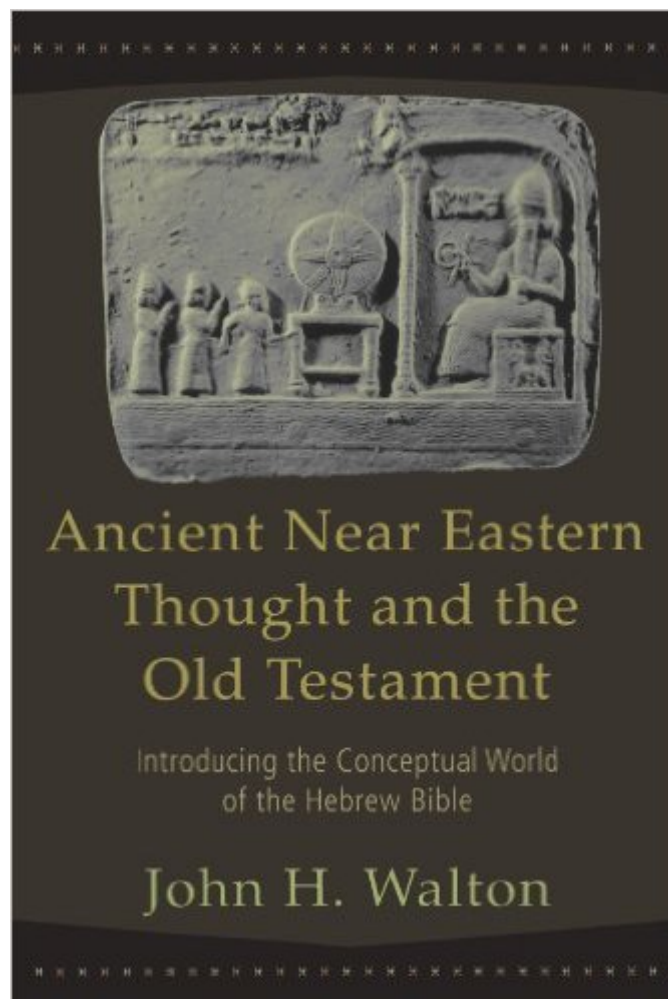


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Ancient Near Eastern Thought And The Old Testament: Introducing The Conceptual World Of The Hebrew Bible



Synopsis

Much of the Old Testament seems strange to contemporary readers. However, as we begin to understand how ancient people viewed the world, the Old Testament becomes more clearly a book that stands within its ancient context as it also speaks against it. John Walton provides here a thoughtful introduction to the conceptual world of the ancient Near East. Walton surveys the literature of the ancient Near East and introduces the reader to a variety of beliefs about God, religion, and the world. In helpful sidebars, he provides examples of how such studies can bring insight to the interpretation of specific Old Testament passages. Students and pastors who want to deepen their understanding of the Old Testament will find this a helpful and instructive study.

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Customer Reviews

First off I want to say that I audited a course by the author of this book, and read through the book throughout the semester. It is part of the core curriculum for an M.A. in New Testament or Old Testament Exegesis at Wheaton. I am a pastor who preaches regularly. This book has impacted my entire understanding of the Old Testament in a powerful way. The logical format of this book gives the reader a simple and effective way to slowly enter into the worldview of ancient people. The author is very good at giving readers hinge concepts to help understand the distinctions between our worldview and their worldview. The book categorizes ancient near eastern thought into topics that are actually enjoyable to read. Each topic could easily overlap with other topics, and Dr. Walton does a great job of separating the topics without distorting them (in my opinion). This book tackles

thorny issues that separate Evangelicals from Liberals in the land of scholars, without alienating either side of the issue. Walton's premise is that we should abandon the old approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Thought and simply understand what they believed, and how it was different from or the same as Old Testament thought. One concept that emerges as the book develops is the idea that some Israelite prophets argued for the support of the covenant with God rather than for the reinforcement of the King's authority (as the prophets of other cultures and sometimes Israeli culture did). This sets Israeli prophets who held to the covenant with God at odds with everyone else who prophesied in Israel and around Israel. Coupled with the exclusiveness of the Jewish religion, and the people soon became alienated from those around them and sometimes from their own religion or people.

Divided into five distinctive sections, this book provides an introductory look at the conceptual world surrounding the Hebrew Bible. The five sections are Comparative Studies, Literature of the Ancient Near East, Religion, Cosmos, and People. The section on Literature of the Ancient Near East is a good, although very brief, survey of the literature of the ancient near east including Egyptian, Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hittite. The author has included a good cross section of ritual texts, letters, chronicles, legal collections, hymns, wisdom literature, and prophecy. The section on Religion is subdivided into The Gods, Temples and Rituals, and State and Family Religion. Here the reader is exposed to ancient thought on these subjects with the intent that they come to understand the common beliefs and practices as well as beliefs and practices that differentiated them from each other. The section on the Cosmos examines both the geography of the cosmos and the beliefs surrounding them. The section on the geography of the cosmos is excellent and includes an examination of the structure of heaven, the earth and the netherworld. I found this section to be particularly interesting and very informative with an excellent exposition on the Hebrew word "bara" and the functional aspects of naming. The final section on People provides an excellent examination of the various concepts of creation of the human race as well as what it means to be human. It also includes a very good explanation of the interaction between the people and their religion including prophecy, oracles, and their perception of history as a nation. This section ends with a discussion of the beliefs about the future of the earth and what happens after death.

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