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#### BOOK REVIEW

John H. Walton. *Wisdom for Faithful Reading: Principles and Practices for Old Testament Interpretation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2023. 248 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-5140-0487-6. \$35.99.

*Wisdom for Faithful Reading* is not intended to be a textbook but is targeted towards academically minded people of the church who are trying to inform their reading of the Old Testament. It is a book primarily about doing interpretation. The intention and target audience of this book would be comparable to *How to Read a Bible for All its Worth* by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart. This book is framed differently, however, by attempting to correct or re-align possible missteps in interpretation.

The book is divided into three parts: the first offers general principles of interpretation; the second offers genre specific guidelines for interpreting biblical texts; and the third discusses the transition from interpretation to application. Each part is divided into multiple sections and then further into what Walton describes as methodological sound bites. There are thirty-seven in all, each offering a guideline, suggestive practice, or corrective for interpretive situations. The sound bites describe an issue, offer a corrective instruction, and then present examples from the biblical texts where the issue occurs. The examples are followed by a concluding remark which summarizes the lesson. This structure is catchy, intuitive, and concise which is bound to appeal to lay readers. The examples not only make the instructions tangible, but they can be used by church leaders to explain concepts to their congregations.

Part One offers general principles for biblical interpretation with the intention of deterring an individual from applying Scripture to their lives after only an intuitive reading of the text.

Walton emphasizes the need for understanding the author's original message for it is this message that he claims carries the authority of Scripture. He introduces his audience to ideas such as cultural distance, interpretive decisions inherent in translation, oral transmission of biblical texts, and the uniqueness of the Old Testament voice. Three points are particularly useful for understanding Walton's point of view as he interprets Scripture. Firstly, he understands God's authority or the Holy Spirit's inspiration to lie solely within the biblical text. He claims that not only did the Holy Spirit prompt the authors, but he has also vouchsafed that God's message was preserved in the writings. This understanding is derived from his interpretation of 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:20–21. This assumption underlies his emphasis for understanding original authorial intention. He never discusses a text like 1 Cor 2:10–16 which could be used to argue that the Holy Spirit's inspiration is also involved in the process of interpretation. For Walton, interpretation demands a series of processes that are not provided by the Holy Spirit, such as understanding the meaning of Hebrew words, literary structure and rhetorical devices, and ancient culture. The way New Testament authors reappropriate Old Testament Scriptures is distinguished from interpreting biblical readers of today because their words carry authority of newly inspired messages while general readers of today can give no such assurance. Secondly, when Walton refers to authorial intentions he is not speaking of the original author, for he sees a complex history of oral transmission to precede the written traditions of Old Testament texts. Instead, he is referring to all who had a role in shaping the final form of the Bible (tradents, authors, editors, and compilers). Thirdly, Walton tends to deter his readers from reading Scripture for propositional statements, prooftexts, or timeless truths. Walton prefers to examine the Bible for its simple message about God's plans and purposes in the world that it describes. Literary intention is privileged over historical-critical concerns, and any information that the Bible provides to matters outside of its primary message are downplayed and not seen as useful for supporting doctrinal stances nor for speaking directly into contemporary issues that the authors could not have known about.

Part Two seeks to provide instruction for interpreting texts of the Old Testament, divided into four sections (Pentateuch, Narratives, Wisdom and Psalms, and Prophecy and Apocalyptic). Readers who are familiar with Walton's *Lost World* series will encounter many of the same ideas discussed in Walton's earlier books. Order is a theme that pervades Walton's interpretation of the Old Testament. Through creation, God brought order to the cosmos. Humanity was created to function as order-bringers. When God rested on the seventh day, order had been established and he began to rule as king. Covenant is seen as an order-producing instrument, and wisdom is defined as the pursuit of order. In his discussion on the Pentateuch, Walton seeks to realign his readers from concerns of salvation and promise to those of presence and kingship. The Narrative section emphasizes the need for understanding the narrator's literary intentions over and above any historical concerns for Walton considers the narrator's interpretation of past events to be inspired, not the events themselves. The Wisdom section highlights the cultural distance of the reader, and the setting that biblical wisdom speaks to. Walton does well to highlight the complexity of the Bible's presentation of the retribution principle and distinguishes between generalizations and promises. Psalms are said to have import for understanding the kingship of Yahweh. A prominent point within the Prophetic section is to highlight its concern for revealing God's plans and purposes (past, present, and future) rather than being predictive in nature. Within Apocalyptic writings, Walton stresses the general intention of the texts rather than their details and fulfilment. Part Two is bound to be provocative for many readers, and it includes a lot of valuable ideas that will provide support for solid biblical interpretation. What it does not offer is exposure to competing interpretations of the academy. Without this exposure, readers will be inclined to accept Walton's perspective as *the* ancient perspective. Walton does however advocate for humility and open mindedness in interpretation, he stresses the lack of certainty inherent in weighing evidence when forming an interpretation, and he encourages the use of outside reference works when we become aware of our limitations as readers.

Part Three is divided into two sections: one which summa-

rizes characteristics for faithful reading and then a second which images faithful living in the light of Scripture. Interpreters are reminded of what it means to read Scripture well and what tendencies to avoid. They are warned against individualizing the text and are encouraged to value differing perspectives of the interpreting community. Faithful living is intended to fit within God's plans and purposes, living in the presence and under the kingship of God. From beginning to end, Walton makes clear that this book is intended to correct or realign what he views as improper interpretation. Walton champions the authority of God's word and its inerrancy but some may not like the way he negates the import of pointed texts on today's readers. These texts are either found descriptive rather than prescriptive, written for an ancient culture and not our own, or fall outside of the primary message of the author. There is still a lot to like about this book, however. Those not familiar with Walton will be exposed to new insights that are bound to challenge or reorient their understanding of Scripture and his discussion of interpretive methods challenges the reader to consider their own assumptions. The brief segmented structure of this book is well suited to the audience Walton is trying to reach, and his numerous worked examples would provide excellent material for an introductory biblical interpretation course.

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