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BOOK REVIEW

Tremper Longman III and John H. Walton. *The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018. x + 189 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-0-8308-5200-0. \$18.00.

The account of the Noahic Flood (Genesis 1–11) is one example of an ancient text that has been subjected to a variety of modern readings. These have resulted in numerous interpretations, including those that focus on apologetics and scientific/historical reconstructions of the primeval event. Tremper Longman III and John Walton, authors of *The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate* argue, however, that such readings “not only miss the point but potentially distort the biblical message” (vii). Moreover, “when we read Genesis we are reading an ancient document and should begin by using only the assumptions that would be appropriate for the ancient world. We must understand how the ancients thought and what ideas underlay their communication” (3).

Like the four previous works in IVP’s *Lost World* series (John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 2009; Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*, 2013; Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 2015; Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of The Israelite Conquest*, 2017), *The Lost World of the Flood* is arranged via a series of propositions, each of which constitute a single chapter of the volume.

Aside from the preface, a brief conclusion, three indices, and a non-annotated “for further reading section,” the book is arranged into four main parts: (1) “Method: Perspectives on Interpretation”; (2) “Background: Ancient Near Eastern Texts”; (3) “Text: Understanding the Biblical Text Literarily and Theologically”; (4) “The World: Thinking about Evidence for the Flood.”

Walton and Longman state that their “purpose in this volume is to come to an understanding of the proper interpretation of the story of the flood in Genesis 6–9” (15). Although the authors maintain that this includes ascertaining whether or not the biblical text is describing a worldwide deluge, a local flood, or, perhaps, even something else altogether, they assert that the “extent of the flood is not the most important issue . . . we are seeking first and foremost the literary-theological interpretation offered by the text” (15). Methodologically, therefore, “we have noted that events are not authoritative; interpretation of events by the biblical authors is what carries authority” (177). In a similar fashion, the authors elsewhere further note that “events are not inspired; interpretations of events are inspired” (23).

Given the previous (notable) scholarship of both of these authors on these specific subjects, most readers will not be surprised that they conclude that the great deluge of Genesis 6–9 was intended to be understood by the author/compiler of the biblical text(s) as portraying real events that took place “in space and time” (15) but that “the events themselves (yes, they happened) find their significance in the interpretation that they are given in the biblical text” (17). That is to say, the authors claim that their “significance is not founded in their historicity but in their theology; not in what happened (or even that something *did* happen) but in *why* it happened. What was God doing?” (17, all emphases original). In addition, Walton and Longman also note:

If we read modern ideas into the text, we skirt the authority of the text and in effect are compromising it. The result would be to arrogate authority to ourselves and our ideas. The text cannot mean what it never meant. What the text says may converge with modern science, but the text does not make authoritative claims pertaining to modern science (e.g., some statements may coincide with big bang cosmology, but the text does not authoritatively establish big bang cosmology). What the author meant and what the audience understood places restrictions on what has authority (9).

Scholarly readers will not be disappointed that the authors’ engagement of the ancient Near Eastern texts, such as ‘Atra-

hasis,' the 'Epic of Gilgamesh/the account of Uta-napishti,' for example, are usually taken from either *ANET*, *COS*, or the standard critical editions, such as A. R. George, ed., *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (2003) or W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, eds., *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (1969).

Many readers will also appreciate the copious attention that is paid to modern scientific research, especially, perhaps, in the areas of so-called 'flood geology' and the like. On this point, in particular, see the chapter written by Stephen O. Moshier "Geology Does Not Support a World Wide Flood" in proposition fifteen. Moshier, the Professor of Geology at Wheaton College, should be commended for his firm, yet gracious (and even conciliatory) tone, when arguing for and delineating the specifics of his discipline. There are no *ad hominem* attacks, no straw man arguments, and no undue appeals to authority. Rather, Moshier systematically and courteously identifies the significant challenges that those who self-identify as "young earth creationists" (and the like) should have when coming face to face with the raw data of modern geology. The same, however, cannot necessarily be said with respect to Walton and Longman. There were a few times where their critique of those with whom they disagreed could have been more circumspect and restrained. For instance, the authors explicitly state, with respect to the claims of John Woodmorappe's *Noah's Ark: A Feasibility Study* (1996), in particular, and those others like him who believe in a more literal, straightforward reading of the ark's dimensions, etc., that such explanations are "rather stretched (to be kind)," and that "only the most gullible can possibly believe all the exceptional conditions that are needed to understand the description of the flood story as anything but hyperbolic" (39). In my opinion, comments such as these detract from the otherwise cogent nature of the arguments being displayed by the authors. One wishes instead that Walton and Longman would have interacted more courteously, acceptably, and professionally rather than make such bald statements (see pp. 168–69, as well, for a somewhat similar example of what may be called an *ad hominem* attack).

One other area of contention that some readers may have with

this volume is that the authors fail to specify the time or location of the actual flood event, stating candidly “the Bible does not tell us when the flood took place” (45) and, elsewhere, though “we do not believe we can reconstruct the historical event from the biblical account . . . there was a historical event” and “the Black Sea flood is the *type* of devastating flood that could have ultimately inspired the biblical account, even if it is not itself the biblical event” (149, emphasis original). As reasonable as these conclusions may be and as much as they may be in alignment with the volume’s purposes, there will (most likely) continue to remain those individuals who would still desire to see further detail concerning the actual Deluge events, irrespective of whether or not these processes are done vis-à-vis the biblical texts. Considering that Moshier’s expertise was brought to bear on dissuading the reader that a global, world-wide, cataclysmic flood did, in fact, occur, and that Walton and Longman both clearly maintain there was indeed some type of devastating event that could have inspired the biblical account, it is not unreasonable to desire more particulars.

One minor quibble that I have with this text is that there are very few visuals, tables, charts, or figures to help augment the text or to further illustrate the point(s) that are being made. I was especially surprised by the lack of a graphic depiction of ancient Near Eastern cosmology, i.e. the three-tiered universe and the so-called ‘firmament’ (see p. 79). One other critique of this volume is that neither of the two excurses (“Genealogies,” 107–9, “Modern Quests for Noah’s Ark are Ill-Founded,” 165–66) are listed in the table of contents (noting that Walton and Walton’s volume *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest* does clearly list the excurses).

The final critique of this volume is that the ‘for further reading’ section is not annotated. Given that each of the works that are cited vary considerably with respect to tone, scope, position, technical detail (biblical, theological, philosophical, and scientific), etc., a few comments to that end would have been a great boon to the reader. In addition to this, there are two other books that I believe would have proved beneficial for the authors to have included, namely Kyle Greenwood, *Scripture and*

Cosmology: Reading the Bible Between the Ancient World and Modern Science (2015) and Helge S. Kvanvig, *Primeval History: Babylonian, Biblical, and Enochic: An Intertextual Reading* (2011). Lastly, although it could be reasoned that by citing each of their own specific commentaries on Genesis in the ‘for further reading’ section (Walton, *Genesis*, 2001 and Longman, *Genesis*, 2016), that the reader would, by necessity, engage with the academic world at large, are there really no other specific commentators on Genesis whose works would have provided direct benefit to the intended audience that could also have been noted?

Lastly, one may also note that though the subject and author indices are quite clear and accurate, regrettably, the Scripture index is woefully (and almost irredeemably) erroneous. Incorrect page numbers for Scripture citations abound, with many of them consistently off by one or two page numbers. The index also consistently fails to note multi-verse pericopes. For example, Gen 25:12–18 is only listed as Gen 25:12; Job 1–2 as Job 1; Luke 3:23–38 as Luke 3:23. This problem is especially pronounced when Genesis 1–11 is consistently not cited as a unit, thereby leaving the reader in a quagmire of trying to discern precisely what verses are actually being referenced within the text. There are several scripture references that are not cited at all, such as the full delineation of the Scripture contents of Table 1 (see p. 120).

Be that as it may, *The Lost World of the Flood* is a welcome, irenic addition to the on-going discussion concerning this complex and controversial issue. Its clear layout, exceptionally capable contributors, and up-to-date content will equip the reader to positively engage this much-debated topic from an informed, evangelical, perspective. Its primary readers will be laypersons, ministers, and students. Concerning those readers who may not fully agree with that which is being asserted by the authors, I conclude with the words of Walton and Longman who maintain:

our goal is not to convert the reader to our conclusions, or even to persuade the reader to adopt our way of thinking. Instead, we seek to bring information to the reader’s attention that has helped us as we

have struggled with the passages. If the readers deem that information useful and beneficial, we are gratified. But for readers who cannot accept our findings, believing that the Scripture makes claims that require other conclusions, we hope that at least we have shown how our particular interpretation is the result of faithful interpretation (viii).

I could not agree more, and heartily recommend this book.

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