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

Benjamin J. Lappenga
Dordt College, benjamin.lappenga@dordt.edu

Ashley Huizinga
Dordt College

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Leader's Guide to

Did Adam and Eve Exist?
A Study of The Lost World of Adam and Eve

Dr. Benjamin Lappenga, Ashley Huizinga
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa
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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 the participant wrestle with the concepts introduced in the chapters of each session. The inclusion of discussion questions, to be written by the participants (and the leader) as they 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 your group should by no means limit itself to the questions contained here.

This study is intended for informal, small group discussion, such as that of a Bible study, catechism, or family reunion. The study is also aimed toward high school students, college students, and post-college adults with an interest in how science and the Christian faith interact. Each theme may be unpacked on its own, but it is the hope of the authors that the entire study may be useful to the interested reader (leader and participant alike).

Please note: Not every “Proposition” (chapter) is as of much value as any other, depending on the purpose of your group. If you would like to directly answer the question “Did Adam and Eve exist?” in as direct a manner as possible, you and your small group might find the following Propositions more significant for reading and discussion than the others:

- Proposition 6
- Proposition 8
- Proposition 10
- Proposition 11
- Proposition 14
- Proposition 15
- Proposition 17
- Proposition 20
- Conclusion and Summary

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.
Planning and Preparing for a Session

The material assumes that each session will have about 30–45 minutes in which to meet. It also assumes that each participant will have read the assigned sections of *The Lost World* ahead of time, as well as answering the questions associated with that week. In order to prepare effectively for each meeting, all participants (including the leader or co-leaders) must answer the questions before the session.

More material has been included in each week than is likely to be covered in a single session. It must also be noted that these questions are intended as a guide for your discussion, but a spirited discussion may head off in any direction – plan accordingly for the flexibility of your small group.

Equipped for Service

This “Leader’s Guide” is meant to equip leaders of these small group discussions, and thus the following pages are far more detailed and expansive than the average participant may judge necessary for complex discussion. You might not use every question and every chapter, nor must you do so. This has been done in the hope that you, as the leader, may more easily facilitate and moderate discussion in and amongst your peers in the small group. Your small group may be made up of the generation that initiates change in how the common Christian comes to understand these questions and answers – in the service of your peers, do not underestimate your own significance as a leader or co-leader.
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](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?

Suggested Answer: As with all high-text communication, traffic reports in Chicago assume that the listener has intimate knowledge of the roadways. Walton proposes that God speaks through Genesis as in a high-context communication to the ancient Israelite, assuming a shared history, culture, language, and experience between the prophet and His audience. We, however, read with very little of that context, and thus we are forced to use our own interpretive and inferential tools “to discern the nature of the communicator’s illocution and meaning” (16). As modern readers interacting with an ancient text, we must do research into the context of the time in order to understand how the passages were intended to be read back then.

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)?

Suggested Answer: According to Walton, the ancient world contained no such understanding of "natural laws" as we know them today. Rather, they were inclined to see the workings of the world in terms of divine cause. "They would have viewed the cosmos not as a machine but as a kingdom, and God communicated to them about the world in those terms" (18). For the thought questions here, consider how you and the culture around you understand the world. The beginning few paragraphs of Proposition 2 give you Walton's perspective on the subject: "We live in a culture that has assigned high, if not ultimate, value to that which is material..." (24). Additionally, as Walton states much later in the book, “In our culture, we think ‘scientifically.’ We are primarily concerned with causation, composition and systematization. In the ancient world they are more likely to think of the world in terms of symbols and to express their understanding by means of imagery...” (136).
The ancients had a cosmology that looked something like the following:

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?

Suggested Answer: The examples mentioned in the book include the Israelite belief in waters above the heavens (a logical conclusion in those times, as rain caused water to come down from the heavens) and in a solid sky studded with stars, among other things. As you discuss how context influences interpretation, consider the possibility that you read the Bible differently than your grandparents did: how might you read the Bible differently than your great-great-great-great-grandparents (assuming that you trace your genealogy back to the Ancient Near East)?

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?

Suggested Answer: Walton suggests that if the Reformers had believed such a thing, they "would not have had to write hundreds of volumes trying to explain the complexities of interpretation at both exegetical and theological levels" (23). While everyone could not interpret Scripture with all accuracy, everyone could (and should) have access to a plain Scripture "that was not esoteric [that is—obscure, intended for or likely to be understood by only a small number of people with a specialized knowledge or interest], mystical or allegorical and could only be spiritually discerned."

“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 bārāʾ (“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?

Suggested Answer: In the midst of a few paragraphs of textual evidence, Walton concludes that "the verb does not intrinsically pertain to material existence" (29). Rather, the uses describe "activity bringing order, organization, roles or functions...The roles and functions are established by separating and naming...These are the acts of creation. They are not materialistic in nature, and they are not something that science can explore either to affirm or to deny."

3. Does our belief that God created ex nihilo (“out of nothing”) come from Genesis 1:1?
Suggested Answer: No, because ex nihilo is a material category and Genesis 1 is not an account of material origins. Instead, ex nihilo doctrine comes from interpretations of John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16 (both of which emphasize the authority and status of the Son of God and not the objects which he created).

*John 1:1-3 KJV,* 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

*Colossians 1:16-17 KJV,* 16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: 17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

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

*Genesis 1:2,* 1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters...

“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:
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?

Suggested Answer: Walton responds with "it could be, but the material cannot be considered a default interpretation; it must be proved." This is absolutely a scientific answer, in that an interpretation cannot be accepted or rejected without proof for one or the other. Discuss this second question with your small group; might there be other reasons for traditionally viewing this passage as a story of material origins, particularly in our day and age?
4. How is the analogy of a “home” versus a “house” helpful to understand how Genesis describes creation? (See also pp. 51-52.)

Suggested Answer: Interpreting the text as the ancient world might have, one becomes less interested in how the material objects came into being and more interested in the fact that "God did it and that was enough [for them]" (45). They cared more about the cosmos as a home (a "sacred space") for God and a home for humans than in how or when the house was built. For example, reading the text as a "home story" teaches us that "even though God has provided for us, it is not about us. The cosmos is not ours to do with as we please but God's place in which we serve as his co-regents...This is not just a house that we inhabit; it is our divinely gifted home, and we are accountable for our use of it and work in it" (52).

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

1. According to Walton, what is the objective of creation?

Suggested Answer: "Rest" (46). That is, not relaxation, but a functional rest, a ceasing of the activity of ordering, an enjoying of the established equilibrium of order.

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”?

Suggested Answer: Walton notes that ANE readers knew divine rest in ancient temples was not a matter of simply residence. Rather, the temple, in a concept foreign to us, was the "command center of the cosmos" from which the represented god would rule. After the god had established order, he took control of that ordered system from his temple. Thus, in Genesis 1, we find a kind of inauguration ceremony of proclaiming of functions and installing functionaries over the creation. The number seven figures prominently here as part of the ANE understanding of the inauguration of sacred space.
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"?

Suggested Answer: According to Walton, the original audience was Israel. He then paints a picture of the event of Moses communicating to the Israelites in the wilderness in these Genesis terms, and of Moses dedicating the temple (a seven-day period of transition from space to place) with these words at the foot of Mount Sinai. Taking part in this Israelite audience, then, we see the most significant part of the Genesis 2 creation story: "the center of sacred space is identified, explanation is given concerning how humans will function in this sacred space," and God interacts with his people in this newly established sacred space (52).

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

4. Does the word ṭōb ("good") ever get used in the sense of unadulterated, pristine perfection in the rest of the Old Testament?

Suggested Answer: No. In your small group, discuss the justifications given by Walton for this statement. If not for an abstract state of perfection, what is the word used for? Do you consider all three "semantic categories" to be persuasive arguments?

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?

Suggested Answer: Walton argues that "God has established a modicum of order adequate for our survival and for his plan to unfold" (56). In turn, creation has a ways to go to achieve the ultimate state of perfection, and people are supposed to (continuously) serve as ordering agents in the creation. Thus, because sin and disorder have not yet
made their entrance, a world of pain, suffering, predation, and death can still be considered "good."

“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?

Suggested Answer: The problems which arise deal with the order and sequence of the passages, as those inclined to interpret the texts as historical, material sequences find a problem in the creation order given for Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 creation accounts. The second of these questions is a thought question for group participants; what do you think? Have you ever wondered before about the questions and potential solutions Walton offers, especially the ones concerning Cain?

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

Suggested Answer: The Hebrew word is usually used to refer to a narrative of someone's sons or a genealogy of that person's descendants. This suggests that the section being introduced in Genesis 2:4 is going to talk about what came after the creation of the heavens and the earth reported in the seven-day account and what developed from that (65).

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: ʾādām Is Used in Genesis 1-5 in a Variety of Ways”
1. How do we know that Adam (ʾādām “human”) and Eve (ḥāwāh “life”) are not historical names, but instead are assigned names that are larger than the characters to whom they refer?

Suggested Answer: Adam and Eve are Hebrew names, and no Hebrew language existed at the time of creation, so these names are assigned rather than historical, and given for a representative purpose (by the author of Genesis). The larger-than-life qualities of the names, as in Pilgrim's Progress, demand a non-straightforward interpretation (more than biographical).

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

Suggested Answer: "If what is being said of [Adam] is true of all humans and not just this one individual, then...he serves there as an archetype. If...[Adam] is acting as an individual on behalf of others...he serves as federal representative" (62). A representative, then, is an individual acting on behalf of others, but an archetype is a character (not necessarily an individual) meant to demonstrate a type.

“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?

Suggested Answer: De novo refers to a quick and complete process of creation (aka God spoke and it came into being immediately) while material continuity refers to the process
of developing materially from a previously existing species (aka adapting or evolving over time). According to current scientific models, de novo is highly unlikely, well-nigh impossible.

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.*

   Suggested Answer: According to Walton, "dust" refers to mortality. There are strong indications in the text that people were created mortal, especially considering the fact that God created a "tree of life" in the garden for Adam and Eve. In this case, "the tree of life would have provided a remedy, an antidote to their mortality" (74), and it would have been all the worse for them to be cut off from the tree—that would have doomed them to die (not immediately, but assuredly).

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)?

   Suggested Answer: An archetype as Walton defines the term refers to something (usually an individual) embodying all others in the group. An archetype is one form of representation, which makes Adam a representative head of the human race. Adam’s formation from dust, then, is archetypal: "For Adam, as for all of us, that we are formed from dust makes a statement about our identity as mortals" (not his/our material origins) (77).

4. Does Walton argue that the Hebrew word šēlā’ is better translated “rib” or “side”? Why?
Suggested Answer: Based on other uses of the word in the Hebrew Bible and the ambiguity of the original term (in Akkadian), Walton argues for the translation of the word as "side," concluding that God took one of Adam's sides, "cut[ting] Adam in half and from one side buil[ding] the woman" (79). As a result, the term conveys an ontological [that is—relating to the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being] rather than material truth. Instead of describing the how, the description of Eve's creation from Adam is meant more metaphorically.

“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?

Suggested Answer: 1) role and function, 2) identity, 3) substitute, 4) relationship. In each category, Walton uses the word "humanity" or "we/us." When he exemplifies these categories, he applies them to the corporate species as a whole rather than any particular individual. According to Lost World author, then, the image of God is displayed in humanity in general.

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?

Suggested Answer: Walton contends that there must be a single moment at which sin entered the world, or else Paul’s argument would have no foundation. “His whole approach to the presence of sin, the need for redemption and the role of Christ to bring such redemption is based on these details” (101). Walton uses the word “punctiliar” (having occurred [in the case of sin and redemption, having entered] at a single point in time through a specific event in time and space. Because the redeeming act of Christ on the cross was a real, historical event, the Fall must have been a real, historical event as well.

“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)?

Suggested Answer: The garden is designed as a residence for God to dwell within his creation. In addition, Eden was created to provide food for people, deliberately contrary to the common ANE myth in which the produce of the garden would have provided food for the resident god.
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).

Suggested Answer: The ancient audience of Genesis would have understood the cultural myths and stories to which the Bible book alludes. In that sense, these first chapters of Scripture operate within the same realm, or “room,” of discourse with ANE texts, because they tell similar stories with similar characters but are pointedly different, with significance in the distinctions.

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?

Suggested Answer: The garden, the trees, and the serpent are symbolic, standing for something beyond themselves. In this vein, the Garden of Eden is sacred space, the “center of order…and its significance has more to do with divine presence than human paradise” (116). “[The Garden] is about the presence of God on earth and what relationship with him makes available” (124).
“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?

Suggested Answer: There was, according to Walton, no indication that the serpent was identified with Satan during old Testament times. As an Israelite storyteller communicating to an Israelite audience, certain common ANE associations with serpent imagery (which are not necessarily natural to us) must be made. For example, in Egyptian mythology, the serpent is associated with both wisdom and death (129); Walton also identifies passages of the Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament which address the details of Genesis 3 paralleling ANE mythology (129-131). Finally, on the basis of its role in the story and other supporting contexts, Walton raises the possibility that the serpent was a chaos creature, “amoral but...mischievous or destructive” (133), “not necessarily...morally evil or bent on the destruction of humankind” (134) but easily correlated with “Deception, misdirection and troublemaking”... a creature “more closely associated with non-order than with disorder” (136).

“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)?
Suggested Answer: In your small group, discuss which of these each group member is most comfortable with (Walton does not say that any of the three are outright wrong). Now, discuss Walton’s emphasis of the third definition, as an alienation/disequilibrium of the relationship between humans and God. Based on the focus on *Lost World* regarding order and disorder in the Genesis creation account, it certainly makes sense that he would prefer this third interpretation. Why might you or your group members choose one definition over the other?

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?

Suggested Answer: Surprisingly, the Old Testament never refers to the event of Genesis 3 as “the fall” and does not talk about people or the world as “fallen” (142). Rather, in a description of the event drawn directly from biblical language, Walton defines the event as Adam and Eve “trying to be like God by positing themselves as the center and source of order” (143), acquiring wisdom illegitimately (although “the Fall” certainly makes for a much catchier term). Because mortality was already a factor and not a result of their decision, the sin of their choice was in failing to achieve a solution to the situation that was within their reach, attainable only by obedience.

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

Suggested Answer: Salvation, the new creation, and our current mandate to be “in deepening relationship with God day by day here and now” is made more significant by the fact that we are being saved to something (“renewed access to the presence of God and relationship with him”) rather than simply being “saved, forgiven and on [our] way to heaven” (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)?

Suggested Answer: In the new creation according to Revelation 21 (and contrary to the initial creation of Genesis 1-2), all non-order (Revelation 21 names “natural disasters, pain and death,” which were present in the initial creation) and the interference of disorder in the creation will be eliminated. The final resolution into a fully ordered world will not be like a restoration of Eden or a return to a pre-fall condition; instead, the eventual result of the new creation will be a level of order that has never before existed.

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)?

Suggested Answer: According to a (reductionist) understanding of Augustine’s model, sin is passed from generation to generation as we are born. This was done “through the sexual act itself, thus equating sexual desire with sin” (for example, see article “The Original View of Original Sin” by Peter Nathan, 2003, http://www.vision.org/visionmedia/article.aspx%3Fid%3D227). [Encourage your small group members to do their own research for this question!] This is problematic, firstly because we have found no proof of a biological basis for sin, such as a gene or sequence for sinfulness (theologians and scholars in Augustine’s time were, of course, entirely ignorant of the concept of genetics). Secondly, Augustine’s view of Adam is derived theologically (from an inadequate Latin translation of the Greek original, no less) rather than explicitly stated in the biblical text; as Walton notes, “If his starting point (view of Adam) is debatable, the rest of his model is jeopardized” (156).

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?

Suggested Answer: If original sin was in desiring to be like God, then Jesus cannot be subject to original sin because Jesus is God. As Walton writes, “the sin of wanting to be like God (as we have defined the nature of the fall) cannot be pollution to one who is God” (157). This interpretation is simple, certainly, but theologically sound.
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?

Suggested Answer: If Babel is understood as a ziggurat, then the problem of the event was that the people strove to build the tower “to make a name for [them]selves.” They strove to construct sacred space “that their name might be exalted as a thriving, prosperous civilization” (164). They sought to improve their own situation (reclaim sacred space for God) for all the wrong reasons. This is not exactly pride, although it involves a selfish motivation as pride does.

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


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?

Suggested Answer: The problem in focusing on the existence instead of the vocation of Adam, as Christians have done for centuries, is a tendency to deemphasize the role played by Adam’s sin in the larger narrative of God and the world (or, as Wright feels worth mentioning, within the smaller narrative of God and Israel). We are “not being obedient to the authority of [the] central scriptural texts” unless we read in Genesis “the notion of the vocation of Adam” and show the fulfillment of that vocation in the Messiah (175). Our “Adamic inheritance” is not only original sin, Wright writes, but also a calling “to bring God’s wise order into the world” (180). Discuss this supposed calling with your small group. Does Wright propose how this is to be done? Do (and should) you strive for this purpose in your daily life and discipleship? Is this purpose inherently biblical, or has Wright theologically derived it from interpretation?

“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?
Suggested Answer: In denying this genetic history, one must claim that 1) God created Adam de novo with a complicated genome, or 2) God totally disrupted the genome of all species as a response to the fall (182). As Walton contends in the text, both of these are scientifically unlikely positions, yet the Bible does not affirm or deny anything regarding these theories of material origins. Not surprisingly (at least, when one considers *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* up to this point), Walton states that the Bible does not demand denial or validation of the evidence of history in the genome; one can be Christian and yet believe a variety of things about this, as long as one knows how and why they believe what they do. In your small group, how would you evaluate Walton’s defense of this position, both from Genesis and from NT passages that would seem to require denial (Gen 3:20; Acts 17:26; and the genealogies in Genesis 5, 1 Chronicles 1, and Luke 3:38)?

“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?

Suggested Answer: No, although it has been presented as such for so long that the two seem inseparable. In reality, evolution “has plenty of room for the providence of God as well as the intimate involvement of God” (191).

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)?

   Suggested Answer: In answering the first few questions above, consider each of Walton’s seven observations on pg. 205, and discuss how the scenarios presented have been/might be remedied for theologians and scholars today.

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?

   Suggested Answer: The four reasons given by Walton are 1) creation care, 2) ministry, 3) evangelism, and 4) considering the future. Discuss how your individual group members (or your churches) approach each of these four categories, and what changes (if any) could be made in this. What can you do to further the conversation?
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