

INTERACTION WITH BRUCE WALTKE

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I. *Introduction*

My friend, Dr. Bruce Waltke,¹ has taken the time to put down on paper some disagreements he has had about *I&I*. He and I have been in some discussion about these matters, and we are both of the same mind, that a one-time, open discussion would bring clarity and charity to an issue that desperately needs both.

The tone of Waltke's comments models well what Christian academic disagreement should look like. Waltke commends me for my "unflinching honesty" and his disagreements with me exhibit the same quality—it is clear where Waltke stands on numerous issues. He does not do so, however, by sacrificing respect for a colleague. I deeply appreciate this, and, although I have strong disagreements with Waltke, I aim to return this respect for a brother in my comments below.

Let me begin by stating that I am not convinced by the force of Waltke's points—either taken individually or collectively. We do indeed seem to have very clear differences of opinion on a number of things. If I may summarize my most pressing point, it is clear to me that Waltke's concerns with *I&I* are most certainly based on *a priori* commitments rather than, as he claims, "exclusively on exegetical data and *a posteriori* reasoning." The interplay between one's theological commitments and exegetical practice is delicate indeed, for all of us, and bringing these matters to the surface is important for further progress in our understanding of Scripture. An exclusively *a posteriori* approach to exegesis is, I fear, impossible, and I am somewhat surprised that Waltke would put the matter as starkly as he does. Now, on another level, I deeply appreciate Waltke's concern to address rigorously biblical and extra-biblical data while eschewing the notion that a simple appeal to a systematic theological grid will adequately address the problems. I welcome this type of exchange with open arms, but I must admit that I am nevertheless struck by Waltke's apparent claim to have achieved exegetical objectivity.

My reason for highlighting at the outset this aspect of Waltke's comments is not to circumvent his exegetical points. I will address those as well. Rather, it is to show how Waltke's own exegesis is framed by the very kinds of theological pre-commitments challenged by historically sensitive exegesis. Although Waltke

¹ Hereafter simply "Waltke," thus following academic convention.

and I certainly have very clear differences about some exegetical points, the more fundamental disagreement concerns where our *a priori* commitments lie, and how these commitments move us to exegetical conclusions. If I may put it another way, where Waltke and I seem to differ is that we have different models for how best to explain the biblical and extra-biblical phenomena. These differing models can be seen on the most basic level, that is, by what factors we call upon to address exegetical concerns, and, more importantly, the limits we are prepared to place on the exegesis of Scripture as a function of its divinity. It is at this level that the real discussions need to take place—among Evangelicals and Reformed thinkers—a discussion that can only begin here. Waltke’s comments, perhaps unintentionally, demonstrate the vital need for addressing exegesis on this *a priori* level, and why books like *I&I* need to be a part of the Evangelical and Reformed discussion about Scripture.

A perusal of Waltke’s introductory and concluding comments quickly makes clear that his concerns with *I&I* are actually primarily *a priori* and only derivatively exegetical. One can see this already at the outset, where Waltke summarizes what he sees as the negative results of my incarnational approach to Scripture: the Mosaic law is “flexible”; Israel’s early understanding of Yahweh is “doctrinally misleading”; the Chronicler’s harmonizations are “incredible”; NT “teachings” are based on “questionable historical data.” Waltke is free to express his opinion, but his word choice to describe the biblical phenomena does not reflect purely exegetical concerns. One need only scratch a bit under the surface to see that Waltke’s concerns, even here, belie certain conceptions of what a proper articulation of the nature of Scripture *should* look like, and we will pause briefly before we move on to exegetical matters.

Waltke seems to have a concern about the flexibility of the Mosaic Law. Such a view is declared unhelpful to students as it calls into question the infallibility of Scripture. Perhaps. However, as far as I am concerned, the much more pressing issue—indeed, the central issue—is not whether flexibility in Torah is *desirable*, but whether it *exists*, and if it does, to articulate a model of understanding that will, in view of Scripture’s authority, embrace this fact. We can see here already a fairly significant *a priori* difference between us, namely, Waltke thinks flexibility in the Law is a problem whereas I do not. The reason I do not have a problem is that the biblical phenomena leave me no choice in the matter. If I may put it this way, it is my commitment to biblical authority that leads me to accept diversity and explore its significance. For Waltke, it is precisely his commitment to biblical authority that prevents him from doing so. The question to be addressed is whether diversity or non-diversity is more consistent with or required by Scripture. Again, in my view, we have little choice in the matter because of the diverse “behavior” we see in Scripture.

I would even go so far as to say that diversity in the law is quite transparent on grammatical-historical grounds, and can only be neutralized by a considerable expenditure of theological energy. Of course, I am aware that my commitment to a grammatical-historical reading of Scripture, at least as a first order of business, is itself an *a priori* that not everyone will agree with—but Waltke does, of

that I am sure. Grammatical-historical exegesis is not a neutral, *a posteriori* exercise, but an *a priori* commitment rooted in my more basic commitment to the historical nature of the gospel. We will not go down this rabbit trail here, however interesting and otherwise necessary it may be. I only wish to express my opinion that (1) Waltke is operating from *a priori* commitments in his handling of the Law; and (2) diversity is a reality of Scripture for which all faithful readers must give an account.

Likewise, to refer to the “doctrinally misleading” nature of Israel’s progressive understanding of their creator and redeemer, Yahweh, is to assume the very point that has to be proven—and one runs up against the biblical data. Why would it be doctrinally misleading of Scripture (and therefore of God) to present Israel’s understanding of God as one that follows a patient and contextually sensitive divine self-revelation that achieves greater clarity over time? It is not doctrinally misleading, but actually doctrinally vital (not to mention central to a Biblical Theology) to understand the progressive revelatory dimension of Scripture, which culminates in the clearest, most concrete description of Israel’s God, the incarnation of his son. As always, these things can be discussed and debated, but to claim as Waltke does that what I have presented in *I&I* leads to the conclusion that Scripture is *doctrinally misleading* is somewhat of an overstatement and misses the argument that I lay out in *I&I*. I know Waltke himself is very sensitive to matters of progressive revelation, what he calls a “canonical process” approach (looking at the various stages in the development of Israel’s canon to see what Israel’s understanding of God is at that point). What I am pointing out in *I&I* is that this “canonical process” involves Israel’s understanding of God himself, an issue raised for all who read the OT on a more or less grammatical-historical level. To claim for Israel a progressive understanding of Yahweh is not “doctrinally misleading” but thoroughly biblical, and energizes the NT claim that Jesus is the final articulation of Yahweh.

Lastly, for Waltke to characterize the Chronicler’s harmonization of the Passover laws as “incredible” is to allow a hermeneutic to be placed upon Scripture rather than allowing Scripture’s behavior to inform those very hermeneutical categories. I will look at the Passover text below, but here let me simply say that the “incredible” nature of the Chronicler’s harmonization is a modern determination, not an ancient one.

Elsewhere in his comments, Waltke’s *a priori* commitments surface repeatedly. Toward the end of his introduction, Waltke speaks of wanting to arrive at alternate interpretations that are for him “more exegetically and theologically satisfying,” which he defines in the next sentence: “By the latter I mean interpretations that do not call into question the infallibility of Scripture.”

The reason I have spent some time outlining this tension is because of the role that such, apparently unexamined, pre-commitments play in adjudicating the biblical data and their interplay with the larger contexts of Scripture as a whole and the historical contexts in which God’s word was first uttered. This tension is one that is actually much more pronounced and confused in other criticisms I have read, particularly from those with little or poor training in handling the very

real problems addressed in the modern study of Scripture. The entire question here is the extent to which we will allow a responsible reading of Scripture to challenge our own fallen notions of Scripture, God, the gospel, and so forth. I continue to be somewhat disappointed at the reluctance shown in some quarters to engage these pressing and unavoidable issues.

That being the case, Waltke's treatment is of a very different flavor in that he takes the time to engage Scripture. I am very happy to interact with his exegetical concerns. In my comments below I will follow Waltke's organizational scheme for ease of reference.

II. *The Old Testament and Theological Diversity*

1. *Diversity in Wisdom Literature*

1. *Proverbs*

I appreciate Waltke's comments on Proverbs, and I would continue to refer people to his NICOT commentary.² As with many OT scholars, however (including, for example, Tremper Longman III³), I disagree with Waltke's assessment that Prov 26:4 and 5 are both universally true. Despite the strengths of Waltke's commentary, I am very much in the majority here. Of course, that does not settle the issue—Waltke could be correct—but this difference between us here is an in-house academic debate, not one that will shipwreck the faith of students.

Still, I think Waltke is mistaken in his reluctance to embrace the situational nature of biblical proverbs. In fact, as I see it, a theological, doctrinal, and hermeneutical accounting of the situational nature of Proverbs will actually strengthen people's faith, in that it addresses directly a clear property of Proverbs, thus deepening their understanding of the nature of Scripture. Perhaps one *a priori* difference between Waltke and me is that I see theological diversity in Proverbs (and Scripture as a whole) as *displaying* God's nature to us rather than diminishing it. But whatever disagreements there might be between Waltke and me on the issue of theological diversity in Proverbs, theological diversity is a fact of Scripture and a perennial issue in Biblical Theology. The example of Proverbs is in my view simply a relatively innocent way of introducing to a general readership this larger biblical phenomenon that still remains despite how Waltke handles the issue in Proverbs.

2. *Ecclesiastes*

Waltke is certainly correct when he points out that Proverbs does not promise that they will "always work," as I say. Much of Proverbs simply makes observations on life but does not say "if you do X, Y will *always* happen." I share Waltke's discomfort in presenting Proverbs in such a light, and I should have phrased it differently. It would have been better to say that *wisdom* always/eventually works.

² See my review in *WTJ* 68 (2006): 147-51.

³ *Proverbs* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), esp. p. 464 and his discussion of genre, pp. 29-33.

It remains the case, however, that Proverbs and Ecclesiastes have a *very* different take on the ultimate efficacy of wisdom, and I do not think the tension will be eased by Waltke's approach. I agree that Proverbs sets out to describe "the end of the matter," in that we read here of the ultimate pattern of the social order (that is my way of putting it, not Waltke's), where ultimately the "righteous rise." The problem, however, is that it is *precisely this notion that Qohelet persistently calls into serious question*. For Qohelet, wisdom *at best* has a *temporary* benefit. It does *not* have long-term benefit, because *all* is "absurd" (my translation of *hebel*, following Michael Fox). There is no "profit" (*yitron*) in any of our activities because we will all, at the end of the day, die. And to make matters worse, it is God himself who has made it so (e.g., Eccl 1:13). This, in a nutshell, is Qohelet's complaint.

I will not go so far as to say that Ecclesiastes is consciously contending with Proverbs, but neither is this an important question to settle. It remains the case that the assessment of the benefits of wisdom are so very different in these two books, that the only theological recourse open to faithful readers of Scripture is to accept the tension as real and to explore what God is ultimately trying to say in these diverse points of view. To appeal to Qohelet's notion of the afterlife, as Waltke suggests, as a means of easing that tension, as if to say that behind Qohelet's pessimism is an acknowledgment of God's ultimate justice, does not do justice to the gravity of Qohelet's own concerns. He is not saying that things are a mess now but God will set all things right. He is saying that all things are absurd, that death is the leveler of all, and that God is the one who has put this burden on humanity. A fuller discussion of the theology of Ecclesiastes cannot be held here, but I will say that none of the passages Waltke adduces demonstrate in the slightest Qohelet's ultimate faith perspective. The fact that the book is framed by the sobering and emphatic reflection that everything is *hebel* should not be allowed to lose its impact. Moreover, the eschatological poem in chapter 12, as C. L. Seow has pointed out,⁴ puts the exclamation point on Qohelet's despair. Not only will everyone die, but all of society and the natural order will come to an end as well. For Qohelet, the state we are in is inescapable.

Now, here, too, I would like to point out that this disagreement between Waltke and me is more of an in-house matter, and the view I am espousing is neither my own invention nor an isolated opinion. Rather, it is an opinion that stems from what I hope is a rigorous assessment of the exegetical evidence in conversation with the larger scholarly developments. More importantly, however, I am trying to show how such a view of Ecclesiastes can be brought alongside of our understanding of the nature of God and the Scripture he has given his people. Waltke shares this central conviction. Where we differ is the degree to which we are comfortable with theological tensions on the pages of Scripture. I am very comfortable because, again, I feel I have no choice in the matter:

⁴ Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18c; New York: Doubleday), 368-69; 372-82; Seow, "Qohelet's Eschatological Poem," *JBL* 118 (1999): 209-34.

it is what it is. Waltke seems concerned to alleviate the tension as much as possible, positing *a priori* that such tensions are inconsistent with a high view of Scripture, and so bearable on only the most minimal level. If I am correct in my observation, this is where we disagree, and this disagreement affects significantly how we handle the words of Ecclesiastes. As I said before, that real conversation that has to happen is on this hermeneutical level, not on a supposedly “purely exegetical” one.

3. *Job*

My comments here parallel somewhat my comments above on the presence of diversity in the OT. With respect to the specific issues Waltke raises, though, let me say that I agree that cursing need not always imply wrong-doing (and Waltke is right, that I am using the word “curse” loosely). He mentions, for example, that Cain is not really cursed by God, even though he has done wrong. But this example takes us too far afield. My appeal was to the blessing and curses in Deut 28, that is, explicit passages rather than narrative examples that give at best indirect teaching. In such didactic passages, it is inviolably the case that behavior will result in either blessing or curse. It is not too much to expect that Israelites would reason, therefore, that a state of accursedness or blessedness reflects on behavior. This is in fact what Job’s friends do. Their error is in failing to *read the situation* and so apply a very biblical theology of retribution *mechanically*.

2. *Diversity in Law*

1. *The Ten Commandments*

To be fair, Waltke’s solution to the diversity on the Sabbath commandment is tentative, taking on more of a “thinking out loud” feel. But regardless, I am very uncomfortable making such a distinction between the actual command concerning the Sabbath, *as coming from God*, and the rationale for the commandment *as coming from Moses*, interrupting the command, no less, and coming from a merely human source that can, therefore, be adjusted over time. The command and the rationale are both part of the Decalogue, *both part of God’s word*. And I certainly doubt whether ancient Israelites would have made such a distinction. Moreover, even though the solution Waltke poses is (I admit) thought provoking, it seems *ad hoc*: it is an exegetical conclusion that seems driven by an *a priori* discomfort with changes in the Decalogue. The irony is that Waltke’s solution poses potentially a far greater theological problem in making a distinction between the words of man and the words of God in Scripture (the very thing some critics have claimed of me).

As for the tension between the third commandment and Ezek 18:19-20, I think I make it clear that Ezekiel’s problem is not with the command itself but with those who appeal to it in a mechanical manner in an attempt to excuse themselves from taking spiritual responsibility for their actions (*I&I*, p. 89). The *letter* of the command is most certainly relativized in that *Scripture itself recognizes*

the shifting contexts into which the Law needs to be interpreted. Scripture bears unquestionable witness to such hermeneutical flexibility. The question before us is what we are willing to learn from such biblical behavior.

I actually agree with Waltke that the concessive clause in Exod 20:5 pertains to the third and fourth generation of those who disobeyed, but that really has no bearing on the point in question. The Decalogue promises that one generation's actions will have an effect on subsequent generations, for good or for ill. The focus there is on the seriousness of the call to godly living to which the exodus generation (by which I mean the community in Exodus and Deuteronomy) is called. In Ezekiel's time, apparently, this sober injunction came to be mis-treated as an excuse to unrighteous living; his audience was living off past capital. The issue, in other words, is the multigenerational effects of disobedience/obedience for the Decalogue and the *denial of such effects in Ezekiel*. Whereas the Decalogue says that one generation's actions have long-term consequences, Ezekiel has reason for saying that they do not.

2. *Passover*

This is probably the only example in the book I would reconsider, not because I feel I am wrong, but because the point I make is too subtle and too dependent on a knowledge of Hebrew. Having said that, let me assert that the solution I pose, although not agreeable to Waltke, is hardly "superficial" as he claims. Quite competent exegetes such as Michael Fishbane and James Kugel are of the same mind as I am, and their understanding of the meaning of *bashal* is also aware of what the "authoritative lexicographers" say. Their reasons for arriving at their conclusion, as mine, involve much more than lexical work but an understanding of interpretive practices in Second Temple Judaism, a central factor not addressed by Waltke, and, perhaps, another *a priori* difference between us (i.e., whether Second Temple Judaism is relevant for understanding the Chronicler's hermeneutic).

With respect to the contested meaning of *bashal*, certainly the medium of cooking is relevant, as Waltke argues, and so he rightly adduces 2 Sam 13:8 and (possibly) Num 11:8 as examples where *bashal* implies some type of cooking that does not include water. All the other examples seem to imply or expressly state the presence of water, however. This fact in and of itself does not support my point explicitly, although it does suggest that "boil" is the much more common understanding of *bashal*. Still, this proves nothing, and I am more than willing to allow a more neutral term like "cook" to stand as a general gloss and allow the wording of the passages in question to help adjudicate the issue.

Recall, then, that Exod 12:12-13 commands that the Passover lamb not be eaten raw or cooked (*bashal*) in water, but roasted over the fire. To summarize, the Exodus version of the law says:

raw,	no
<i>bashal</i> in water,	no
roasted over fire,	yes.

For Deut 16:5-7 to come along and say, apparently without any concern for the problems it might generate,

bashal, yes,

that one must *bashal* the Passover lamb when Exodus just said not to, is enough to make any exegete, modern or ancient, stand up and feel the weight of this exegetical challenge. No, this author does not specify

bashal in water, yes,

which would be in explicit contradiction with Deuteronomy; he simply says *bashal*, which leaves open the issue of the medium of cooking. The potential confusion is grating, and it is precisely situations like this that *ancient* interpreters flocked to address.

Enter the Chronicler (2 Chr 35:13):

bashal the Passover animals over the fire
bashal the holy offerings in pots, etc.

It is worth noting that the second use of *bashal* clearly indicates boiling, but the matter in question is the first use. How are we to understand the Chronicler's curious "*bashal* over the fire"?

Here is where *a priori* commitments come into play again. Waltke feels that the lexicons are sufficient, and even necessary, to solve the matter. They are relevant aids, I feel, but not determinative *if the issue before us is a hermeneutical one*. Waltke reasons that, since the Hebrew root *can* mean cooking rather than specifically boiling,⁵ therefore one *can* argue that *bashal* in Deut 16:7 *should* be understood as "roast" *so as to avoid any tensions with Exod 12:9*. But, is this not the point, whether the tension between the two laws *should* be ameliorated? Does this argument not rest on the *a priori* mentioned above that theological diversity is a problem? I simply do not share Waltke's pre-commitment to iron out tensions—not because I have abandoned biblical authority, but because I have not—and so I am *a priori* much more open to understanding the Chronicler's exegesis differently. Here, what is more determinative than lexicons is the *historical context in which the Chronicler wrote*. Waltke writes that my description of the Chronicler's exegetical activity results in a "ludicrous harmonization." But this is Waltke's assessment based on an apparent *a priori* that the Chronicler exegetes the way Waltke expects, and that Second Temple midrashic exegesis is not a worthy category for understanding the Chronicler. I would disagree, citing the plethora of exegetical data we have from the Second Temple period, including the Chronicler's creative articulation of Israel's history throughout (a point Waltke's colleague on the faculty, Ray Dillard, spent much of his too-brief career articulating).

⁵ The root *bashal* occurs in 21 passages in the OT, three of them pual (Exod 12:9; Lev 6:28; 1 Sam 2:15) and the rest piel (Exod 16:23; 23:19; 29:31; 34:26; Lev 8:31; Num 11:8; Deut 14:21; 16:7; 1 Sam 2:13; 2 Sam 13:8; 1 Kgs 19:21; 2 Kgs 4:38; 6:29; Ezek 46:20; 46:24; Zech 14:21; Lam 4:10; 2 Chr 35:13).

Waltke continues by suggesting that the Chronicler's "boil in fire" is "not semantically pertinent." I think, rather, that it is the very heart of the matter for understanding the intersection between these three biblical passages. It is also no small matter that the Chronicler claims "boil in fire" to be "according to the law" (*kamishpat*). The Chronicler's "law" included *both Exodus and Deuteronomy*, and his statement is best explained as an attempt to align them. In this respect, Waltke's assessment has some merit, that by saying "*bashal* in fire," the Chronicler is "screening out the potential misunderstanding that *bshl* with the Passover could include its hyponym 'to boil.'" I do not agree, however, that the Chronicler's words are buttressed in his own mind by a "proper" (lexical) definition of *bashal*, but by the clear tension created by the "don't *bashal*" of Exodus and the "do *bashal*" of Deuteronomy. It is precisely my point that the Chronicler's comment is motivated by his desire to remove any potential of ambiguity or contradiction from the earlier two texts concerning the proper preparation for the Passover meal. In this respect I am in agreement with Waltke. Where we disagree is that I see the Chronicler's means of removing the ambiguity as an ancient exercise in fusing Scripture together, not an appeal to lexical definitions.

Let me stress this point. It seems to me that where Waltke and I agree is that Exodus and Deuteronomy at the very least leave open the possibility for misunderstanding of the Passover law, and that *the Chronicler's comment is designed to alleviate the stress*. Where we disagree is whether there is an *actual* tension in the law *for the Chronicler*, which he addresses according to ancient interpretive conventions, or whether the Exodus/Deuteronomy tension is merely a lexical pothole that the Chronicler covers up by reminding his readers of the semantic flexibility of *bashal*. To address this issue properly, however, we must move beyond a discussion of lexicons and look more closely at interpretive practices in the ancient world, which is why Fishbane and Kugel, among others, show no discomfort with the Chronicler's midrash. They are not men blinded by their disrespect for God's word, but trained in the rigorous analysis of the biblical text understood in the context in which the Chronicler wrote. In that sense, the really pertinent question to ask Waltke is why, in the interest of grammatical-historical exegesis, he does *not* appeal to the Chronicler's hermeneutical context for understanding the Chronicler's exegesis.

Some might argue (I do not think Waltke would be among them) that here we see the danger of "allowing" extra-biblical evidence to determine how we understand biblical passages, thus compromising biblical authority. But it is a bizarre fantasy to suggest that the Bible can be understood by wholly internal means.⁶

⁶ A demonstration of this principle would be an exercise in stating the very obvious. Suffice it to say that, not only is the extra-biblical world "relevant" for understanding Scripture, Scripture is incomprehensible without it. Even though matters pertaining to faith and life are derived solely from Scripture (i.e., are not dependent on extra-biblical information), the *absolute* sufficiency of Scripture to "interpret itself" cannot be reasonably defended. At every point of interpretation of Scripture, one *must* call upon the broader context of general revelation. Biblical scholars do this with a deliberate degree of self-consciousness, others are engaged in a more intuitive exercise. On this matter, see Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1994), 58-64.

The question before us is not whether we should “allow” contexts beyond Scripture to play a role in hermeneutics (as if we are somehow outside of the interpretive process and can “allow” one thing or another to intrude). The question is *what context will be most helpful* in bringing to light what Scripture says. Because Scripture’s testimony is, if anything, rooted in God’s acts and inspired by the Spirit, I elect the broader context of general revelation, particularly the historical context of the Chronicler (the discernment of which is itself a process of entering the hermeneutical spiral), to be a non-negotiable point of departure to help us see how Scripture is behaving—I did not say “firm foundation” or “objective court of appeal,” but “point of departure.” Systematic theology, particular denominational or confessional traditions, or personal preference (and the three are hardly separate categories) invariably come into play in one form or another. We are fallen humans, after all, and everywhere bear witness to the noetic effects of sin. But these factors should come into play in conversation *with* such an historical analysis, not as judge over it. I am certain that, given another venue, Waltke and I would be striking the same chord here, but as it stands, I see Waltke coming close to putting the exegetical cart before the horse.

3. *Sacrifice*

I do not say that Scripture pits “the necessity of sacrifice against the necessity of spiritual fidelity,” as Waltke concludes. I simply say that passages such as Hos 6:6 and others “add a dimension to the matter” (*I&I*, p. 93) by emphasizing the importance of the disposition of Israel so that sacrifice does not descend into a mechanical ritual. I am also well aware that I am saying nothing new here.

Waltke’s description of the back-and-forth between covenant commitment by Israel and liturgical commands by God throughout Exod 25 to Lev 9 is interesting, even helpful, and I do not discount it. However, such an explanation runs the risk of minimizing the rhetorical point of the prophets and Jesus. Micah 6:3-8 makes the point with great energy. He recounts how Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt, but then adds a rather disparaging note on the cultic obligations, clearly preferring justice, mercy, and humility *over cult*. Now, this could simply be a rhetorical move to shake the Israelites back to a proper posture for cultic observation, but that is a guess on our part. My observation is simply that, because of changing historical circumstances, the prophets say what the Law does not—even if it might be subtly implied in the Law as Waltke wishes to argue. In other words, the words of the prophets reflect a hermeneutical (and even pastoral) decision to *bring the Law into line* with contemporary circumstances.⁷

⁷ Without further complicating matters, note also how Mic 6:7 seems to assume some form of child sacrifice as an acceptable offering to Yahweh, at least in historical memory, which is both consistent with (e.g., Judg 11:34-40; Num 8:15-18; Gen 22:1-19; Ezek 20:25-26) and in contradiction to (e.g., Lev 18:21; 20:2; 2 Kgs 16:3) antecedent Scripture. This would be another area of fruitful theological discussion among Evangelicals. It does not help matters that the NIV Study Bible does not consider v. 7 to be worthy of comment. Contrast this to the *Jewish Study Bible*, which puts the matter

4. *Gentiles*

Waltke is correct that the question of the inclusion/exclusion of the Gentiles is “an old chestnut,” which is precisely why I bring it up: people will recognize it. I also agree with Waltke that there is “another possible interpretation” to the one I have posited. My issue, however, is that Waltke’s solution (making a sharp distinction between males and females) is tantalizing, and “possible,” but also somewhat midrashic in his use of grammatical fine points to draw an exegetical conclusion. To be fair, Waltke does affirm the weakness of his suggestion, that the Hebrew masculine often includes the feminine as well. Still, I do not wish to dismiss Waltke’s solution. As I said, it is tantalizing and made me think a bit, and I accept it as a prod to clearer thinking. But here, let us not forget that in *I&I* I am more interested in offering a theological paradigm that puts old chestnuts like this one into a different light altogether, not offering possible alternate solutions within conventional paradigms that I feel have run their course. Although Waltke’s grammatical solution *may* work here (I ultimately think it does not), my bigger concern is in joining others in helping people address not a problem passage here and there, but an approach to Scripture where theological diversity as a whole is accepted *in principle as of positive value* for understanding the nature of Scripture. The approach Waltke is espousing (and he is by no means alone), is to *assume the viability of the traditional paradigm*, and then work out *possible* solutions for the (many) parts of Scripture that do not cohere. My contention in *I&I* is that it is precisely this approach that is ultimately unable to give more than an *ad hoc*, piecemeal interaction with the biblical and extra-biblical data.

Waltke and I seem to have different models for how these types of biblical data are to be addressed. The question is, once again, which model is best? Which model can best account for the data? This, I will gladly confess, is very much open to discussion, but, as I have said before, progress will not be made without laying on the table our *a priori* commitments and allowing them to be as open to change as we expect of others.

3. *God and Diversity*

1. *One God or Many Gods?*

Waltke’s solution to the varied portrait of God in the OT (which Waltke seems to accept) is to make a distinction between the “genre of religious commandments . . . and theological statements.” The latter pertain to “ontological reality,” and the former to “epistemological reality.” I am not sure on what Waltke bases this distinction, but I am a bit uncomfortable with it. To claim that henotheistic passages in the OT (which are well-documented) can be dismissed as (merely) “epistemological” and understood as “tacitly assum[ing] human depravity,” whereas theological statements describe ontological reality, is to skate on thin ice. The henotheistic passages, which are found on Israel’s (and God’s) own lips, are not corrected in those passages. One can say, I suppose,

quite unapologetically, “This v. seems to assume that human sacrifice, at least in extreme circumstances, was thought to have been acceptable and efficacious (see Gen. ch. 22; 2 Kings 3.27).”

that such passages are a mark of a depraved people, but a different option is far less strained: these passages open windows for us to see the categories within which the ancient Israelites were thinking.

I think, though, that the motivation for Waltke's assessment of my view can be seen in his note 7, a concern for open theism. I understand the point Waltke is making, but his concern about the *possibility* that my approach *can* lead to open theism does not constitute an argument over how the biblical passages should be handled. It may be that neither open theism nor a hermeneutic that guards against it is adequate or even relevant for adjudicating the issue of henotheism and Israel's progressive understanding of the nature of God. In other words, I am pressed to ask, once again, whether it is an *a priori* that informs Waltke's exegesis—and this is an *a priori* that does not simply reflect on the question of the suitability of open theism for understanding Scripture, but on whether open theism is even a relevant category. I do not think it is, especially if attention to this contemporary theological issue begins to affect how we understand ancient Israelites. I address in more detail how my approach has nothing to do with open theism on pp. 105-7 of *I&I*.

2. Does God Change His Mind?

As I read Waltke's brief comment, I actually think that we are in agreement more or less, even though Waltke seems to misunderstand me. Nowhere do I "pit" God's involvement in salvation history against his comprehensive knowledge. What I am saying is that in Scripture God presents himself as one who is involved in salvation history through and through, and *therefore* we should *not* "pit" how God has revealed himself throughout salvation history against some passages that seem more ontological.

Now, where Waltke and I disagree, it seems, is the degree to which Scripture reveals God ontologically. Without wanting to get into a very difficult matter here, I would want to argue that this is a false dilemma. *All* of Scripture is covenantal, all of it is a *condescension* by God to stoop down to speak to his people. There are no parts of Scripture that get "closer" to what God is "really" like than others. What we get in Scripture is the "God of the Covenant," what *he* is *really* like, brought to its fullest expression in Christ. As I say in *I&I*, in Scripture we have the God *of the scenes*, not *behind the scenes*. But Waltke seems uncomfortable with how God is presented in Scripture. He says that there are statements in the Bible that only "*seem to entail* that God's knowledge is restricted or that he changes his mind" (my emphasis). But these biblical statements do not "*seem to entail*" anything; they directly state that God's knowledge is indeed limited and that he changes his mind *in those narratives* (such as the Flood story, the binding of Isaac, etc.). *This is how the wise God has chosen to make himself known*, time and time again, in Scripture. These sorts of statements are not there to test how skilled we can be to glance past them to get at the "real" God. Scripture, all of it (in its redemptive historical, Christotelic coherence), gives us the real God on a silver platter. The question is whether we will accept this gift.

III. *The Old Testament and Its Interpretation in the New Testament*

1. *Biblical Interpretation in the Second Temple Period*

1. *Innerbiblical Interpretation: The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament*

I disagree with Waltke's handling of Dan 9:21-22. I find it overly subtle to suggest that Gabriel's giving of insight and understanding to Daniel can be distanced so from Jer 25:11; 29:10, since it is Daniel's agonizing over this very prophecy vis-à-vis current circumstances that instigates the angelic visitation (Dan 9:1-3). Waltke is troubled by an angel's handling of antecedent Scripture in a manner that is not bound to its historical sense. But it must first be asked whether Gabriel's inspired understanding of Jeremiah's prophecy needs to be tied to Jeremiah's historical sense or not. Waltke seems to assume that it does, and so demonstrates an *a priori*. I do not share this assumption, based on my understanding of what Dan 9 itself presents.

Continuing in this section, Waltke expresses concern over the applicability of Qumran *peshet* to the NT's use of the OT. Again, Waltke seems to be most concerned about how *peshet* "totally bypasses the historical sense." Leaving that aside for the moment, I should mention that Waltke's colleague on the faculty, Dan McCartney, expressed a similar view in his contribution to the 1987 faculty volume edited by Harvie Conn, *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate* ("The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament"). It is not clear to me whether Waltke's views have changed in the intervening twenty years or if he has always had these concerns but chose not to express them earlier. In any event, that there is some connection between *peshet* and apostolic exegesis is hardly a stretch in the Westminster orbit or among Evangelicals (e.g., Richard Longenecker, with whom I interact a bit in *J&J*). For Waltke or anyone who wishes to distance the NT from *peshet*, it would need to be argued on a very different basis than that of theological discomfort. The overlap between the NT and *peshet* is widely attested. The *degree* of overlap can certainly be argued, or what we are warranted to conclude from that overlap, but dismissing the overlap altogether will gain few supporters.

In response to my argument that the NT's authors' hermeneutic must be understood within the context of their historical moment (which includes *peshet* but is not limited to it), Waltke adduces an argument that is likely well-known among Evangelicals, perhaps mainly through the writings of Walter Kaiser Jr. and others so persuaded. For Waltke, the NT authors could not be presenting a sense of the OT other than the plain sense, for if they did, Jesus' charge of hermeneutical culpability (Waltke cites Luke 24:25-26) would have no teeth. O.K., but two things need to be considered. First, is it not true that even statements such as Luke 24:25-26 have to be understood in their own literary/canonical and historical sense? It actually confuses the matter to take Jesus' statement here and presume a contemporary "plain sense" understanding. What is plain sense for us may not be plain sense for the recipients of Luke's Gospel, particularly if we remember that Jesus' statement here must be understood in the context of Jesus' own teachings about his ministry vis-à-vis the OT,

where *his own handling of the OT is anything but “plain sense” according to our understanding of the term* (see, for example, Jesus’ appeal to Exod 3:6 in Luke 20:34-38).

Second, although Waltke’s solution may be meaningful given certain *a priori* about what is acceptable hermeneutically for NT authors to do, one must admit that such a solution is an abstract one, and would run into persistent and serious difficulty when considering the many problematic (from our point of view) instances of the NT’s use of the OT. After all, it is precisely a “plain sense” reading of Ps 16 that makes one scratch his/her head over Peter’s appropriation of it in Acts 2.⁸ A “plain sense” *a priori* to proper biblical interpretation shows, ironically, how non-plain sense the NT authors were with their Scripture. Perhaps to put it more pointedly, a truly *a posteriori* exegetical posture on our part would reveal how very *a priori* the NT writers were in their handling of the OT. To appeal to such passages as 2 Tim 3:16 or 1 Pet 1:10-12 (as is often done, but which Waltke does *not* do) to settle this complex hermeneutical matter actually *demonstrates* the depth of the problem, for, despite these passages, the non-contextual, *pesher*-like, midrashic nature of the NT’s use of the OT remains. In other words, appealing to such passages as being somehow hermeneutically foundational or programmatic runs immediately into the brick wall of how the NT authors themselves went about using the OT. Any understanding of 2 Tim 3:16 or 1 Pet 1:10-12, for example, that ascribes to them a foundational hermeneutical role actually *exacerbates* the hermeneutical tension of the NT’s use of the OT.

2. *Apostolic Hermeneutics as a Second Temple Phenomenon: Interpretive Methods*

1. *Matthew 2:15 and Hosea 11:1*

This passage is of perennial interest for the topic of the NT’s use of the OT, since an OT passage is clearly being cited, but the manner in which Matthew claims its fulfillment seems to have very little in common with what the prophet intended. Waltke claims that a midrashic handling of the OT by Matthew, for which I argue, “deprecates a high regard for Scripture’s inspiration,” but here again we see a theological *a priori* determining an exegetical conclusion—one that does not take into account the hermeneutical context in which Matthew was written. An appeal to typology, although certainly valuable,⁹ does not address the hermeneutical issues. I certainly agree with Waltke that the divine author’s mind

⁸ Waltke engages this very passage briefly in n. 8, but his assertion that Peter’s reading of Ps 16 is “based on plain sense, not *pesher*” is difficult for me to comprehend.

⁹ I do not agree, however, with Waltke’s claim that “typology is a unique species of promise and fulfillment,” in that he seems to be implying that typology is somehow special to Scripture and therefore insulated from contextual exegesis. Christological typology is certainly a unique property of the NT. Typology more broadly considered, however, is a mark of Platonic exegesis, which indicates, on some level, Hellenistic influence on the NT writers (esp. Hebrews). The language of type and anti-type is not the restricted property of the NT authors, but is as historically rooted as an appeal to Second Temple Jewish midrashic hermeneutics. What I will say, however, is that *both* Jewish and Hellenistic hermeneutical contexts are important for understanding the use of the OT by NT authors.

transcends the mind of the human author, and so sees all of salvation history laid out before him. But this is not the point. It is still the case that (1) the ultimate divine authorial intention is one that goes beyond the penultimate divine intention as spoken through Hosea; and (2) Matthew's understanding of Hosea can only be achieved after the fact, that is, in light of Christ's coming. The manner in which the two event horizons are related can helpfully be called "typology," and such a fusion of horizons can be claimed to have been in "God's mind" all along. I agree with this. But an appeal to typology cannot obscure the hermeneutical activity of Matthew, which is the *means by which the event horizons are fused*.

I go into some detail in *I&I* explaining my point of view here, and even more so in a recent publication.¹⁰ Some of our differences here may be more a matter of speaking past each other. In the main, however, Waltke's explanation of Matthew's use of Hosea owes more to his discomfort with the implications of Matthew's Jewish setting than it does to *a posteriori* exegesis.

2. 2 *Corinthians* 6:2 and *Isaiah* 49:8

Waltke's objections here puzzle me. I certainly agree that "Paul generally adhered to the accepted [citational] practices of his day," and that an understanding of Graeco-Roman techniques will enrich our understanding of Paul and other NT writers. But Waltke is certainly too strong when he claims that Paul's use of Isa 49:8 "does not illustrate Second Temple Jewish hermeneutics and, in fact, has nothing to do with fulfillment." On the latter point, it is quite clear that Paul is most certainly claiming that Isaiah's words find their end (*telos*) in the "now" of Christ. In fact, I chose this passage as illustrative because it is so obvious, and because of the impact it had on me in my M.Div. years as a student of Richard Gaffin, Waltke's colleague, when he used this very passage as an example of the dynamic way in which NT "fulfillment" should be understood. Fulfillment is not a matter of a few select prophecies coming true. Rather, it is a biblical theological, redemptive historical, eschatological, already/not yet fulfillment, whereby *all of Scripture* finds its end in Christ. We may be speaking past each other here, but Waltke, along with a number of my other Westminster professors, taught me this. It's what got me excited about reading Scripture on another level and committing my life to teaching students the very same things.

I am also uncomfortable with Waltke's distinction between "Graeco-Roman *citational customs*" and "the arbitrary *peshet* hermeneutics of the Qumran covenants" (italics original). To label Qumran hermeneutics as "arbitrary" is to erect a roadblock to understanding it and the influence it might have had on the NT authors (an influence that I explain is indirect, not a matter of direct "borrowing" as Waltke seems to imply). The reason, it seems to me, why an appeal to Graeco-Roman conventions is acceptable to Waltke but an appeal to Jewish hermeneutics is not, is that the former is more amenable to Waltke's *a priori* commitment to the priority of the historical sense of Scripture (as Waltke

¹⁰ Kenneth Berding and Jonathan Lunde, eds., *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 198-202.

understands it). This reflects a selective use of historical background information and is part of what must be addressed in Evangelical exegesis.

3. *Second Temple Interpretive Traditions*

1. *Jannes and Jambres*

The final substantive point Waltke addresses is the Second Temple interpretive traditions that appear in the NT. I am very much in tune with the difficulties this issue raises for an Evangelical doctrine of Scripture, but such concerns cannot drive the articulation of truth.

Waltke lays out clearly his own *a priori* commitments:

As an alternative to interpreting the apostles as *grounding* [my emphasis] some of the doctrines in the allegedly *fictitious* [my emphasis] traditions of Second Temple literature, I *prefer* [my emphasis] to think that these stories cited by the apostles are historically true. *In my opinion* [my emphasis] Second Temple literature *preserved*, not *generated*, these non-biblical stories. The apostles *seem to* [my emphasis] represent these ancient traditions as *real history* [my emphasis] and so has the church in the history of interpretation. If the stories are not *true* [my emphasis], the *theological truth* [my emphasis] based on them is also called into question. A community to sustain itself must be *based in reality* [my emphasis], not on *fiction* [my emphasis].

I see numerous difficulties with how things are phrased here. In the interest of space, I will be content to list some of my concerns. The theological issues Waltke brings with him to address the presence of Second Temple interpretive traditions in the NT obscure the issue significantly.

- (1) I do not say that NT “doctrines” are “grounded” in Second Temple traditions. I say that the understanding of the OT by the NT authors is influenced by their “interpreted Bibles.” The word “doctrine” is wholly out of place and its use gives the false impression that the *doctrines of the faith* are being called into question when adducing Second Temple hermeneutics to explain apostolic exegesis.
- (2) To refer to Second Temple traditions as “fictitious” is to apply hermeneutical standards that obscure ancient literature and therefore the hermeneutical issue before us. It also assumes that, if fictitious, Second Temple traditions are irrelevant for the NT, since fiction and the NT are considered absolutely mutually exclusive. This assumption needs to be examined and assessed as part of general genre issues of ancient literature.
- (3) Likewise, what is meant by such terms as “historically true,” “real history,” “reality,” “fiction,” and so forth, needs significant qualification and explanation rather than assuming that our standards are consistent with ancient ones. It is not helpful to assume that these terms require no definition when dealing with ancient literature.
- (4) Waltke’s “preference” for understanding Second Temple literature as preserving rather than generating interpretive tradition is precisely what an investigation of the data would challenge. Waltke is assuming the very thing that has to be proven.
- (5) The “extra” material preserved in the NT is accepted by Waltke on the basis of their greater historical plausibility than the traditions found in other Second Temple sources, such as the Wisdom of Solomon. The *a priori* that something historical is more worthy of Scripture than what we call fiction, is, again, a topic deserving of our focus and energy.

Waltke's discomfort with the presence of Second Temple, midrashically generated and preserved traditions clearly owes much to Waltke's own understanding of what can and cannot be worthy of a text that claims to be God's word. I am sympathetic, to be sure, but Waltke's insistence that the proper explanation for things like Jannes and Jambres *must* be the preservation of the names of historical persons, unmentioned in Scripture, or *otherwise* the veracity of Scripture is called into question, is to assume the point that has to be demonstrated, and to paint ourselves into a doctrinal corner by minimizing the biblical data.

Waltke assumes that God's word behaves in certain ways, and then applies an *ad hoc* explanation to passages that are problematic. If I may paraphrase his concern: *Since theological truth is based on Scripture only reporting "real history," otherwise questionable biblical data must be subsumed under that heading. The notion that NT authors reflect the hermeneutical practices of their ancient context runs counter to this more fundamental commitment to real history, and so must be avoided and an alternate explanation sought. That explanation is to render things like Jannes and Jambres, the Dispute over Moses' Body, and so forth, as historically true, even though they are not in the OT, since they are in the NT, which can only record historically accurate information and not Jewish tradition.* What is missing from this explanation, however, is the necessary interaction with Second Temple hermeneutics in general. Waltke's "context" within which he adjudicates this issue is that of deeply held theological pre-commitments. In principle I certainly understand, but a familiarity with the broader context of Second Temple interpretive practices, which is so widely attested, would at least temper Waltke's theological explanations.

Waltke spends a couple of paragraphs engaging the "Angels Mediated the Law" tradition, and argues that Deut 33:2 could very well preserve the tradition and that, therefore, the NT passages that speak of angelic activity in giving the law are based on real history. Waltke, however, needs to appeal to Habakkuk and Deborah in order to "enrich" the discussion. Both refer to Yahweh coming from the south, as does Deut 33:2. *By combining these texts, one can conclude that it is only God who comes from the south, whereas Israel comes from Egypt.* Hence, understanding "holy ones" in Deut 33:2 as *Israel*, as clear as that might be from the immediate context of that verse, is "better" understood as including not only Israel but angels as well, with the help of Hab 3:3 and Judg 5:5.

It should not escape our notice that Waltke's preference for the "distant context" of other passages over immediate context is a technique well-known in Jewish midrashic exegesis. More importantly, however, I would contend that Israel most certainly came from the south: after leaving Egypt they met at God's mountain, in the south, and proceeded from there to conquer the Promised Land. "South" reflects ancient tradition of the general location of Sinai, which is not in the Sinai Peninsula (St. Catherine's Monastery), as has been erroneously thought in much of the history of Christianity, but somewhere approaching Arabia, in the region approaching the Gulf of Aqaba. (Midian, where Moses first met Yahweh in Exod 3, is across the Gulf of Aqaba.) It is from the south that Yahweh led his people northward across the Transjordan and eventually into Canaan.

Still, regardless of this specific matter, the differences between Waltke and me are fairly clear here, and I see tremendous benefit for many people if further articulation of the grounds for these differences could be addressed.

IV. *Conclusion*

In his conclusion, Waltke reiterates the unacceptable theological conclusions of the positions I adopt in *I&I* and the strictly exegetical, *a posteriori* manner in which he has proceeded to address my comments. I most sincerely and deeply appreciate the time and effort my friend has put into his reflections. In my opinion, what we have here are two articulations of biblical and extra-biblical data that have some areas of overlap, but are also quite distant from one another in many respects. To repeat, what is needed in my opinion is further discussion that involves the hermeneutical and epistemological issue of *models* of understanding. What are the *a priori* commitments we *all* make that allow certain types of arguments to be considered as more legitimate than others? What Waltke has assiduously avoided—and for this I am most thankful—is casting any aspersions on my own commitment to Scripture as God’s word. This is refreshing, to say the least. It is clear to me, as well, that Waltke is concerned to allow the biblical data to speak for themselves (as much as that is possible for any of us!). Hence, as perceptive readers will note, many of Waltke’s counter-explanations are consciously offered as alternate possibilities rather than unalterable truths.

As always, Waltke’s scholarship and pastoral gentleness are models to be imitated. But, we do see things differently. In my brief response, I hope that I have shed some light on where those differences actually lie. I also hope I have encouraged others to see that the matters before us are not an open-and-shut case, as others have tried to suggest. These are highly complex matters before us, and they require much patience and learning to discern what the most fruitful avenues of exploration are to bring further clarity. Toward that end, I embrace Bruce Waltke as a brother and a fellow scholar in that quest, and I am deeply thankful to him for taking the time to interact with these very important issues before us. May our disagreements light clearer paths of understanding.