old Testament and Semitic Languages. Here is my evaluation, as an Evangelical Christian seeking to maintain my faith while still engaging with critical scholarship. Summary: Kugel, an orthodox Jew and Harvard Bible professor, contrasts two ways of reading the OT: that of ancient interpreters and modern critical scholarship. By moving the reader through the canon, he reveals the presuppositions of ancient interpreters (four assumptions: 1. The Bible is fundamentally a cryptic text, 2. The Bible has lessons directed toward readers today, 3. The Bible contains no contradictions or mistakes, 4. The Bible is a divine text), and the presuppositions of critical interpreters (motivated by the desire to uncover the real Bible underneath the rubble of tradition, using scientific method and focusing on the human hand in the formation of Scripture). Traditional interpretations of texts is (in the modern era) seen to be naive, an artificial masking of textual fragmentation (i.e., JEDP) and religious development (i.e., etiological tales). Yet it is precisely these ancient assumptions that made Scripture into what we hold it to be "it is impossible to separate the text from its interpreters. Critical scholarship ends up with a very different Bible. Kugel ends with a chapter exhorting the reader to hold the two in tension: "Happy the reader who can open the Bible today and still understand it as it was understood by those who first proclaimed it the Bible. I certainly have nothing against exploring what really happened and how the Bible came to be written, but I would not mistake such things for what is foremost" (688). Kugel's conclusions are that "What Scripture means is not what today's ingenious scholars can discover about its original meaning (and certainly not about the events and persons it describes), but what the ancient interpreters have always held it to mean" (681). In this he holds in tension his own faith tradition and the work of critical scholarship. For Kugel, what makes the Bible Scripture is not that every word is inspired or inerrant, but that it is a record of God's initiation of revelation, setting forth "a basic program for the service of God in daily life" (687). Evaluation: The book's greatest strength has to be its "shock value," and how successfully it posits the two extremes against one another. Is the Tower of Babel narrative a critique of the pride of humanity or of Babylon's big cities? Did Aaron really make Israel worship the golden calf or is it a mere retrojection of the sin

of Jeroboam? Was David God's anointed or an opportunistic guerrilla leader? Only in the last chapter does Kugel let in a little more nuance as he explores how various faith groups today (fundamentalist, evangelical, liberal, Jewish) deal with the tension involved in holding to one's faith convictions and listening to the voice of scholarship. I admire Kugel's conviction to not ignore either of these voices, but rather allow both to inform his faith and work. Yet I can't agree with his position that the text of Scripture is of secondary importance. Just because scholarship has fragmented the text, does it mean we must return to an Oral Torah? Or is there a better way to bring faith and critical study into a nuanced relationship to one another? Take-away: Being a student of the Bible and a Christian will require some necessary tension. We all have presuppositions that drive how we read and interpret Scripture (even as basic as, "God speaks today through the Bible"). It is important to be aware of those assumptions (and being aware of them does not necessarily mean rejecting them). Understanding how you (and others) read will allow you to interpret with more nuance, grace, and conviction. When the study gets too overwhelming, it is okay (and healthy) to fall back on your basic principles (i.e., "the Bible is God's Word"), recognizing that it is your faith that is of primary importance.

Biblical criticism, in some circles, is not looked highly upon. Referred to as "higher-critical methods", many conservative and/or fundamental Christians would believe that using such tools violates the integrity or demeans the authority of Scripture. I do not always share this view. Personally, I believe that each of these interpretive tools needs to be evaluated on their own merit, and used judiciously to help the interpreter of Scripture get the most intelligent, thorough understanding of Scripture available. *To Each Its Own Meaning* covers the best and most prominent of the critical tools available to a Bible student in interpreting Scripture. It begins by discussing the most well-established of the critical tools that are available. Then they introduce some newer ways of approaching the Scripture that also try to find objective meaning in the text. As the authors spend the second half of the book discussing more contemporary approaches to Biblical criticism. The reader will discover that several of the emerging methods of interpretation are more explicitly focused on using the Scripture to speak to contemporary situations. Many of these ways of understanding Scripture are less interested in drawing objective information from the text as they are using the text to speak to a particular concern. *To Each Its Own Meaning* is a monograph. So, each chapter brings a different perspective, most often from an expert and advocate of a certain way of interpreting God's Word. Each chapter is smart, well-written, and challenging. The reader may not agree with

each person's way of understanding the text, but these ways of reading the Scripture are becoming so prominent that it is important for all responsible interpreters of the Bible to have a working knowledge of these methods. This would be a great book to use as a text in college or seminary. If I was a professor, I would assign a class to read through the book, and then use 2-3 of these methods to approach a specific text while developing a Bible Study or sermon.

I'll be upfront and honest about this book - I hate it. I know there are different methods to interpreting the Bible but this book makes it far more complicated than what the Bible is. I haven't finished reading yet as of this writing but I will as I am reading it for a class. For me it's nothing but gobblegook; I'm more than an average reader but this book is beyond my level of understanding. Unless you need to buy this book for a class, I would avoid it. The biggest negative about this book is the writers refer to Julius Welhausen quite often as if he were some great scholar. He may have been a great scholar but he did not believe the Bible to be the infallible, inerrant Word of God. In today's society, rather than take the Bible at its word, we're asked to approach it with skepticism, with a critical eye, and read it like any other text book. That is certainly not my cup of tea on how to understand the Bible.

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