



## ***The Lost World of the Torah*** ***Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context***

February 26, 2019 | \$20, 256 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5241-3

**John H. Walton** (PhD, Hebrew Union College) is professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College and Graduate School. His many books include *The Lost World of Genesis One* and *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*.

# Discovering the Truth of the Torah for Today

## Why did you decide to include a *Lost World* book on the Torah?

**John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton:** In our modern world, our handling of what we call the “biblical law” teeters between heated controversy and utter neglect. Controversies arise when Old Testament laws seem either odd beyond comprehension (not eating pork) or morally reprehensible (executing children). Neglect results when we consider the law obsolete, no long carrying any normative power (tassels on clothing, sacrifices). Even readers who do attempt to make use of the Old Testament “law” often find it either irrelevant or so confusing that they throw up their hands in despair, frustrated at its perceived impenetrability. Despite the extremes of vitriol and dismissiveness, people—sometimes the same people who are controversial or dismissive—continue to propose moral principles from these laws and garner proof texts to resolve the issues that arise in society by offering the “biblical view.” The result is that both Christians and skeptics regularly abuse the Old Testament Law as it is misrepresented and misunderstood, and its true message too often lies either fallow or trampled underfoot.

## What do you hope to convey for readers as they study the Torah?

**Walton and Walton:** If we seek to be faithful interpreters, we need be readers who read the text in an informed and careful manner, who are consistent in the methods that we use, who refuse to manipulate the text to our own ends, and who respect the autonomy under which divine authority operates. We must interpret in light of a sound understanding of the language and literature of the text, including how the genre works. We must be committed to seeking what the original communicators intended to say; no more, no less. As faithful interpreters of “Law”—more accurately, “Torah”—we must therefore seek understanding of how the genre works, what the paragraphs of legal sayings meant in their context, and what significance (if any) they should have for people today seeking to order their lives and society in faithful submission to God’s Word. The most important interpretive question is not “What is this statement telling me to do in order to represent God properly?” The prior question we should ask instead is, “Why is this in here?”—because that will help us address the literary task.

## What is the main objective of this *Lost World* book?

**Walton and Walton:** It is the first objective of this book to provide information about the Torah that will help readers to become more aware of how this biblical literature functioned in its context—that is, why this literature was presented in this particular way, and why what it says by doing so was important enough that it was regarded as Scripture. We have to start in the ancient world, recognize the nature of this sort of literature in the ancient world, then based on that contextualization, we need to penetrate the Hebrew text to understand how the Torah was meant to function for the



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**J. Harvey Walton** (MA, Wheaton College Graduate School) is a researcher in biblical studies and has contributed to a variety of publications. He is pursuing graduate studies at St. Andrews University.

ancient Israelites. Only then, secondly, will we be in a position to inquire what the authoritative significance of the Torah is for us.

People using the Old Testament and the Torah today want to believe that they can address the significant issues of culture in “biblical” ways and, specifically, with “biblical” answers and positions. In our society today, as diverse and pluralistic as it is, we are faced with a multitude of issues, including abortion, stem cell research, genetic engineering, climate change, land exploitation, species extinction, capital punishment, immigration policies, creation care, sustainability, euthanasia, and, perhaps most pervasively, questions concerning rights and identity (gender, sexuality, ethnic, racial, etc.). We want the Bible to give us answers, but whatever answers might be embedded there, or whether there are any answers at all, can be determined only by having an informed understanding of the biblical text and by using a consistent methodology to arrive at our interpretation. We are going to suggest that finding what we can consider “biblical” answers to these social issues is not as straightforward as it seems.

**What must we understand about the Torah in order to faithfully study the text?**

**Walton and Walton:** At the core of this book is the understanding that the ancient world was more interested in order than in legislation per se, and authorities were not inclined to make what we call “laws” (though decrees are commonplace) to regulate everyday life in society. Instead of relying on legislation (a formal body of written law enacted by an authority), order was achieved through the wisdom of those who governed society. We have too often looked to the Torah to construct legislation as if it were intended to be legislation. If, as we contend, it was never intended as legislation, then that is the wrong approach. If the focus of the Torah is order and wisdom, then it will provide for us an understanding of order and wisdom at least in an Israelite context. We will then have to determine the relevance that has for us today. We will contend that Torah is situated in its ancient Near Eastern cultural context. But the Torah was also given to Israel as part of Israel’s covenant with Yahweh; thus it is situated within the terms of the Israelite covenant. Finally, that covenant operates within a very specific conception of the nature of divinity and the relationship between God, people, and land. Thus the covenant is situated within the Israelite theology concerning sacred space—Yahweh living among them. These are essential elements to understand if we aspire to be faithful interpreters.

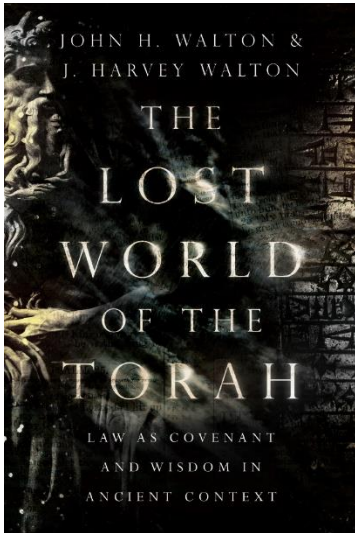


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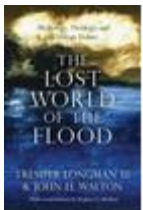


## DETAILS

IVP Academic

### *The Lost World Series from IVP*

The intention with the Lost World Series is not to offer the single “correct” interpretation of the given text. Instead, these books seek to provide an interpretation based on a conviction that the Bible is the Word of God—Scripture that speaks truly. The goal is not to convert the reader to the author’s conclusions, or even to persuade the reader to adopt their way of thinking. Instead, this series seeks to bring information to the reader’s attention that has helped the authors as they have struggled with the passages.



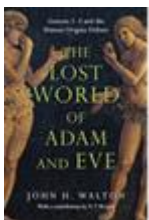
*“With a firm but gentle hand the authors lead their readers into the world of ancient Israel, offering an interpretation of the biblical flood narrative that honors the authority of Scripture and respects the scientific consensus on geological matters.”*

—Kyle Greenwood, associate professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, Colorado Christian University



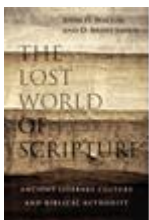
*“Into the many recent discussions concerning the ethical and moral problems of the Israelite conquest, Walton and Walton offer a much needed corrective, effectively arguing that to properly understand these troublesome texts one needs to interpret them in light of their ancient context.”*

—David T. Lamb, Allan A. MacRae Professor of Old Testament, Biblical Theological Seminary



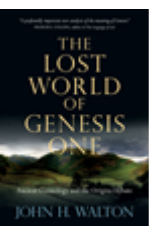
*“Here we are treated to more ‘propositions’ about Adam and Eve that will anchor our faith in the ancient world in such a way that the fresh Spirit of God can blow on those chapters to illuminate all who will listen. Thank God for The Lost World of Adam and Eve.”*

—Scot McKnight, professor of New Testament, Northern Seminary



*“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.”*

—Lyndon Drake, *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research*



*“Respected scholar John Walton argues convincingly that Genesis was intended to describe the creation of the functions of the cosmos, not its material nature. In the process, he elevates Scripture to a new level of respectful understanding, and eliminates any conflict between scientific and scriptural descriptions of origins.”*

—Francis S. Collins, head of the Human Genome Project, author of *The Language of God*



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