

## Final Reponse to Bruce Waltke: The OT and Theological Diversity and the OT in its interpretation in the NT

### *Proverbs 26:4a-5a*

On one level I have a lot to talk about here, but it would all be in-house and not relevant to the topic of this exchange. I understand Waltke's exegetical point (see *The Book of Proverbs* 2:348-49) in trying to demonstrate that these two proverbs are not in "apparent contradiction" (348) to each other but are both "absolutes and applicable at the same time" (349). The "error" (see n. 69, p. 349) of seeing it otherwise, Waltke traces to the Talmud, and Mishnah, and this error is repeated by "many moderns" including, for example, Ray Van Leeuwen. It is fair to say that Waltke's position is novel. That does not make it wrong, but it is novel. One might ask why, at this point, Waltke did not refrain from giving the impression that there are no other viable options, and why he gives the impression of such certitude (the very accusations he levels against me), but none of this has any bearing on the point under consideration. I disagree with Waltke on his exegesis, which rests on translating the preposition *k* ("according to") differently in the two verses. That the somewhat interpretive LXX handles the preposition differently (*pros* and *kata*) is not exegetical justification but an example of an early interpreter struggling with the Proverbs' "non-linear" train of thought. Having said all that, Waltke still may very be right, but this is in-house banter at the end of the day.

### *Ecclesiastes*

I can appreciate that Waltke cites 3:17 and 8:12 to bring Qohelet more in the mainstream of Israelite wisdom, but these two passages, or several others like them, do not simply neutralize the challenging and despondent tone Qohelet takes throughout. In fact, Qohelet typically is very quick to neutralize any "positive" sentiment (e.g., 2:13-15), and what are sometimes understood to be positive expressions on Qohelet's part (e.g., the *carpe diem* passages, 3:1-8) are really nothing of the sort. It is also true that "rigorous exegesis" of Ecclesiastes will have to see the parts in terms of the evaluation of the whole offered by the writer in the prologue (1:1-11) and epilogue (12:8-14), the so-called frame narrator. The message of Qohelet is not that he sometimes has faith, sometimes doesn't, and we should give more weight to the former. Rather, it is that the theological stress between the two, which Qohelet so ably articulates, is accepted as true and *wise* (12:8ff). The frame narrator, accepting the truthfulness of this tension, nevertheless exhorts his readers not to dwell there, but to continue in a position of "fear God and keep his commands," i.e., traditional Israelite theology *despite* the wise reflections of Qohelet. But, again, we are in an in-house debate here, one that is very old, namely the relationship between Qohelet's words and the frame narrator's evaluation and how that dynamic sits with respect to the theology of Proverbs. Waltke and I disagree.

### *Job*

Waltke's point is well-taken, that within the larger narrative of Deuteronomy, the theology of Deuteronomy 28 is not inviolable, and so positing it as the fuel for Job's

friends' comments may not be a straightforward matter. It may be simply a matter of Job's friends having a mechanical understanding of such deuteronomic theology, rather than a more canonical understanding as Waltke suggests. In that case, an aspect of the theology of the book of Job may be to neutralize such a mechanical view. This would be analogous to Ezekiel's criticism of a mechanical view of Second Commandment (treated in *I&I*, 88-90). In both cases, a rigid view of antecedent biblical material is challenged by biblical writers. My point, however, is that such a rigid view is understandable, even if ultimately wrong, given the biblical injunctions. Job's friends got their view from somewhere, after all, and it is worth noting that Job does not really question the truth of their theology, only its applicability to him.

### *Diversity in Law*

The issue here is the difference in wording between the two versions of the Fourth Commandment. The problem for Waltke is a *logical* one: how God can speak "different words at the same time and in the same place and on the same subject" (120). But, does this not miss the point that the two commands are given at different times and places (on either side of the forty-year period of Wilderness wandering)? The narrative/plot distinction Waltke offers as a solution is worth considering, but it is not compelling to me here. A more compelling explanation for why Moses gives two different rationales for the Fourth Commandment is the different narrative settings of the two stories, plus the different historical contexts that gave rise to these traditions that we find compiled in one Torah. Waltke may object that two different perspectives in one divinely authored text is logically unacceptable, and that the narrative/plot distinction obviates this logical problem. It is not clear to me, however, how making a distinction between the words of God and the words of Moses in a text, deemed to be fundamentally and thoroughly the word of God, helps. It is quite possible I am missing the point of Waltke's argument, and I am willing to consider this further.

### *Passover Laws*

As I said in my published response to Waltke, the matter of the Passover laws in the OT is complex, and so perhaps should not have been handled in a book like *I&I*, mainly because of the required Hebrew content. But, Waltke's rejoinder still rests upon the assumption that the type of differences that I (and others) say exist between Exodus 12 and Deuteronomy 16 is "nonsensical" in view of divine authorship. My response remains doubt as to whether we are really in a position to make such a confident claim given what we in fact read. Waltke attempts to remove the lexical problem—and therefore the charge of a logical blunder on the part of the divine author—by appealing to the lexical flexibility of the Hebrew word *bashal* and the "accredited hermeneutic" (122) of reading a less clear text in light of a clearer text. My response is that, however much we might judge the flexibility of *bashal* by lexical standards, reading 2 Chronicles 35 in *that* author's historical context presents an entirely different solution: he addresses the problem by invoking midrashic interpretive principles, the "accredited hermeneutic" of his moment in time. For Waltke, this may be unacceptable of a divine author. For me, it is

acceptable not only in theory, but by observation of so much of what our own biblical literature, so much of which is itself a Second Temple phenomenon (e.g., Chronicles and the NT), does .

#### *Daniel 9:21-22*

The transformation of Jeremiah's prophecy in Daniel 9 is explained by Waltke as "a new insight into the extension of Jeremiah's original prediction..." (123). Of course, everything hangs on what is meant by "insight" and "extension." Waltke suggests that Gabriel has in mind the blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant. It is not clear to me how this helps (although I am more than willing to go back and think through this again), but, more importantly, I am not confident I can know what is on Gabriel's mind. My more modest suggestion is that Gabriel's revealed understanding of the seventy years is not what Jeremiah meant. I hardly think this can be disputed, lest we make the plain meaning of the words incomprehensible. Jeremiah meant "seventy years"—a number that either symbolizes the completeness of the exile (which actually lasted more like fifty years), or refers to the period between the destruction of the temple around 586 BC and the completion of the second temple around 516 BC (hence, you are not *really* back in the land until the temple is functioning). Either way, Jeremiah meant "seventy"; Gabriel says "no, 490." I don't think Waltke's appeal to Gabriel's knowledge of "an absolutely perfect scheme of redemptive history in accordance with God's original covenant with Israel" (123) explains the interpretive process we see at work here. Why, for example, does Gabriel not simply say "full redemption will take much longer than Jeremiah's seventy years." Why does Gabriel say to Daniel, "I have come to give you insight and understanding... the 70 is really 490"? This type of midrashic handling of the OT is well known in the Second Temple period, and I feel we should look there for an explanation of this very interesting biblical phenomenon.

#### *Luke 24 and Peshar*

After reading Waltke's response it seems that we may be working within circles of understanding that overlap more than might appear to be the case at first glance. And so, this may be another intramural discussion. Still, there do seem to be some clear differences between us. As for Jesus deriving the resurrection from Exodus 3, Waltke advocates the well-known defense that Jesus was merely adopting the "flawed canon and...flawed midrash *pilpal*" (124) of his Sadducean opponents to confound them, but without himself approving of that canon or hermeneutic. In the abstract, I suppose this is possible, but it strikes me as too similar to a related argument that I know Waltke rejects: Moses (or the author of Genesis 1) reflects an ANE cosmogony purely for accommodationist purposes. The author, being inspired, knew better (otherwise one would be putting nonsense on God's lips), but was only coming down to the level of the audience. I certainly agree with the principle of accommodation, but I do not think that the biblical authors were "in on it" so to speak. God was accommodating to them as well. The same reasoning should be applied to Jesus' use of Exodus 3, particularly in view of Jesus' full humanity as well as how the OT is handled similarly in the NT at large. I do

not think, in other words, that in appealing to Exodus 3 against the Sadducees, Jesus was laughing to himself about how wacky these Sadducees are, what with their faulty canon and hermeneutic. I think Jesus was really showing them—in a manner consistent with the hermeneutical conventions of the time, which were also Jesus’ conventions—how their own Bible proves them wrong.

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

Waltke seems to see typology and midrash as alternate, mutually exclusive, explanations for Matthew’s use of Hosea. I do not. Waltke certainly acknowledges that OT events do not in and of themselves anticipate later NT events. It is up to Matthew to show us this. But Waltke then asserts that Matthew sees the correspondence between Hosea and Jesus’ flight to and from Egypt because “he believes God is writing sacred history according to his eternal plan” (125). Of this I have little doubt. My only point is to observe what Matthew has to do with Hosea in order to flesh out this sacred history. Waltke is trying to preserve that Matthew’s use of Hosea is reflective of God’s design for “sacred history.” However true this may be, Matthew demonstrates this, not by expanding or reapplying what Hosea intended, but by using his words in a way that make no sense in Hosea’s context. This admission takes some of the bite out of the typology argument, which puts a great deal of stock in historical correspondence, at least at some level, between type and antitype. So, as I said, appeal to typology does not address the hermeneutical issue, and so cannot neutralize the “offense” of Matthew’s use of Hosea. (On this, see also my essay in *The New Testament Use of the Old Testament*<sup>1</sup>, pp. 204-9).

#### *Second Temple Interpretive Traditions*

Waltke’s main concern continues to be the historical veracity of the traditions represented by the NT writers concerning certain events and persons associated with the OT. To put it another way, the issue is whether the otherwise unattested OT events, persons, etc., are *ancient* traditions, i.e., they are historically true even if absent from the OT, or *interpretive* traditions, i.e., generated during the Second Temple period as an attempt to fill the gap in the OT narrative, explain problems, or for any one of a number of other concerns that motivated Second Temple interpreters. For Waltke, the latter is theologically unacceptable. It is important to note that for Waltke the choice is between historical or fictitious. On a certain level, I agree. It is important to call a spade a spade and say, for example, that the names of the magicians in Pharaoh’s court were *not* Jannes and Jambres, or that a rock did not follow the Israelites through the desert (1 Cor 10:4). The problem, though, is that these types of “fictitious” comments are quite common and well documented in Second Temple literature. The question, therefore, is not “history or fiction” but the extent to which the NT would/could/should reflect similar hermeneutical conventions. Toward that end, I reject Waltke’s assertion that, since the apostles claimed to be “writing real history” (1256), that participation in Second Temple hermeneutical conventions were out of bounds. (Again, one need only apply this to

---

<sup>1</sup> Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.

Genesis 1 and one would quickly arrive at a position Waltke would reject, that the writer was writing real history—for nowhere does he imply he is writing otherwise—and you are left with a literalist reading of Genesis 1.) And the reason I do not offer readers Waltke’s alternate explanation to, say, Jannes and Jambres (127) is because I do not think it is a good explanation. It is *purely* hypothetical, supported only by doctrinal assumptions, whereas Second Temple interpretive traditions are well documented enough to be a ubiquitous topic of professional research. Waltke raises some good issues regarding the very difficult Deut 33:2. I treat this issue in more details in *The New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, pp. 185-97), although I would not presume that my treatment would satisfy all objections.

I think this has been a fruitful exchange and I am honored to have participated. It is not always pleasant when student comes to disagree with teacher (and vice-versa), but we are hardly the first example of this phenomenon, nor will we be the last. In fact, it is a necessary part of true academic work, which can include progression to newer paradigms or re-clarification of older ones. Waltke is, as he also mentions, no knee-jerk conservative, to be sure. Neither am I simply throwing caution to the wind in favor of “progress” for the sake of it. Rather, both Waltke and I feel that our models of interpretation do a better job of addressing why our Bible looks the way it does. Faith in God does not hang in the balance, and this is a conversation that, I am sure, will not come to a conclusion in the near future. After all, the proper interpretation of Scripture is a task with a long and honored pedigree.