

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

### Episode 132

### Conference Interviews, Part 5

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**Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)**

**Guests: Dr. John Walton (JW), Dr. Ben Witherington (BW), Dr. Tremper Longman (TL)**

### Episode Summary

During the recent annual meetings for biblical studies scholars held in San Antonio, Dr. Heiser interviewed a number of scholars about their recent work. In Part 5 of those interviews, we meet Dr. John Walton (Old Testament professor at Wheaton College), Dr. Ben Witherington (New Testament professor at Asbury Theological Seminary), and Dr. Tremper Longman (Old Testament professor at Westmont College).

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 132, "Conference Interviews, Part 5." I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing?

**MH:** Very good! We have another round of really good interviews.

**TS:** We do, and real quick, Mike, I just want to let everybody know that I'm posting pictures that I'm taking during the interviews, so if you'd like to go take a look at those pictures, you can get those at our website at [nakedbiblepodcast.com](http://nakedbiblepodcast.com), and it's going to be on each episode page.

**MH:** Unfortunately, I'm in the pictures. (laughter) I got in the way a few times.

**TS:** That's good! Those pictures are interesting. And also the pictures of our live event... those are pretty good. I appreciate Nathan for taking those pictures. Those are the ones we're using. So we appreciate that!

**MH:** Absolutely. Well, our interviews this time around are going to be, first John Walton. He has a lot of fans in our audience, for good reason. John produces a lot of good stuff—again, intentionally trying to produce content that is for the non-specialist. So we spent a little time with John talking about why we should care about the Ancient Near Eastern context for what we do in the Old Testament, and some of the things he's been working on. Then we have interviewed Ben

Witherington. Readers of the blog will recall Ben posted an eight or nine-part review of *Unseen Realm* on his blog. Ben is a very famous and noteworthy New Testament scholar that, again—just like John Walton—tries to produce material that is digestible for the non-specialist, that matters, that's useful. So we were really happy this year to be able to get some of Ben's time. He always has a lot of things to do at these events (filming and what-not), but he was enthusiastically eager to give us a little time for the podcast. And then, thirdly, Tremper Longman. I've referenced Tremper on the blog and, of course, on the podcast a few times. Tremper is an Old Testament scholar, and (not surprisingly, again) he makes it part of his career, part of his ministry, to produce things that are not just for the elite—the people that are at a conference like this. He doesn't just produce scholarship for other scholars, but is trying to produce useful things for people who care about Scripture. So we talked to Tremper a little bit to see what he's working on.

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**MH:** Our next interview from SBL will be with John Walton. Now, Dr. Walton is very familiar to our audience. I talk about John's work a lot; I plug his work a lot. So here we have the man! Right here with John. Even though a lot of listeners are going to be familiar with you, could you just give yourself a brief self-introduction?

**JW:** Well, I'm John Walton. I teach Old Testament. I taught for 20 years at Moody Bible Institute, and I've been now 16 years at Wheaton College. I write about the ancient world and how it helps us to interpret the Old Testament. I've been married 40 years, have 3 kids, and am proud of all of them.

**MH:** (laughing) That was a nice kind of neutral introduction. "I write about the Old Testament and the context and help to interpret the Old Testament." John, you write about controversial stuff! (laughs)

**JW:** Maaayybbee...

**MH:** (laughing) No, a lot of our listeners have read your *Lost World of Genesis One*, that's probably the thing I see the most referred to. Secondly, the *Lost World of Adam and Eve*. I always recommend the *Ancient Near Eastern Thought* (the book that sort of covers everything). I want to ask you a question before we actually get into the newest book that you're interested in talking about, and that is... I asked Kyle Greenwood this the other day, as well—who has the book on cosmology. We just take this as axiomatic. It never even enters into our mind any more that this is what you're supposed to do: "You're supposed to read the Old Testament, and if you want to understand it, let's try get the Israelite in our heads. Let's try to think like they did so that we don't miss what they're trying to

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say, and so we don't put our own words in their mouths." I meet a lot of people, though, that just don't get why you would do that. In other words, they don't even see this as a need. The whole enterprise. So when you encounter that (and I'm sure you do), how do you try to convince people that what we're doing here is really important?

**JW:** Well, I always tie it to the issue of biblical authority. The authority flowed through the authors—from God through the authors. And if people who read the Bible are interested in getting the authoritative word, we've got to get it through the authors. What people don't understand... Sometimes they even forget that the Bible they've got in front of them has been translated from another language, but even when they remember *that*, they sometimes neglect the idea that it's also a *culture* that has to be translated. You need not only a translator, but what we could call a "cultural broker" to help us understand the ancient world. And so I think the people don't get it because they don't want to give up the idea that they can just sit down, open up their Bibles, and just read intuitively. The point I try to make is that intuitive reading *can* be (it isn't always) unreliable because we run the risk that we're just going to read our own culture and our own context onto the text. And that's imposing something on the text.

**MH:** I always find your insider/outsider way of talking about this to be really helpful. Can you summarize that?

**JW:** Sure! We come at the text as outsiders. The biblical authors were addressing their audience, and they were all insiders. They were inside that culture, inside that time. But we come to it as outsiders, and sometimes what the biblical author assumed his audience knew, we don't know. And so, in that sense, we've got to try to come up to speed and understand that world. Now, on that same point, lots of people say, "Well, how can you imagine that we could ever understand that world?" The point I make is, "Maybe we won't get so far into doing it, but we can understand enough of that world to know all the things in our world that don't belong there." And even if we can only just strip out the things that we keep trying to push into that world from our world... Even if we can only do that, that's an advantage.

**MH:** That's worth doing. Right. Well, that's a good segue to talking about a recent volume that you've edited that I'm sure you have high hopes for. It looks like it's going to be very useful. So let's talk about that.

**JW:** That's the *Cultural Background Study Bible*. It's an NIV edition, and so it's put out by Zondervan. What we wanted to do was to provide lots of these notes along with the Bible that will help readers to understand that world. Unlike other study Bibles, we don't do theological notes and literary notes, and "here's what this word means," and application notes. Those are all important, but we focus our attention on backgrounds. Now, that includes geography, history, archaeology, manners and customs, ancient literature, and in general, how

people thought in the ancient world so that readers can have that right at their fingertips as they read the biblical text in front of them. It's full of side articles (one-page articles on different issues). It's full of photographs that help (full-color photographs). And it's really just to help people get engaged in that ancient world and see what benefit it has to bring to the reading of the text.

**MH:** How much of the material that has wound its way into the Study Bible was drawn from the ZIBBC...

**JW:** Yes, "ZIBBCOT"—the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary of the Old Testament* (that five-volume work). Basically, we started out by condensing that down, by taking what we thought were the most important entries. And of those entries, what were the most important parts of those entries. So kind of boiling that down to really be laser-focused on the needs of someone who's using a study Bible. We added to that some information that we got from the *IVP Bible Background Commentary* (which they graciously made arrangements with us so that we could use some of that material). Then after we got all that put together, then I went through and did some new writing and filled in some gaps.

**MH:** I've looked through it and my impression was just what you said. I just wanted to sort of get a little confirmation there, because for anyone who is familiar with that, you're going to see some overlap here, but as John just said, there is some fresh writing there. It has sort of the top-tier things (the most important things you'd need to know at any given point). Since we mentioned it, though, why don't you say something about the bigger five-volume set.

10:00 **JW:** Yeah. The five-volume *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*... I was the general editor and I had 30 experts—an international scope of experts—writing for that. Again, we were trying to enlarge on what was available in the IVP work. The IVP work was designed to be just one volume, and they basically told us, "no footnotes, no pictures." In the Zondervan work, that's why it's five volumes. We have 2,200 photos and 22,000 footnotes to take you into more detailed scholarly writing. So it ends up being kind of a starter that launches you into that world.

**MH:** I would certainly recommend both of those. I think for our audience... they're used to hearing this kind of thing. They're already over the hump of, "Oh, should we interpret Scripture in its own context, as opposed to some later context?" They're already over that hump. So I would highly recommend the Study Bible, and once you get into that, I'm really thinking a lot of people are going to take a look at the set. Even though it's a set and you think, "Oh, I bet it's expensive—it's a set," you can actually get that for a really, really good deal in CBD or things like that. It's not beyond the scope of what you're going to be able to afford, and you will mine it for information consistently.

John, what are you working on now (if you can say) that you sort of have on your publishing calendar?

**JW:** Yeah, let me talk about those things. But I wanted to say one other thing if I can, quickly.

**MH:** Go ahead.

**JW:** Sometimes people worry that I might be imposing the Ancient Near East on the Bible. And the point I want to make is that it's impossible to do that. The Bible is embedded *in* the Ancient Near East! (laughter) That would be like saying I'm imposing Hebrew on the Bible. You can't impose Hebrew on the Bible, it's *in* Hebrew! And it's the same thing with the Ancient Near Eastern cultural background. You can't impose it. It's embedded in it.

Anyway, we're still following through with more books in the *Lost World* series. We've got the *Lost World of the Flood* that's coming. That's about halfway through the writing process. I'm hoping it'll be out about this time next year. I'm doing that with Tremper Longman, so we're working on that together. We also have *Lost World of the Conquest* coming, because the Conquest is a big problem—increasingly a problem today, as it becomes the target of skeptics' attacks on the Bible. "How can you worship such a God who would push genocide?" And also, a problem for Christians, who say, "Oh yeah... What I'm I going to do about that? Wow, this is a problem." Again, like the other *Lost World* books... The basis of the *Lost World* books is we want to bring out the Ancient Near Eastern background and a close reading of the Hebrew text and bring them together in an accessible way to address kind of modern issues. And so *Lost World of the Conquest*, likewise, will certainly be out by this time next year. So those are two more *Lost World* books that we're doing. I also have just finished a manuscript: *The Old Testament Theology*. It's set up to be an Old Testament theology for Christians—not because I'm reading Old Testament theology through New Testament, but because I believe that even before the New Testament comes along (and I don't think this should be terribly controversial!)...

**MH:** Give it a try! (laughing)

**JW:** Even before the New Testament comes along, that text had authority in and of itself, and therefore there's theology there to be mined for Christians today. But to get to that, you have to first of all understand the Ancient Near Eastern context in which Israel was embedded, and then how God drew them out of that with the revelation that he gave, to give them distinctives. And how through all of that process, theological messages emerged—through the impetus of the Holy Spirit—and that those are still of enduring value to us today, and we need to understand them.

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**MH:** It's kind of amazing that we sort of forget that, as I like to say, "God knew what he was getting" when he prompted people to put together something, to write something, to edit something. Whatever set of hands (or hand) that touch the text, it seems like we sort of forget Providence when it comes to this. I try to encourage people to try to think about inspiration the way you would think about canonicity. We have no trouble taking what looks like a human enterprise (and certainly it is a human enterprise), but we process that through the filter of Providence—that God could actually do something as crazy as move someone to recognize a text that was inspired, that should be considered sacred. Well, why not look at it the same way? Again, I'm sure you'd be in agreement. In my thinking, when you strip out the humanity from the text, you actually *undermine* the doctrine of inspiration—you really make it vulnerable to various kinds of criticism. We both have these experiences of what we might say or recommend that makes people nervous, but it's really important. Because if you don't try to do that—just like you said, you're putting words in their mouths, you're framing something in a different way, and you're getting something out of that they wouldn't have intended at all. You're not letting them speak, really, is what it comes down to. You're not letting the people that God chose *speak*.

**JW:** You're making the message be something you want it to be, rather than something that is inherent in the text.

**MH:** It is! And if God was happy with it, we might want to be happy with it, too.

**JW:** Sounds good to me!

**MH:** Well, thanks for spending a few minutes with us. Anything else you'd like to... Have you started blogging or anything? We always want to give people a chance to promote anything that they want.

**JW:** No, I don't blog. But maybe one other... One of the metaphors I've developed, and this is right in the front of the Study Bible, is I've been using the metaphor of the "cultural river." That is, we have our modern cultural river that's got things like democracy and freedom and capitalism and market economy and individualism and consumerism and even social media—it's all part of what we can talk about as our cultural river. We're in it. And we can't help but be in it. We didn't have to find it and get into it. We're in it. Sometimes we might say we don't like it, and we can try to swim against the currents or try to scramble out of the rushing water, but we're still in that river. Likewise, there's an ancient cultural river, and it doesn't have any of the stuff in it that's in ours. It has its own elements in the cultural river. It's shared broadly. They all are different, but it's shared broadly by Babylonians, or Egyptians, or Assyrians, or Hittites, or Israelites. Again, God might be trying to draw the Israelites into a position where they're standing against that (or swimming against it), but they're still in that river. And even when they're swimming against it, they're in that river. With that analogy, I think the most important thing to recognize is that the Bible does not

anticipate our cultural river. It always writes to that cultural river. And so it's not going to think about, or present, or suggest... Its teaching, its claims *can't be* about the specifics of our cultural river. Certainly, it's relevant to us because it helps us to stand—to take a stand—in our cultural river. Not by anticipating the river, but by transforming *us*. And I think that makes sense to people because if you were going to say that the Bible anticipated our cultural river, you couldn't just say it's *us*. You'd have to say it anticipated the Medieval cultural river and spoke to *that* and the Borneo Stone Age cultural river and anticipated *that*, and that becomes ridiculous.

**MH:** It does. It becomes absurd.

**JW:** So at that point we say, "Okay, so the Bible did not anticipate *all* cultural rivers and not specifically ours, and therefore we have to go and try to understand *their* cultural river." So I drew that analogy in the opening pages of the *Cultural Background Study Bible*, and I gave about 12 different areas of the ancient cultural river, just to give people a flavor for it.

**MH:** That makes sense. I think you're right. That's going to be digestible. I think people will be able to grasp that and its implications. That's pretty good.

Well, thanks for spending a little bit of your time... I know your schedule is kind of chaotic here. Everybody's schedules seem to be chaotic, so we appreciate it!

**JW:** Chaotic is what we do here. (laughter) We're seeking to develop order out of non-order. Anyway, it's great to chat with you, Michael.

**MH:** Thanks.

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**MH:** We're back at SBL, and with us this time is Dr. Ben Witherington. Ben is a noteworthy New Testament scholar. He does a lot of blogging and he's on the short list of those scholars who really makes an intentional effort to get content to the non-specialist. I've referenced him on the blog a lot, but now we get to meet him. So Ben, could you introduce yourself a little bit?

20:00 **BW:** Sure. I'm an *old* New Testament professor at this point. I've been at this for 35-plus years, teaching Biblical Studies and actually Wesleyan Studies, not just Biblical Studies. But it was kind of funny... Twenty years ago I went to Asbury, having been teaching Old and New Testament and Intertestamental Literature and Wesley Studies and Apologetics at Ashland Seminary. And I got to Asbury and they said, "Now which *part* of the New Testament would you like to teach?" (laughter) And I said, "YES. At least that, yes!" So I've been very blessed to have a good teaching career in various places. Right now, I'm especially enjoying

having doctoral students in Biblical studies. We've got 30 folks in the program, and they're all sharp and challenging and stimulating. So that part of my life is very full—lecturing for them and working with the doctoral dissertations and all of that. But I continue to do a good deal of writing. The most recent thing that has hit the book stalls is the *Lightfoot Legacy Series*: three volumes of unpublished manuscripts by J.B. Lightfoot.

**MH:** Let's talk about the blogging a little bit, because you've been an online presence for quite a while. So what attracted you to that at a time when most people in Biblical Studies... Most academics generally are not thinking about, "Oh, this new thing called 'blogging,' let's do that!" What attracted you to that?

**BW:** Well, initially Leafnet came after me (back at the dawn of time when the earth was still cooling in the early 21st century) and said, "We need a Bible answer man who would answer questions and maybe do some blogging." I've been involved in culture for a long time. I'm a musician, as well as a writer. I was always interested in the interface between faith and culture. So I said, "I'll do a Bible and culture blog for you," because I do a lot of reviews of movies and books and this that and the other... It seemed a natural thing to do. So I had sort of two incarnations for them. One was the "Bible answer man" and the other was my blog, dealing with the Bible in culture. That's just continued. I moved to Patheos six or seven years ago. It's been good. You're right—social media has grown enormously in the last ten years in various ways. One of the reasons I was interested in this is because my own forebear, John Wesley, said, "The world is your parish." For me, what that meant ethically is by any ethical means necessary to reach people for Christ and for the Gospel, and so I committed myself to doing that. For me, writing is easy. I don't sweat bullets writing, so writing a blog takes 15 or 20 minutes for me. No big deal.

**MH:** What are some of the current things in the last couple weeks... Just give people an example of the range of the stuff that you'll blog about.

**BW:** Well, what I've been blogging about this fall is about some unpublished manuscripts of my "doctor father," C.K. Barrett—a famous Methodist New Testament scholar who passed away in 2011. I am transcribing his remarkable sermons that are both thoroughly biblical and thoroughly Wesleyan in their theological orientation. And really, there's not much like them out there. So what I've been doing is giving previews of coming attractions. We're going to publish two volumes of his sermons—100 sermons on the Gospels and Acts and more than 100 on the rest of the canon. So I've been giving little quotations from him and snippets from some of the sermons, and there's been a good deal of reaction to that.

**MH:** Now, when you say "transcribing," this is from audio?



**BW:** No, it's his notebooks. He wrote out all of his sermons in longhand verbatim, with topics, with headings, and with a page that told exactly where he preached all these in the Bridge Methodist Circuit. Because the way Methodism worked in the U.K., is it was "musical chairs" in the pulpit. So he would preach two or three times a week in different little Methodist chapels. Some of these sermons he preached between 40 and 60 times over the course of 1934 to 2009. He preached in seven decades.

**MH:** So did you find these, or where were they archived?

25:00 **BW:** No, his daughter had them. She had a cardboard box full of his multitudinous little sermon notebooks, and she sent them to me because we knew each other and she wanted to see somebody publish them. And Whippenstock was very happy to oblige. So we're publishing two volumes of his sermons. And then his *father* was the Billy Graham of British Methodism in the 20's, 30's, and 40's—going all over England in horse and buggy, evangelizing the U.K. So we have *his* sermons, as well, and we're going to publish some of them. For those of us who are from that faith tradition (of evangelical Wesleyan biblical preaching), this is like a gold mine for us!

**MH:** Sure—absolutely. Wow, that's a huge project, and really significant. I'm in Semitics, but everybody knows Barrett.

**BW:** Well, see, I went over there to do my PhD with him. I turned down Oxford and did my PhD with him in Durham, and I'm so glad that I did. But I only knew him as an author, a New Testament scholar, a lecturer. I heard him preach occasionally (and they were excellent), but I didn't realize that his teaching and his writing were only the tip of the iceberg of his ministry. The majority of his ministry was writing sermons every week and preaching two or three times a week. I had no clue that that was the majority of his ministry. And so now I have figured this out, and it's exciting. It's exciting for me to hear the voice of my doctor father again.

**MH:** Well, that's a big deal. Let's be honest. That's a big deal to put that out.

**BW:** It certainly galvanized me. I've gotten all excited. I've heard so much BAD Methodist preaching, and superficial Methodist preaching (laughter)... *annoying* Methodist preaching.

**MH:** "That's what it ought to be and used to be..."

**BW:** Exactly! "This is what it's supposed to look like." His great gift was to be able to distill complex theological and ethical ideas to any level of discourse. So he was mostly preaching this to 45 working-class Methodists in a pit village around Durham or Darlington, again and again and again. And he was happy as a clam to do that. It was an important part of his calling. In one of his sermons he

actually says, "When I went to Durham in 1945, I thought, 'I'll give this a go for three or four years and then get back to the Circuit.'" Well, he never left the Circuit, but he continued to be a professor the rest of his career.

**MH:** Wow. I don't think I can really ask, "Aside from that, what are you working on?" because that's a huge project.

**BW:** It is, but it's a heart project. It's a fun project. And it's not hard—it's just transcribing and annotating a little bit. I've just finished a book for Fortress called *Isaiah Old and New* on intertextuality, where I'm reading the Old Testament forward and also backward. I'm reading it in its original context, being fair to that. And then I'm reading it in light of how it's used in the New Testament. So *Isaiah Old and New* is coming out with Fortress in February. And then the second volume is with the press: *The Psalms Old and New*. And then they said, "Now you have to do one on the Torah. We need *The Law Old and New*, because there's a lot of Deuteronomy in the New Testament, you know." So the next project down the road is to do those passages in the Pentateuch that show up as a citation, allusion, or echo in the New Testament.

**MH:** Are those technical? What's the target audience for those?

**BW:** It's mid-level. Like most of my audience, it's for the educated lay person. It's for the pastor. It's for the keen Bible student. I try to write at a level of clarity that anybody with some background in biblical studies can get benefit. These are not technical monographs. They're more sort of introducing that whole audience to the idea of textuality and how that affects biblical theology, those kinds of things.

**MH:** Well, that's a big deal for my audience, because we do intertextuality on the blog. Right now we're going through Ezekiel, so that's always a big deal. "What are the touch points? How does this hook into that? When the writer uses this word or this phrase..." Just to get people to realize that they want you to go mentally someplace and pick up that thought and then come back. If they're pitched at that level, I'm happy to recommend them here. That's important.

**BW:** That's exactly right. In an age of increasing biblical illiteracy, one of the things that's clear to me is that most preaching is sound-biting: take a few words, a verse or two here or there, and milk it for all its worth. Which is not necessarily terrible, but it can be distorting. So increasingly, I've been concerned about whole-canon understanding, progressive revelation, all those... some of the same things you're interested in in *The Unseen Realm*. I've been very concerned about having enough of a macro context that when you deal with the micro material you know where it fits in the bigger picture, and that's one of the reasons for doing this. The other reason I did it is there is a lot of stuff out there about intertextuality that has a theory of meaning and a presupposition about epistemology that I absolutely would not agree with. For example, the idea that the texts don't have meaning; that meaning is in the mind of the beholder. I absolutely don't agree

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with this theory of meaning, so one of the things I'm doing is saying "yes" to intertextuality, and "no" to that approach to meaning.

**MH:** That sounds great. As those kinds of things roll out, I'll be interested in getting them and going through them. So there's *Isaiah* and...

**BW:** *Isaiah* is coming out in February, and then *The Psalms* in the fall, and if I have any spare time in the summer, I'm going to start on *The Law, Old and New* in the summer. And all of this is for the purpose of doing a proper biblical theology. I've done a New Testament theology, twice over. And I finally got to the point where I was very dissatisfied with the biblical theologies that are out there. We have a new one from John Goldengay, as you know, and I will have to go through that. But knowing his hermeneutic and knowing his shtick, I'm probably not going to agree with a good deal of what he's going to say (laughter), which is, "The Old Testament says what it says and the New Testament writers (bless their hearts) really didn't get it."

**MH:** Right. He has that short little book... I'm trying to remember what table it was at. But something like, "Do we need the New Testament?"

**BW:** Yeah, it is! "Why do we need the New Testament?"

**MH:** Right. I looked at the Table of Contents, and it's like, "Well, I guess your answer is 'No!'"

**BW:** Yes. Could be a very short book. Just no! So I'm trying to work my way towards a proper biblical theology. I've taught Old Testament long enough and New Testament long enough that methodologically and in regard to other things, one of the keys to even being able to think about that is intertextuality: what is the relationship between the Old and New, and how is the Old used in the New, and how does the Old prepare for the New, and all those kinds of questions. I figured I need to have a real good handle on that before I even jump into the swimming pool called "biblical theology."

**MH:** So these books are essentially going to be illustrations of how this is done... lots of examples, working through a book.

**BW:** Yes.

So what would you recommend to people... Pitched at my audience. I like your description. It's one I use: "the educated lay person." The lay person who cares and has enough Bible under their belts, so to speak. What would you recommend as far as a book introducing people to this concept broadly? You've brought up method. What would you recommend there?

**BW:** One possibly point of entry that will at least tease the mind into active thought is Richard Hayes' little book *Reading Backwards*.

**MH:** And that's pretty recent, too.

**BW:** That's very recent. I have a review of it in one of the appendices to the *Isaiah* book. It's a good book. I don't entirely agree with him about how this would have been received. I mean, he presupposes a significant quotient of the audience is learned in the Old Testament. I don't think that's likely to be the case. Maybe one or two people. What I know about literacy in the New Testament era doesn't encourage that kind of view, and what I know about his largely Gentile audience also doesn't encourage that view. So some of the things he does with metalepsis, the British would say is "too clever by half." This would be way over the heads of Joe Gentile going, "I didn't get that. What was that Isaiah thang?" I mean, I think it's fascinating, and I think he asks the right questions, but I also think that he is suggesting that the New Testament writers presuppose a lot more out of their audience than the way they portray the disciples in the Gospels, for example. I call the disciples in Mark the "DUH-sciples," because they just regularly *don't* get it. Right? I've reckoned that was pretty typical for a high level of discourse. Like take Isaiah 9-11. You have like 43 citations from Isaiah in other portions of the canon. This is like eating marzipan. I'm thinking, average Joe Gentile Christian in Rome is going, "Help! I don't get this!" And they didn't have all these scrolls in front of them from the Old Testament like we do. So there's some of those kinds of issues. But it raises the right questions about orality and the importance of the Old Testament for Christians going forward. Those are all the right questions to ask about all of that.

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**MH:** Yeah, I often find myself saying on the podcast or something else that the qualifier... A literate person would have understood this or would have seen this connection. But you're right—that's a limited audience. The other people were really dependent on how good their teachers were—whoever they were (parents or rabbis or something). So it's going to be a little bit of a scattershot, hit or miss proposition.

**BW:** To me, one of the "aha moments" was when I looked at the use of the word *anaginoskon* in two places in the New Testament. In Mark 13: "Let the reader understand." And more importantly, in Revelation 1:3-4. In both cases, the reader is not the audience. The reader is a lecturer who is reading *to* the audience. Which presupposes an audience that's basically oral and aural and probably can't read in detail. This stuff needs to be *told*. Jesus didn't say, "Let those with two good eyes *read*." It's not like our situation today, where everybody's reading blogs and reading the internet and all of that. Jesus said, "Let those with ears, *hear*." Well, it was primarily an oral cultural and writing was secondary. So the question is, "How does a sacred text function in a larger oral culture?" It's those kind of questions that really interest me.

**MH:** So the last question... I want to ask you a little bit about apologetics. We can see some of this coming through in your blog. Give us an example or just tell us generally kind of how you approach the postmodern mindset. What do you think is effective?

**BW:** I think we have a mixed group of people out there. I think we have premodern people out there, I think we have modernist people who think in modern ways, and yes, we have postmodern people out there. I think it's a wrong generalization to say, "Well, we're in a postmodern situation." Frankly, quite a lot of Americans haven't gotten the memo. They think in very modernist ways about things ranging from miracles to sacred texts. So it depends on the audience. But what I *have* found, having done a bunch of apologetics conferences with the Talbot folks and with Bill Craig and some of those folks, is that many of those philosophical apologetes are not really coming to grips with the difference that postmodernism (for example, in the Pacific Northwest) makes to the way people think about these issues. And so a lot of what passes for evangelical apologetics is arguing in a way that will be profoundly unconvincing to a postmodern person. "Here are the six proofs for the existence of God." Well, okay, that's a nice little logical miniature circle. Not impressed. So in terms of apologetics, what I say is, "You have to know your audience." I watch some of the culture-shapers that people actually listen to within both the evangelical community and much more broadly. For example, why has Rachel Held Evans garnered such a humongous audience through her blog and her books and what-not? What is it that she is saying that is appealing to all kinds of people? That would be one example. Or why has Andy Crouch done so well with his *Culture Making* books? What's that about? So I think you have to learn by having a detailed study of keeping your ear to the ground with culture and asking what works, and why? Those kinds of questions. I think we're tremendously unprepared for the growing hostility against Christianity in America.

**MH:** Yeah, I would agree with that. That's unfortunate.

Well, thanks for spending a few minutes with us! We know it's chaotic here. We've had a whole week of it ourselves (laughter). We're grateful you could do it.

40:00

**BW:** Well, my pleasure, and thank you for what you're doing! I think you're forcing many more rationalistic evangelicals to think seriously about the supernatural. And I think that's so vitally important because (as you know as well as I do), the growing part of Protestantism worldwide is Pentecostalism. There's a reason. They take demons seriously! They actually believe in card-carrying demons! And so thank you for your work. I think it's very important.

**MH:** Thank you.

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**MH:** Our next interview at SBL is with Dr. Tremper Longman. This is another name that our listeners and readers of my blog have heard of before. It's great to spend a little bit of time with Tremper. Why don't you introduce yourself briefly and then we'll get into some things that readers would be interested in hearing about?

**TL:** Sure. Thanks, Michael! It's great to be here with you and see you again, and to be at SBL—and before that IBR, an organization I'm very involved with. I'm a long-time professor of Old Testament, presently the Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies at Westmont College. I'm retiring at the end of the year, but I'll stay very involved in the field. I'm moving to Alexandria, Virginia, to be near kids and grandkids.

**MH:** Oh, wow. I didn't know you were retiring, so that's news! Do we need to edit that out? (laughter) Wow, I didn't realize that. Well, you brought up IBR, so we should say something about that to promote the Society. Tell us a little bit about IBR. What's different about it from ETS and SBL, because those are the two that people are going to know?

**TL:** Sure. IBR stands for the Institute of Biblical Research, and I've been very privileged to serve as the president for the past four years, and I have two more years on my term. It's an affiliate organization of the SBL. Its purpose... It was founded back in the late 70's by Earle Ellis and some other leading evangelical scholars of that day. It was to serve as an organization where scholars who wanted to do work in the context of faith (particularly an evangelical faith, which can be Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox evangelical faith) can get together, network... We have an annual lecture. We have very close to 700 members now. We've grown dramatically lately, as more and more scholars want to network in an organization like ours. So I'm very excited about all the things that are happening. You can go on our website: [www.ibr-bbr.org](http://www.ibr-bbr.org). We have publications, etc.

**MH:** Yeah, and this is the same BBR... I've had two articles published in BBR. Readers and listeners will know and recall some brief posts about that. So this is the agency behind that journal, and it's quite a good journal. So anything we can do to maybe get some people to subscribe to the journal... That would be a good thing to do if you're interested in biblical studies, and also just to follow the progress of IBR. You have an affiliate/associate membership, too, right, or something like that?

**TL:** Right. To be a fellow, you need a PhD in Biblical Studies. To be an associate, you can be on your way to getting a PhD, but we also have student memberships, as well as friend memberships. They're different, and it's all

explained on our website. We'd love to welcome people who want that kind of interaction.

**MH:** Yeah. And hopefully we'll get you a few more of those. So let's talk about your work. I've referenced your books, either on the blog or the podcast at some point. What is sort of recent that we could recommend for listeners to go out and buy and benefit from.

45:00 **TL:** Thank you! My most recent published book is a commentary on Genesis, which is in a new Zondervan series called *The Story of God Commentary Series*, which Scott McKnight and I are co-editing. Of course, I'm focused in on the Old Testament. You might ask, "Why do we need another commentary?" (laughter) There are a couple of unique features of this series that I think your listeners will be interested in. One is it's concerned not only with what the text means in its original setting, but what significance that meaning has for us today—how it relates to us today. And also in terms of the Old Testament, part of that is that every book of the Old Testament will offer (after looking at the message in its Old Testament setting)... We'll consider that book, in different segments of the book, its Christological significance, taking seriously Jesus' words in Luke 24 about how all of Scriptures look forward to him. So we've chosen a wonderful group of scholars to write the volumes in the Old Testament. Mine's the first one out. Wendy Widder's *Daniel* just came out this month, and *Proverbs* by Ryan O'Dowd is about to come out. So the New Testament series is a little bit further along. I had the privilege of designing the series for the Old Testament, varying for Old Testament purposes the design that Scott McKnight had for the New Testament. I think, particularly, preachers are going to find it helpful if they want to preach Christ from the Old Testament, to give them some ideas about how to do that.

**MH:** Right. And how to legitimately do that, as opposed to just sort of making stuff up.

**TL:** Right, we're not doing the allegorical kind of reading. (laughter) So I'm very excited about the series as a whole.

**MH:** That's great. I ran into Wendy yesterday and she gave me a golden ticket! I have to go pick up her *Daniel*. She says, "I quote you in chapter seven... you'd better go get that!"

**TL:** Of course she does! And yeah—Wendy did a wonderful job. I read it in manuscript form and *Proverbs* is great, too, by Ryan.

**MH:** That sounds like a great series. What else do you have, either already out or in the pipeline?

**TL:** Well, the next thing that's out is a book on wisdom. I've written commentaries over the years on all the wisdom books and other books that may not be wisdom

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but are filled with comments about wisdom, like Proverbs and Job and Ecclesiastes and Psalms. So now Baker asked me to do a more synthetic work. So in the summer, that book will come out. It's called *The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom: A Theological Introduction to Wisdom in Israel*. And we start in the Old Testament, but again, I talk about wisdom in the New Testament. Also wisdom during the Intertestamental time period, both in the Apocrypha and in the Dead Sea Scrolls. They even have an excursus there that talks about wisdom in the 21st Century. (laughter) So I go from the Old Testament to today. But the latter is just pretty suggestive.

**MH:** Anything we should look for on the horizon?

**TL:** Well, I'm actually (in my retirement) contracted to write about four or five books. Maybe one of the ones your listeners might be interested in is a book that doesn't have a title yet (even though I'm pretty far into it). It's basically about the controversial issues in the Old Testament, which would include sections on historicity issues (Does it matter whether the Exodus and Conquest took place?), on divine violence (What do we do with God's command to Moses and then Joshua to go in and conquer?), and creation/evolution, sexuality, slavery, and patriarchy.

**MH:** So, basically, this is going to be sort of your take (or your response) to a lot of the things that in the last 2, 3, 4, or 5 years other people have come out with books and have kind of rattled some evangelical cages...

**TL:** Yeah! As you know, one of my best friends/former students/colleague is Peter Enns, whom I love dearly as a friend and we interchange ideas all the time. I'm going to challenge some of the ways he thinks about these issues—very ironically, because I know his heart like a lot of people don't. He's really trying to help people grapple with these difficult issues. [They] know I'm writing this book and I'm going to let them read it while I do...

50:00

**MH:** You're not going to surprise him with it? Like a photo bomb book or something? (Laughter)

**TL:** No, no, no. Personally, I think one of the sad things about our evangelical world is that we tend to demonize people who disagree with us and go after them in negative ways that aren't helpful to further the discussion.

**MH:** Right.

**TL:** Besides that, I know that my book... There will be something in it that will make everybody on whatever side they are, there will be one issue where they'll say, "Yeah, Longman has it right!" and another one like, "Is he *nuts*?" (laughter) But I'm trying to write it in a scholarly way in the sense that my 30 or 40 years of scholarship will be behind it, but in a kind of very accessible way, because



especially Pete writes so well in that vein. I'm not going to mimic him (I can't), but you can really see his personality come through. But I do want it to be an accessible kind of presentation on these issues.

**MH:** That kind of thing is needed, where you can offer push-back. A lot of people are going to know (at least within the Academy) that you guys have a relationship. You're not shooting at each other. It's a discussion. It's an actual discussion, as opposed to an ambush or a "gotcha" kind of thing. That kind of thing ought to actually be done more often.

**TL:** That's my feeling, as well, Michael.

**MH:** I'm surprised a publisher hasn't sort of leaped on that in other things, because you come to the meetings and you talk to people. "Oh, I have a friend that disagrees with me." "Well, why don't you two do something together or respond back and forth?"

**TL:** Well, I think Rich Maow is a good person who speaks into that kind of attitude, trying to encourage civility. Not just in our circles, but in the political realm and others, there's so much nasty-talk that doesn't get us anywhere. So yeah—that is my hope with this book. And then I'm also writing a commentary on Revelation. (laughter)

**MH:** Okay, now you really *have* gone over the deep end! (laughter)

**TL:** I know, I know. But who better to write a commentary on Revelation than an Old Testament professor, right?

**MH:** Of course... really! It uses the Old Testament so much. Why not? That's fair game!

**TL:** Your book will be (and is) very helpful to me as I think through a lot of the issues in Revelation. It's actually a series that Kregel is doing called *The New Testament Through Old Testament Eyes*.

**MH:** That's a good idea.

**TL:** I think so.

**MH:** That would be a good series. Well, hopefully at this time next year... We probably can't count on the one that's sort of a response to Pete being out because it takes a while for these things to get up and running and edited and what-not, but some of these other things will be right there at the forefront and you'll probably be on to something else. (laughter)

**TL:** Yeah, there are two or three that I haven't... I'll mention them next year!  
(laughing)

**MH:** Well, thanks for spending a little time with us.

**TL:** Thank you! I really appreciate it.

**MH:** You bet.

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**TS:** Well, Mike, that was three great interviews! I enjoyed Walton... he's another character! I enjoyed his interview; that was pretty fun. And then Witherington, he's a character, too.

**MH:** He is a character! He really is.

**TS:** All you scholars are a bunch of characters. (laughter)

**MH:** I'd say we let our hair down, but we don't really have a whole lot of hair so... At an event like this, it's great just to come and you see who these people are. By and large, they're just normal. They like to have fun, too.

**TS:** Yeah, I grew my beard out to see if I could go all mountain-man on you scholars here, to see if I could do that. But I've seen some impressive beards here myself.

**MH:** You forgot your tweed! (laughter)

**TS:** All right, Mike. We appreciate it. Look for Part 6 coming up after our "Live from San Antonio" episode, which is going to be released next. Then we've got one more conference interview left, so be looking forward to that. I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.