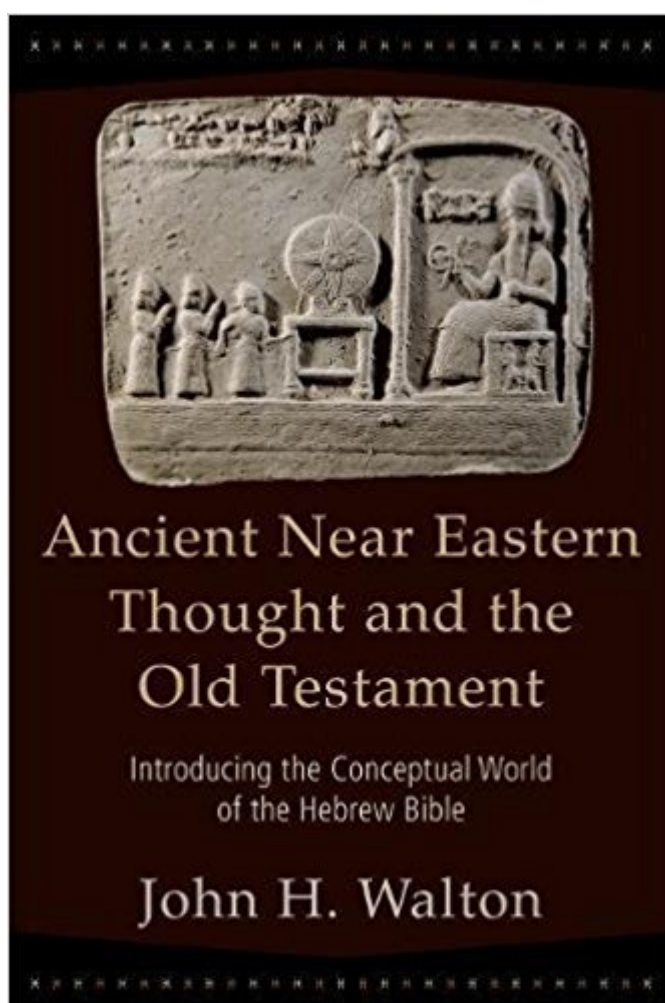


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# Ancient Near Eastern Thought And The Old Testament: Introducing The Conceptual World Of The Hebrew Bible



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Comparisons between the culture of biblical Israel and the other cultures of the ancient Near East have long been a fundamental part of biblical scholarship, but more often than not, they have been presented in piecemeal, isolated fashion. In his new book, John Walton offers a much broader reach, giving us arguably the most extensive review of these cultural comparisons now available together with a serious meditation on what the enterprise of cultural comparison is all about in biblical study. One may not always agree with his views, but invariably one will come away challenged to rethink the purpose and value of such comparisons for understanding the Hebrew Bible and its world."--Peter B. Machinist, Harvard University"As no other author has done, Walton penetrates beyond the simple comparisons often made to bring back intelligence about the contexts

and constitution of the ancient world, stressing the ideas Israel and its contemporaries held in common--such as 'deity is on the inside, not the outside' of life--and discussing accounts of creation, views of history and of the future. Yet Walton repeatedly demonstrates how Israel's faith was distinct, its God revealing his will by writing his law on his people's hearts, a metaphor from divination implying that they reveal his law to others. That's one of many cases where interpretation gains from 'comparative exploration.' This book deserves the attention of all serious Bible teachers and students."--Alan R. Millard, University of Liverpool" This book is a must read for serious students of the Old Testament. John Walton has employed his extensive background and experience to write this excellent survey of the interface between the ancient Near East and Israel. I especially appreciate his sidebars on 'Comparative Exploration,' which enable readers to 'zero in' on the comparative topic of their choice relatively easily. The book is thoroughly readable yet very scholarly. Thus, beginning students, seminarians, and the interested public will find gold mines of conceptual information in this excellent work."--Mark W. Chavalas, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse" John Walton has produced an important and useful guide to entering into some of the major worldviews and value systems found in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Israel. As a unique contribution to the study of that era, his work both introduces readers to this thought world and bridges the gaps between ancient Near Eastern texts and the perspectives of the Bible. Walton's engaging style makes this an ideal introductory text for these important areas of Bible backgrounds."--Richard S. Hess, Denver Seminary

John H. Walton (PhD, Hebrew Union College) is professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College. He is the author or editor of numerous books, including *A Survey of the Old Testament*, *Old Testament Today*, and *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*.

Any Christian interested in the cultural context of the Old Testament needs to press the 'Add to Cart' button right now. John Walton puts forth a systematic presentation of the 'conceptual world' of the Old Testament where he compares ancient Near Eastern literature with the Bible. This trend has been happening in scholarly circles, but is usually done by those with secular approaches. Walton is the first modern evangelical to attempt this enterprise (besides maybe Niehaus) and has thus far succeeded. One must be patient with the book and have the humility to consider his arguments. Even if you don't agree with everything he says, you will still walk away with your money's worth. Main critiques: 1) The first three chapters are more helpful as a reference than they are as a read. Perhaps that could have been noted somewhere. 2) His conclusions can overstate the

evidence at points (e.g. functional ontology, etc.)<sup>3</sup>) Most of the ancient Near Eastern material is textual (in fact, "canonical"); it has an impoverished appreciation for non-textual (and "non-canonical") archaeological data. However, perhaps the archaeological material would be too burdensome to the readers he is trying to reach.<sup>4</sup>) He is not concerned with establishing the feasibility of these particular cultural influences through the likes of trade interconnections, migrations, proximity, etc. Instead, the approach is more "this text/idea is ancient, so it can speak to biblical things regardless of historical, geographical, and linguistic barriers." However, this is not to say that this approach can still not be employed with caution. Considering everything said above, Walton's book is still valuable for those beginning their comparative studies. The critiques are only meant to help the untrained reader, and with that said, I would still highly recommend this book. Compared to other OT scholars who are too caught up in commentaries and lexicons to deal with the ancient Near Eastern material, Walton actually deals with it and makes it accessible to the student of the Bible. Hopefully there will be more confessional efforts to interface the Bible with the ancient Near East.

I am not a scholar, nor do I hold any degrees, but I have read many a book on various ANE topics, and I do not know if I have ever read a more thoroughly researched book. Walton's chapter on ANE ontology of deity is worth the whole book. Additionally, how that that ontological understanding impacts certain Old Testament cornerstones like the Decalogue and the 10 Plagues is astounding. As a long time Christian scholar, Walton avoids the all too common mistakes of simply saying that all of the OT is merely borrowing from the ANE, and the other mistake of saying that there are enough differences that we ought not busy ourselves comparing the two. This by no means an easy book to read and I would not recommend it as an introduction to this kind of field, but if you can handle the footnotes, if you have a basic working understanding of some of the major ANE myths, and are interested in how the Hebrew Old Testament fits in all of that, it will be well worth your time. On a final note, I hunted down Walton's email address at the university where he teaches, and wrote an email thanking him for the work put into this book and how thoroughly I enjoyed reading it both times I read it. Believe it or not, I got an email back from him the following morning! Five stars for that alone.

Simply put- you can't go wrong with great scholars who devote their lives to specific areas of study, so YOU don't have to. This is one of those, especially for those of us out there who deeply appreciate the role the Ancient Near East played in the development of probably the most resilient

people-group in history, the Israelites!!

This is a detailed analysis of Ancient Near Eastern thought, and how it was like and different from the thought of the ancient Israelites as expressed in The Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament.) It explains quite well how the religious, political, and cosmological beliefs of surrounding nations (such as Mesopotamia, and Egypt) were different or like those of the Hebrews.

I really enjoyed reading Walton's book. It was technical enough for someone seeking insight into the world of the Old Testament, but still readable for anyone. We know so little about the times and culture in the world the ancient Israelites lived in, but Walton brings a great deal of what we do know to the table in a practical way. His bibliography and footnotes invite the reader to study more literature on the subject. This book was a pleasure to study.

I honestly wish I could shake John Walton's hand for writing this scholarly treatment of the ancient Near East. This book illuminates the cultural world that the Israelites were living in. With objectivity Walton surveys almost every conceivable aspect of ancient Near East culture. The reader is illuminated to the mindset and understanding of the ancient cultures and as a result gains a deeper understanding of the Israelites of the Old Testament. This book is crucial for Old Testament study and comprehension. Some believers might be surprised by how alike the Israelites were to their surrounding neighbors; however I think believers will also feel enlightened to see just how unique Israel was in many aspects. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and I hope it gains a wider reading.

Ancient Near Eastern Thought is very open minded toward the Bible and the cultures of peoples who surrounded ancient Israel. It is an eye opening perspective on ancient near eastern thought.

This book offers the mindset that the Bible was written in so the contexts make sense as to what they are referring to with terms we don't understand now because understanding has been lost. It's a hard read and you have to change how you think

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