Reviews

JOHN H. WALTON AND D. BRENT SANDY. *THE LOST WORLD OF SCRIPTURE: ANCIENT LITERARY CULTURE AND BIBLICAL AUTHORITY*. DOWNERS GROVE, IL.: IVP ACADEMIC, 2013. (320PP.) [ISBN 978-0-8308-4032-8; DIGITAL 978-0-8308-6498-0]

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Lost worlds can be dangerous places, as Jurassic Park showed its viewers. Nevertheless, the excitement of stepping back into the past remains a compelling vision—not to mention a necessity for those who wish to understand the Bible, written as it was within the ancient world.

John Walton's first *Lost World* book took readers back into the realm of ancient cosmology. In this new volume, co–authored by D. Brent Sandy, readers are invited into the world of oral–dominant cultures. Walton and Sandy set out to show modern readers of the Bible the cultural gulf that lies between the literary–dominant world we live in and the oral text forms that dominated ancient societies. As they do this, they explore the theological issues around biblical authority.

Their introductory–level book is intended particularly for evangelical readers. Evangelicals have often found it easier to see predatory dangers rather than long–hidden wonders in accounts of the origin of the Biblical texts that place them in their ancient context, and have tended to defend the canonical form of the text as having been created in a literary form by a modern-style author (eg. see Oswalt, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* [Downers Grove: IVP, 1993]).

Walton and Sandy attempt to persuade evangelical readers to accept two main ideas: that the literary texts we encounter in the Bible originated in oral forms, often via a long process where no simple parallel exists with the modern conception of single author and single archetypal literary text (pp. 17–38); and that this first proposition does not remove the divine authority and inerrancy of the Bible (pp. 263–282). The book's authors are explicit in their commitment to the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (p. 12).

The book is structured around a series of short chapters, each presenting a single proposition, such as "Exact wording was not necessary to preserve and transmit reliable representations of inspired truth" (pp. 167–182). This form gives prominence to the steps in the authors' argument but makes for a rather fragmented reading experience. The propositions have been categorised by subject (Old Testament, New Testament, The Biblical World of Literary Genres, and Concluding Affirmations), but in the longest section, on the New Testament, the propositions are of quite varying types: some are fairly uncontroversial historical observations, such as proposition 5 on the way elements of hearing–dominant

culture affected Greco-Roman literature (pp. 77–86), while others are more innovative and theological in nature, such as the suggestion in proposition 10 that Jesus commissioned his followers to "proclaim truth in oral forms" (pp. 128–142). This more innovative material relies less on existing scholarly material and is somewhat limited by its context and audience to a statement of ideas rather than a developed argument. In the instance just mentioned, the chapter could have benefited from a methodology allowing the authors to distinguish between the degree to which Jesus merely *reflected* the textual norms of the world he participated in, and was *intentionally commissioning* a particular model of proclamation as a culture–transcending norm.

In general, this reviewer felt that the New Testament section of the book was the weakest, although this reflects in some measure the strength of the Old Testament chapters. The first proposition in the Old Testament section, and indeed in the book, is that "Ancient Near Eastern societies were hearing dominant and had nothing comparable to authors and books as we know them" (pp. 17–29). This point is fairly easy to demonstrate about the world ancient Israel inhabited, and has significant implications for theories about the formation of the Hebrew canonical text (not to mention providing a useful context for considering the variant text-forms observable in some of the Judean desert documents and the Septuagint), but would be quite false to assert about the Greco–Roman world in which the New Testament originated. Books and authors did exist in the Greco–Roman world, and while the terms "book" and "author" meant something different in Greco–Roman times to their modern meaning, they are comparable. The admirable attempt to draw together the oral–dominant features of both the Old and New Testaments does not give adequate weight to the differences.

For example, the discussion of the Gospels notes the relatively recent work of Burridge on the Gospels as *bioi,* but does not give adequate weight to the fact that (if one accepts Burridge's conclusions, as the authors do) the Gospels were constructed in a literary form. The existence of an oral prehistory to the material used to construct the Gospels ought not to obscure the difference between a literary–textual gospel where the text-form was largely fixed within the lifetime of those who wrote (not spoke) it, and some of the prophetic books such as Jeremiah where the text–form was still in flux at the time of Jesus, or Isaiah where much of the text is believed to have originated some considerable time after Isaiah of Jerusalem's lifetime. Nor should the likely oral performance of the letters be allowed to obscure the fact that the letters were not the eventual literary product of an oral developmental process, but a literary form admirably suited for an oral–dominant culture.

The Lost World of Scripture is most successful in its description of ancient near–Eastern oral–dominance in relation to the Old Testament, and in demonstrating that the evangelical preoccupation with authorship and contemporary composition of literary texts is both anachronistic and unnecessary for a trusting approach to Scripture. The pre–commitment of the authors to inerrancy will no doubt be of great value in bringing this important topic to a wide range of evangelical readers, who might otherwise be suspicious of

some of the conclusions the authors arrive at—although the risk is that Walton and Sandy's nuanced version of inerrancy might be unrecognisable to non–scholarly members of that constituency.

Walton and Sandy are to be commended for giving significant time and thought to the theological implications of their propositions. Lost worlds are attractive to explorers for the wonders to be found there, and this book has the potential to help a wider audience find the joy of a scholarly *and* trusting reading of the Bible, rather than merely seeing the dangers of modern scholarship.

JOHN TUCKER. *A BRAIDED RIVER: NEW ZEALAND BAPTISTS AND PUBLIC ISSUES 1882-2000*. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL STUDIES, VOL. 5. BERN: PETER LANG, 2013. (364 PP.) [ISBN 9783034313728].

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Patient readers must wait until the conclusion of this important study to understand the significance of "braided river" in the title. Drawing on a history of New Zealand art by Hamish Keith who suggested that "the great braided Rakaia that meanders across the shingle plains of Canterbury" provides the perfect metaphor for New Zealand culture, John Tucker argues that the New Zealand Baptist movement similarly has "not been limited to one stream … it has flowed along many different channels, taken many different courses" (p. 333). His view, based on his PhD thesis, is that whilst the majority of Baptists in New Zealand have abstained from debate of public issues altogether, other streams have understood the church's mission more broadly. The analysis of these tributaries that made this 'braided river' and the careful discussion of various issues that have (more or less) attracted Baptist attention makes for a significant contribution to Baptist history in New Zealand, although the interest and relevance of this book will extend to all students of global Baptist and evangelical thought.

The role of the churches in political and social debate is a well canvassed theme and there is much here that will stimulate this discussion. Tucker first summarises the English Baptist attitudes on these issues since these were influential in the colonies, and then addresses three questions (pp.16–17). First, to what extent did New Zealand Baptists attempt to reshape their society through public debate? Second, what were the forces that influenced involvement in public debate and in particular, how significant were the wider cultural and intellectual changes? Third, what did Baptists achieve? Did they make any significant contribution to public debate in New Zealand?

Wisely, Tucker doers not seek to cover every public debate that interested Baptists. Debates about sabbath observance, film censorship and the like are not reviewed. Rather, ten topics are selected from across the period in order to illustrate how Baptists have engaged in public debate The rich resources of the national denominational press and valuable archival collections are examined closely. The