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Did Adam and Eve Exist? (Participant's Guide)


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Participant's Guide to

Did Adam and Eve Exist?

A Study of *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*

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Summer 2017

How to Use This Material?

This study of the Fall and the historicity of Adam and Eve is composed of various “Modules,” with each Module covering a number of “Propositions” (chapters) from the book *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* by John Walton. Each module contains assigned chapters for the session and discussion questions for participants, including (where appropriate) suggested answers for the Leader to keep or disregard as he/she wishes. The questions are to be completed before each meeting and are meant to help you wrestle with the concepts introduced in the chapters of each session. The inclusion of discussion questions, to be written by you as you read, is encouraged. In these questions, you will have the opportunity to grow through asking and answering these questions in a healthy setting. Please note that you should by no means limit yourself to the questions contained here.

As you read, it is our hope that you will come across (and come up with) questions which challenge you, both in understanding your personal faith and in understanding the truth of what the Bible actually claims regarding the origins of mankind.

Who is the author of *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*?

John H. Walton is professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College and Graduate School. Walton earned a Masters in Old Testament Studies from Wheaton, as well as a Ph.D. in Hebrew and Cognitive Studies at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. He also served as Old Testament professor at Moody Bible Institute for two decades before joining the faculty and staff at Wheaton. As dedicated readers of the *Lost World* will discover, his primary literary focus is in the development of Hebrew culture, including areas of comparison between the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East (especially as those areas are illustrated in Genesis). Walton's many books include *The Lost World of Genesis One* (a precursor to *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*) and *The IVP Background Commentary: Old Testament* (with Victor Matthews and Mark Chavalas).

For those interested, more of his biography and background can be found on his Faculty page at wheaton.edu. See <http://www.wheaton.edu/Academics/Faculty/W/John-Walton>.

As you read, one would do well to keep in mind that Walton holds a healthy respect for the Old Testament (and the New), along with pastors and theologians of yesterday and today. As both a Christian and a scholar, he dedicated much of his life to the study of the Bible. What he proposes in this book is simply one interpretation, but he obviously regards it as a valuable interpretation enough to publish a book on the subject. Any Christian, whether he or she walks away from the book singing Walton's praises or not, might consider study and analysis of such an interpretation to be worthy of one's effort and time.

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Module 0: Before You Begin

As you read and think about the themes presented in each "Proposition" chapter of The Lost World, be sure to write down thoughts of your own. In addition, note any interesting points that you raise or hear in your small group discussion.

Walton, pp. 11-14

“[I]nformation from the literature of the ancient world or new insights from scientific investigation may appropriately prompt us to go back to the Bible to reconsider our interpretations” (14). When might it be appropriate (if ever) to let science influence biblical interpretation? When would it be inappropriate?

Module 1: Reading Genesis within the Ancient Near East

Walton, chs. 1-5, 7

Reading and Reflection

“Proposition 1: Genesis Is an Ancient Document”

1. How does the traffic report analogy help us think about reading Genesis?

2. Did the ancient world have a category for what we call “natural laws”? Do you think modern (scientific) worldviews tend to be generally materially-oriented (that is more concerned with matter and cause-and-effect among created things) or functionally-oriented (that is, more concerned with the role and purpose of created things) (see also pg. 136)?

3. When it comes to understanding the natural world, how might our modern worldview differ from that of an ancient Near-Eastern culture? How might this influence our interpretation of the Bible?

4. Do you agree with Walton that “Though the text has much revelation to offer about the nature of God and his character and work, there is not a single incidence of new information being offered by God to the Israelites about the regular operation of the world (what we would call natural science)” (21)?

5. Does the “clarity of Scripture” propagated by the Reformers mean that every part of Scripture was transparent to any casual reader?

“Proposition 2: In the Ancient World and the Old Testament, Creating Focuses on Establishing Order by Assigning Roles and Functions”

1. Are there any inspired translations of the Bible?

2. The word *bārā'* (“create”) gets used to indicate *the transition between nonexistence and existence*. In the other occurrences in the Bible, does this verb usually describe creation *order or material*?

3. Does our belief that God created *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”) come from Genesis 1:1?

4. Is the situation described in Genesis 1:2 about lacking *material* or lacking *order and purpose*?

“Proposition 3: Genesis 1 Is an Account of Functional Origins, Not Material Origins”

1. Comment on the way this chart explains the days of creation as set out by Genesis:

1 Day & Night (1:1-5)	2 Waters Above (the heavens) & Waters Below (the oceans) (1:6-8)	3 Land & Vegetation (1:11-12)	6b Man & Woman to rule: land animals, fish, birds, “all the earth.”	7 God to rule: humanity, land animals, fish, birds, “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed... and God rested... God blessed & sanctified that seventh day.” (2:2)
4 Sun to rule the day Moon to rule the night (1:16-18)	5 Birds to rule the heavens; fish to rule the seas “And God said be fruitful, multiply... fill your domain.” (1:22)	6a Land Animals & Humanity “Let the land produce living creatures.” (1:24-26)	“Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, rule over... every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (1:26)	

2. According to Walton, do the descriptions in this account focus on what happens on one initial occasion, or on what happens all the time? How does this influence your reading of these chapters?

3. What is Walton’s response to the question, “why can’t it be both material and functional” (43)? Do you accept Walton’s insistence that the presupposition that origin accounts are essentially material stems from *our own culture* and not that of the ancient Israelites?

4. How is the analogy of a “home” versus a “house” helpful to understand how Genesis describes creation? (See also pp. 51-52.)

“Proposition 4: In Genesis 1, God Orders the Cosmos as Sacred Space”

1. According to Walton, what is the objective of creation?
2. What are some features of the seven-day creation account that would make an ancient reader quickly draw the conclusion that it is a “temple story”?
3. Who is the original audience of the creation account, Adam and Eve, or Israel? How does this audience help us understand the symbolic importance of the Sabbath week, the number seven, and “sacred space”?

“Proposition 5: When God Establishes Functional Order, It Is ‘Good’”

4. Does the word *tôb* (“good”) ever get used in the sense of unadulterated, pristine perfection in the rest of the Old Testament?

5. According to Walton, does Genesis 1 suggest that everything pre-fall is perfect, with no pain, suffering, predation, or death? Is the ultimate order of new creation achieved at the end of Genesis 1?

“Proposition 7: The Second Creation Account (Gen 2:4-24) Can Be Viewed as a Sequel Rather Than as a Recapitulation of Day Six in the First Account (Gen 1:1-2:3)”

1. What problems (sequence, etc.) exist in Genesis 2-4 if we read Genesis 2 as a more specific account of what happened on day six of Genesis 1? What do you think of Walton’s suggestion that the people in Genesis 1 may not be (only) Adam and Eve?

2. How is the word *tōlēdōt* used elsewhere in the OT, and what does this suggest about what follows Gen 2:4?

3. What stood out to you in Chapters 1-5 and 7? Was there anything that you strongly agreed with? Was there anything that you strongly *disagreed* with?

Module 2: The Archetypal Adam and the Act of Formation

Walton, chs. 6, 8-10

Reading and Reflection

“Proposition 6: ’ādām Is Used in Genesis 1-5 in a Variety of Ways”

1. How do we know that Adam (*’ādām* “human”) and Eve (*ḥawwāh* “life”) are not historical names, but instead are *assigned* names that are larger than the characters to whom they refer?

2. What is the difference between an “archetype” and a “federal representative”?

“Proposition 8: ‘Forming from Dust’ and ‘Building from Rib’ Are Archetypal Claims and Not Claims of Material Origins”

1. Explain the difference between “de novo” and “material continuity.” Which of these claims would be inherently contradictory to current scientific models of human origins?

2. According to Walton, what does the designation “dust” refer to (see Gen 3:19 below)? What does the provision of a tree of life suggest about humans before the fall?

Genesis 3:19 KJV, In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

3. How does Walton define the word “archetype”? Does Adam’s formation from dust pertain uniquely to him, or to all humans (see, e.g., Job 10:9)?

4. Does Walton argue that the Hebrew word *ṣēlāʾ* is better translated “rib” or “side”? Why?

“Proposition 9: Forming of Humans in Ancient Near Eastern Accounts Is Archetypal, So It Would Not Be Unusual for Israelites to Think in Those Terms”

1. Without getting too bogged down in the details of the ancient Near Eastern texts surveyed in this chapter, what is your impression of the comparative literature? Did you know there were so many parallels to the creation accounts that were circulated in the ancient world in which the Old Testament was first written? Does Walton suggest that the Bible is rooted in the same environment as these texts, departs from these texts, or both?

2. Look back to Proposition 3 (p. 42). What are the four categories in which the Old Testament speaks of the “image of God”? Do these pertain to individuals, or the corporate species?

“Proposition 10: The New Testament Is More Interested in Adam and Eve as Archetypes Than as Biological Progenitors”

1. After reading about passages like Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, does Paul seem to be more concerned with the question of human origins per se, or with the effects of the fall?

2. What stood out to you in Chapters 6 and 8-10? Was there anything that you strongly agreed with? Was there anything that you strongly *disagreed* with?

Module 3: Historicity, Symbolism and Imagistic Thinking, and the Natural Order

Walton, chs. 11-16

Reading and Reflection

“Proposition 11: Though Some of the Biblical Interest in Adam and Eve Is Archetypal, They Are Real People Who Existed in a Real Past”

1. Does Walton think that Paul’s argument about Adam and Christ (Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15) would work if there was not a historical moment when sin entered the world? What does Walton mean by the word “punctiliar” when applied to the entrance of sin into the world?

“Proposition 12: Adam Is Assigned as Priest in Sacred Space, with Eve to Help”

1. What is the garden of Eden, as “sacred space,” designed by God to do (e.g., top of p. 105)?

2. Explain the following statement about Genesis and parallel texts from the ancient world: “They are operating in the same room of discourse, but Genesis has rearranged all the furniture” (p. 110).

3. What do you think of Walton’s suggestion that perhaps Adam and Eve were the first *significant* humans, not necessarily the first humans?

“Proposition 13: The Garden Is an Ancient Near Eastern Motif for Sacred Space, and the Trees Are Related to God as the Source of Life and Wisdom”

1. Why does Walton think we make a mistake to think that the Genesis account of what happened in Eden is simply about “magical trees in a garden paradise” (124)? What is it about?

“Proposition 14: The Serpent Would Have Been Viewed as a Chaos Creature from the Non-ordered Realm, Promoting Disorder”

1. Although the serpent is later identified in the NT as Satan (Rom 16:20; Rev 12:9; 20:2), what are some reasons Walton gives for thinking about the serpent as an Israelite reader would? Does Walton classify the serpent as a creature of *non-order* or *disorder*?

“Proposition 15: Adam and Eve Chose to Make Themselves the Center of Order and Source of Wisdom, Thereby Admitting Disorder into the Cosmos”

1. Sin can be thought of as a *crime*, as a word that means *missing the mark*, or as something that causes a disruption in the relationship between humans and God. Which of these do you think of most naturally? Which does Walton endorse (142)?

2. Does the OT ever speak about “the fall”? In terms of Genesis itself (according to Walton), is “the fall” more that Adam and Eve *initiated a situation* that was not already there, or that they *failed to achieve a solution* to a situation that was in their reach?

3. What does Walton mean that “salvation is more importantly about what we are saved *to...* than what we are saved *from*” (148)?

“Proposition 16: We Currently Live in a World with Non-order, Order and Disorder”

1. What elements in Revelation 21 point back to Genesis 1-2 and show that *new* creation (not original creation) is when all non-order (not only disorder) will be resolved (see also p. 160)?

2. What stood out to you in Chapters 11-16? Was there anything that you strongly agreed with? Was there anything that you strongly *disagreed* with?

Module 4: Original Sin and the Remedy

Walton, chs. 17-18

Reading and Reflection

“Proposition 17: All People Are Subject to Sin and Death Because of the Disorder in the World, Not Because of Genetics”

1. Describe Augustine’s biological model of how sin is passed on to all humans. What are two problems with this view, one from what we now know about DNA, and one from the (incorrect) translation of Romans 5:12 that Augustine was familiar with (see p. 157)?

2. How does defining the nature of the fall as “wanting to be like God” solve the dilemma of how Jesus is not subject to original sin?

3. Consider Walton’s use of Romans 5:13 in this chapter, arguing that “sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law.” What do you think of this statement?

“Proposition 18: Jesus Is the Keystone of God’s Plan to Resolve Disorder and Perfect Order”

1. Read Colossians 1:15-23 and comment on how well this passage supports the reading of Genesis 1-3 that Walton has outlined in the book thus far.

2. With the understanding that the tower of Babel was a “ziggurat,” was the tower for people to reach heaven or about providing sacred space for God to enter? What then (according to Walton) was the sinful behavior that God rejects, *pride*, or *creating sacred space for their own benefit*?

3. What stood out to you in Chapters 17-18? Was there anything that you strongly agreed with? Was there anything that you strongly *disagreed* with?

Module 5: Genomes and the Image of God

Walton, chs. 19-21

Reading and Reflection

“Proposition 19: Paul’s Use of Adam Is More Interested in the Effect of Sin on the Cosmos Than in the Effect of Sin on Humanity and Has Nothing to Say About Human Origins”

1. Ever since the scientific revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have Christians focused more on the *existence* of Adam or the *vocation* of Adam? Why is this problematic, according to Wright?

“Proposition 20: It Is Not Essential That All People Descended from Adam and Eve”

1. What claim must be made if we are to *deny* the genetic history that seems obvious from a comparison of genomes (that is, that there is material continuity between species)? Does Walton think the Bible demands that the evidence of history in the genome needs to be denied?

“Proposition 21: Humans Could Be Viewed as Distinct Creatures and a Special Creation of God Even If There Was Material Continuity”

1. Is evolution inherently atheistic?

2. Walton does not deny that the easiest reading of the text (and one that has been believed for millennia) would suggest a de novo creation of human beings. Do you think that a failure to read it this way constitutes a rejection of biblical truths? Either way, has Walton's book helped you to understand why Christians who take the Bible seriously could read the text another way because of what we have learned from ancient Near-Eastern writings and from modern science?

3. Briefly explain Walton's and your understanding of each of the four aspects of the image of God outlined in the book (*function, identity, substitution, and relationship*) (194-196).

1) function

2) identity

3) substitution

4) relationship

“Conclusion and Summary”

1. Walton insists that the *roles and functions* of human beings as presented in the Bible cannot be confirmed through science. But he also insists that Genesis, read properly, will be compatible with the truths about our world that scientists uncover. Discuss these two claims and your own response.

2. How does Walton respond to questions such as *How dare we disregard two millennia of church history? Are we better than the church fathers? Would God leave us without sound interpretation for so long* (205)?

3. What four reasons does he give for carrying this conversation forward? Do you agree, or do you think the hard work required of us in engaging these issues is misplaced?

3. What stood out to you in Chapters 19-21? Was there anything that you strongly agreed with? Was there anything that you strongly *disagreed* with?

Bibliography

Walton, John H. *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic (InterVarsity Press), 2015. Print.