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Wisdom for Faithful Reading *Principles and Practices for Old Testament Interpretation*

April 25, 2023 | \$26, 248 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0487-6

“Evangelical pastors and church leaders will appreciate John H. Walton’s Wisdom for Faithful Reading. Irenic and thoughtful, Walton introduces principles for how to read the Christian Old Testament faithfully. Anyone who reads this book will come away with a better sense of how to read Scripture and an appreciation for its beauty and richness.”

Nathan MacDonald, professor of the interpretation of Old Testament at the University of Cambridge

Five Principles for Faithful Interpretation

The basic ideas leading to faithful interpretation . . . can be summarized as the following five principles.

1. The author’s message carries the authority of Scripture and of God. When we depart from his literary intentions, we are no longer submitting our interpretation to the authority of the text.
2. The author’s message is couched in his language and culture. We therefore need to be alert to the dangers of reading Scripture through our contemporary language and culture. We may not be able to recover certain details of his language and culture, but we can often recognize when we are driven by our own language and culture.
3. Our accountability in interpretation is to track with the author in the text that he has produced. It is what he says and what he means—his message—that matters because that comes with the authority of God.
4. Our interpretation should be supported with evidence that can identify the author’s literary intentions. If an interpretation that we are considering cannot be defended as something the author could have meant, we should reconsider. As I have noted, that evidence is typically derived from analysis that is linguistic, literary, cultural, historical, and theological.
5. Our task is to find our place in God’s story, which he has communicated so that we can know him and be in relationship with him, thereby becoming whole-hearted participants in his plans and purposes as he has revealed them in Scripture. Sometimes Christians wonder, “How can I know God?” We can find an answer to that if we think about how we come to know people in our lives. When you first meet someone, you introduce yourself—by telling a little part of your story. As you spend more time together, you each tell more of your story to each other. We know people through their stories—stories of their past, present, and future. The more of their story we know, and the more of ours we share, the deeper we grow in relationship. In the Bible, God has given us his story, and we come to know him and grow into deeper relationship with him as we encounter his story and share ours with him.

To be clear, in this book I am differentiating between “interpretation”—the process of determining what the authors of Scripture intended to communicate—and “application”—what we do with the message that is actually in the text once we understand it. We need to engage in interpretation to the best of our ability, using all the evidence that we can garner. Once we have identified the message the author intended to communicate (interpretation), we then need to appropriate it for ourselves and prayerfully seek wisdom to apply it to our lives and our world. Such application derives specifically from the message of the text—it is tethered to the text.

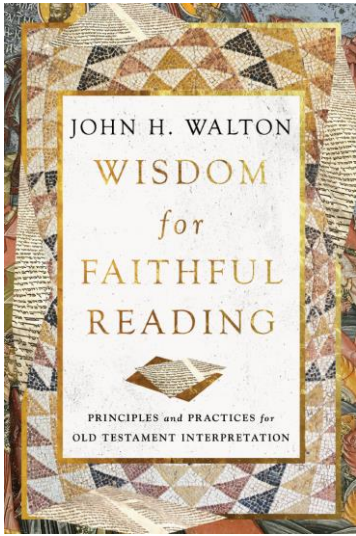
There is, however, a second type of application that is tangential to what the author was communicating rather than derived from it. Such untethered application may represent the Spirit’s leading and can have great benefit. Much about Christian belief and the Christian life of faith is not addressed in Scripture, but it is important and should be addressed.



Karin DeHaven, academic publicist
kdehaven@ivpress.com or ivpress.com/media

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My intention, therefore, is not to cut off all the insightful or inspiring thoughts that people have about Scripture that may not track with the author. But those thoughts should not be mistaken for biblical interpretation. The danger is that they will take the place of biblical interpretation and lead us to neglect the messages that carry the authority of the author and text.

If we neglect giving attention to the author’s intentions and seek application only based on our intuitive reading of our translations, we risk running off the tracks to wander in the beautiful meadows of our own imaginations. We may enjoy the meadows, but they don’t get us where we need to go if we seek to understand the authoritative message of the Word of God (following the tracks). In contrast, so much stands to be gained when we follow the tracks laid down in the message of Scripture. Readers might understandably be interested in how we should go about doing application, but that is not what this book is about—I am going to focus my attention on doing interpretation.

—Taken from chapter five, “Five Principles for Faithful Interpretation”



Karin DeHaven, academic publicist
kdehaven@ivpress.com or ivpress.com/media



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Wisdom for Faithful Reading *Principles and Practices for Old Testament Interpretation*

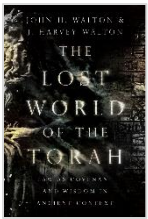
April 25, 2023 | \$26, 272 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0487-6

The church has often lost its way in reading the Old Testament for lack of sound principles of interpretation. John Walton offers a consistent approach to give us confidence as faithful interpreters, laying out his tried-and-true practices developed over four decades in the classroom. You may never read the Old Testament the same way again.

New from a Trusted Old Testament Scholar

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 other titles in the Lost World Series, *Old Testament Theology for Christians*, and the IVP Bible Background Commentary: *Old Testament*.

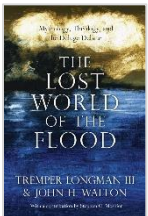
Also by John H. Walton:



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

by John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton | February 26, 2019 | \$25, 288 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5241-3

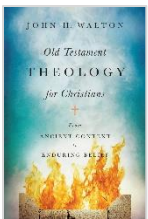
To modern eyes, what we call the biblical law, or Torah, seems either odd beyond comprehension (not eating lobster) or positively reprehensible (executing children). Using a consistent methodology to look at the Torah through the lens of the ancient Near East, Walton and Walton offer a restorative understanding that will have dramatic effects in interpreting the text and in discerning the significance of the Torah for today.



The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate

by Tremper Longman III and John H. Walton | April 3, 2018 | \$22, 192 pages, casebound | 978-0-8308-5200-0

The Genesis flood account has been probed and analyzed for centuries. But what might the biblical author have been saying to his ancient audience? In order to rediscover the biblical flood, we must set aside our own cultural and interpretive assumptions and visit the distant world of the ancient Near East. Walton and Longman lead us on this enlightening journey toward a more responsible reading of a timeless biblical narrative.



Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief

by John H. Walton | November 21, 2017 | \$40, 320 pages, hardcover | 978-0-8308-5192-1

The Old Testament was written *for us*, but not *to us*. Inviting us to leave our modern Christian preconceptions behind, John Walton contends that we will only grasp the Old Testament's theology when we are immersed in its Ancient Near Eastern context, being guided by what the ancient authors intended as they wrote within their cognitive environment.



Karin DeHaven, academic publicity
800.846.4587 ext. 4096 or kdehaven@ivpress.com



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