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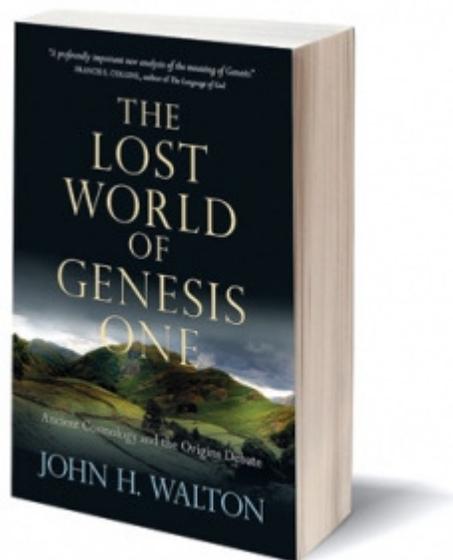


## John Walton's propositions on Genesis 1.

Posted on December 27, 2011 by Brian LePort • Posted in [Bibliology](#), [Book Reviews](#), [Books \(General\)](#), [Creation](#), [Creation/ Evolution](#), [Inspiration/ Inerrancy](#), [John H. Walton](#), [Science](#), [Scripture](#) • [10 Comments](#)

This year I hope to study the relationship between modern science and biblical origins narratives more. As I've mentioned previously I'd like to read C. John Collins *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* and Peter Enns' forthcoming *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins*. First though, I will be reading John H. Walton's *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*. I know this book was quite popular many months ago, but I was in the midst of my Master of Theology program (Th.M.) and there was little time for books that were not related to my immediate studies. Now that I am almost finished I can turn some of my attention elsewhere.

Walton presents eighteen propositions in his book for the reader to consider: **(1)**



The Lost World of Genesis One by John H. Walton

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This is the biblioblog of Brian LePort, Daniel Levy, and JohnDave Medina.

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Genesis 1 as ancient cosmology; **(2)** ancient cosmology is function oriented; **(3)** the Hebrew *bara'* ("create") concerns function; **(4)** the beginning in Genesis 1.1. is "nonfunctional"; **(5)** days one through three establish functions; **(6)** days four through six install those functions; **(7)** divine rest takes place in a temple; **(8)** the cosmos are described as a temple for God; **(9)** the seven "days" of Genesis 1 are a "cosmic temple inauguration"; **(10)** these days *do not* concern material origins; **(11)** this is reached via "face-value" exegesis; **(12)** other theories "either go too far or not far enough"; **(13)** the difference between "origins" in science and Scripture is "metaphysical in nature"; **(14)** God's role as creator and sustainer are essentially one; **(15)** debate about Intelligent Design (ID) is about "purpose"; **(16)** scientific explanation can be viewed "in light of purpose"; **(17)** this will result in a stronger theology from Genesis 1; **(18)** public education should be neutral regarding purpose.

I will read each proposition and post my response on this blog. I come to the book with the following presuppositions:

**First**, I am a theist who affirms the existence of the Christian God. I don't have categories for *pure naturalism*. So I assume that God is active in the world.

**Second**, I find Scripture to be trustworthy, but not *inerrant*. In other words, the Holy Spirit and the community of the church provide a context wherein Scripture can be understood as the guiding narrative of the community or as N.T. Wright and Kevin J. Vanhoozer have emphasized, *the script* that guides the cosmic drama wherein we find ourselves (yes, that is a bit of Brian McLaren's jargon in there as well). This does not mean *every scientific and historical detail must be accurate*. I find that when Christianity is solely a book religion it ignores factors that the book itself promotes, namely Pneumatology and Ecclesiology.

**Third**, as a student of biblical literature, Second Temple Judaism, and Christian doctrine I am *not qualified to speak authoritatively on science*. I know many pastors and professors who sense their role as interpreters of Scripture automatically qualify them to speak for the scientific, philosophical, sociological, and other communities. This is something that needs to be approached with caution. Sure, as a student of religion I can speak from this perspective against economic injustice, but I am not foolish enough to assume that I am an expert in economics. Likewise, I can speak to science, but only as an amateur (unless I am someone like Alister McGrath who functions in both worlds and I am not).

**Fourth**, modern science is current, but not eternal. While I may seek to reconcile my religious views with the data available now I find caution in the reality that science itself has paradigm shifts. If science was not in flux it would

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## 10 THOUGHTS ON "JOHN WALTON'S PROPOSITIONS ON GENESIS 1."

**T. C.** says:

December 27, 2011 at 2:14 pm



I thoroughly enjoyed Walton's book and found his thesis to be the most important piece for constructing a biblical framework to understanding Scripture's relationship to science.

My review can be read here: <http://beingtc.com/lost-world-genesis-one-review>

**Joel Riley** says:

December 27, 2011 at 3:08 pm



Hey Brian, why the distance from you with science and not be consistent and have such distance with Christianity? You seem to have a suspicion of science (because it's in flux) but don't place God within the same mold (e.g. God could be inconsistent and in flux)....

I'm not pro-science, but I just don't think we as Christians need not put the science vs. faith (Genesis story vs. Evolution) debate as a true dichotomy. Now I'm not arguing for a harmonious Bible where God and Science are completely at peace with each other either....

I guess what I'm getting at is best understand when we hear Neo-Calvinists justify their beliefs... they love putting reason out there about how Sovereign God is and how the Bible paints this picture of a God full of abundant grace freely given to His Elect (the joke to me is that this kind of grace is more like a forceful entry).

But the moment you get their reason into a bind by pointing a bit of bad logic or overlooking scripture on their part they run off to a world that completely evades reason and rather asserts a poor man's fideism (well we don't know everything but be rest assured that God does know!)... and then goes off to this tangent about how God is so much more beyond anything of human understanding, and his ways beyond our ways.... And lastly the final argument from the Calvinists is "Keep in mind we are fallible."

And I think the reply to this Calvinist is kind of the same thing i would ask of you (whose

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theology above I agree with for the most part)... If we are fallible and limited in our understanding... then why say anything about God? Either we can talk about Him with reason and science, etc... and therefore the reference to finitude in understanding is more of an escape than an explanation (because the Calvinist admits their finite existence is able to comprehend "some things" about God)...

I know you mentioned that these are your questions going into this year so I don't expect you to have a solid answer.... But I urge as a fellow brother who will never apologize for the free will, we believe we have... to be questioning the place of epistemology within this whole science vs. religion question.... I really believe that Christianity is an ontological question, and anytime we as thinking Christians get "stuck" in contradiction, we allude to the epistemology as an escape... instead of letting the contradiction possibly be the point that God intended.....

(I can't help but smile now when I see terrible errors in the Biblical text... Because I really do believe GOd put them there to say the Truth isn't HERE in the text you IDIOT!)

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**Brian LePort** says:

December 27, 2011 at 3:39 pm



@T.C. : Thank you for the link. I have heard many positive responses to Walton's work. This makes me even more anxious to engage it myself.

**Brian LePort** says:

December 27, 2011 at 3:47 pm



Joel: I am a bit puzzled by some of your comments. I think they result from confusion over what I wrote, so let me try to clarify some things.

First, I'm not "suspicious" of modern science anymore than I suspicious of all human knowledge and yes, that includes the theological claims of Christianity. As regards the sciences, I am but a novice. This is why there is distance. It is not my primary field. Christianity is my primary field of academic study so I am going to be more confident in my understanding of its claims.

Second, I am not saying science-faith is a dichotomy, per se, but they do dwell in different language games and we must be cautious when we bring them together. We can't conflate their language if indeed they are addressing different sides of the coin.

Third, you state "If we are fallible and limited in our understanding... then why say anything about God?" What is the alternative? Do you suggest we are not fallible and that our understanding is limited? I am confused here, so it is not possible for me to reply.

Fourth, finally, I agree, the "truth" may reside in the contradiction. I have no qualms with that. That being said, we are limited in our knowledge and we will always be limited in our knowledge. We can speak to what we know, but we must realize that this is inherently limited. We seek to know more, but we may not be able to find it at this time.

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**T. C.** says:

December 27, 2011 at 3:52 pm



I'm looking forward to reading your thoughts/impression of the book.

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**James** says:

December 28, 2011 at 9:43 am



Brian, I highly recommend Walton's "Lost World..." it is an engaging and thought provoking work. I would also recommend that you purchase "Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament..." also by Walton. He also has a new monograph out titled "Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology" Walton's position is that before we can begin to understand the text today, we must understand how the ones to whom it was written perceived it. To do so, we must enter their world which requires that we become interdisciplinary. A challenge but a worthy one.

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**Brian LePort** says:

December 28, 2011 at 10:00 am



@James: I'd love to read those two books. Maybe I will get the opportunity.

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**Ryan Over** says:

February 17, 2012 at 2:13 pm



Praise God for a humble theologian! I am rooting for you.

-Ryan

B.S. Biochemistry – University of Rochester 2011

beginning a Ph.D. at IU in Fall of 2012

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**Brian LePort** says:

February 17, 2012 at 2:16 pm



Thanks Ryan!

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