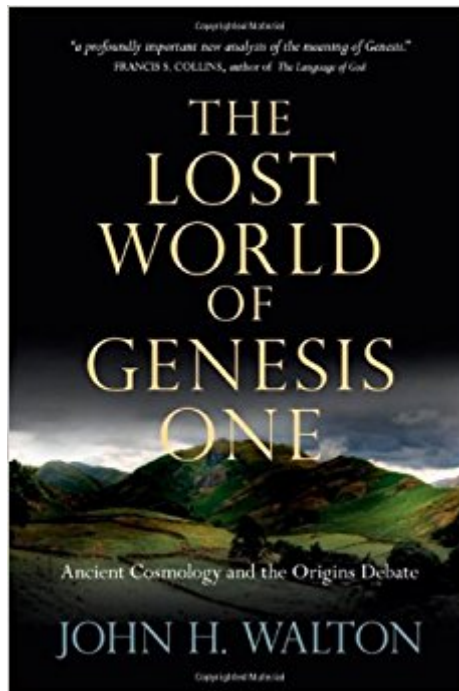


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The Lost World Of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology And The Origins Debate



Synopsis

In this astute mix of cultural critique and biblical studies, John H. Walton presents and defends twenty propositions supporting a literary and theological understanding of Genesis 1 within the context of the ancient Near Eastern world and unpacks its implications for our modern scientific understanding of origins. Ideal for students, professors, pastors and lay readers with an interest in the intelligent design controversy and creation-evolution debates, Walton's thoughtful analysis unpacks seldom appreciated aspects of the biblical text and sets Bible-believing scientists free to investigate the question of origins.

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Customer Reviews

I enjoy books that push me out of my comfort zone and cause me to ask questions I had never considered before. John Walton's The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate (IVP, 2009) is one of those kinds of books. Walton offers an interpretation of Genesis 1 that focuses on the worldview of ancient Israelites. In a nutshell, here is Walton's proposal: Genesis 1 was not intended to give us a scientific understanding of the material origins of the universe. Instead, the seven days of creation are a cosmic temple inauguration ceremony that describe the functional beginning of our world. If your eyes have already glazed over after reading that summary, then consider his illustration about a college. At what point is a college created? Is it when the buildings go up? Or when the students and faculty arrive on campus and classes begin? Or when the commencement ceremony begins? Walton's proposal is that Genesis 1 does not give

us a narrative of when matter began to exist. The narrative concerns functional origins: when the world began to function the way God intended for human creation to flourish. Walton writes: "I believe that people in the ancient world believed that something existed not by virtue of its material properties, but by virtue of its having a function in an ordered system." (26) In case some might wonder if Walton is denying the doctrine of creation ex nihilo (out of nothing), he clarifies: "I firmly believe that God is fully responsible for material origins, and that, in fact, material origins do involve at some point a creation out of nothing. But that theological question is not the one we are asking. We are asking a textual question."

I have been quite pleased with the relatively recent spate of books that have been released by scientists who are quite and proudly adamant that a serious and intellectually minded Christian can be without cognitive dissonance between his faith and his view of science. Authors such as Kenneth Miller, Denis Lamoureux, Darrel Falk, and Francis Collins have demonstrated that one can be a good Christian while accepting good science. Entering onto this stage full of lab coats is now eminent Old Testament scholar John Walton who brings his expertise as a contextually informed exegete to the table. I had something of a hint that we would see a book of this nature after reading his thoughts on the first few chapters of Genesis in his commentary some time back. Happily there is no more need for waiting. In this work Walton's thesis consists of a series of propositions that culminate with the contention that the creation account of Genesis is a description of the universe's construction as a temple of God. Throughout the course of the book Walton makes a couple of salient points that relate to the "Origins Debate". First of all, we should keep in mind that there is little if no basis in thinking that God would intend to communicate "scientifically correct" statements via the creation account. For (1) there is no statement in the Bible that conveys a scientific truth that the biblical writers would not have already known. (2) There are statements in the Bible that convey cosmological and physiological notions that simply do not comport with science. "Domed cosmology" and the additional notions it contained is clearly without scientific merit. Another example Walton cites is that some of the words translated as "mind" in English actually mean entrails in the Hebrew. Why?

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