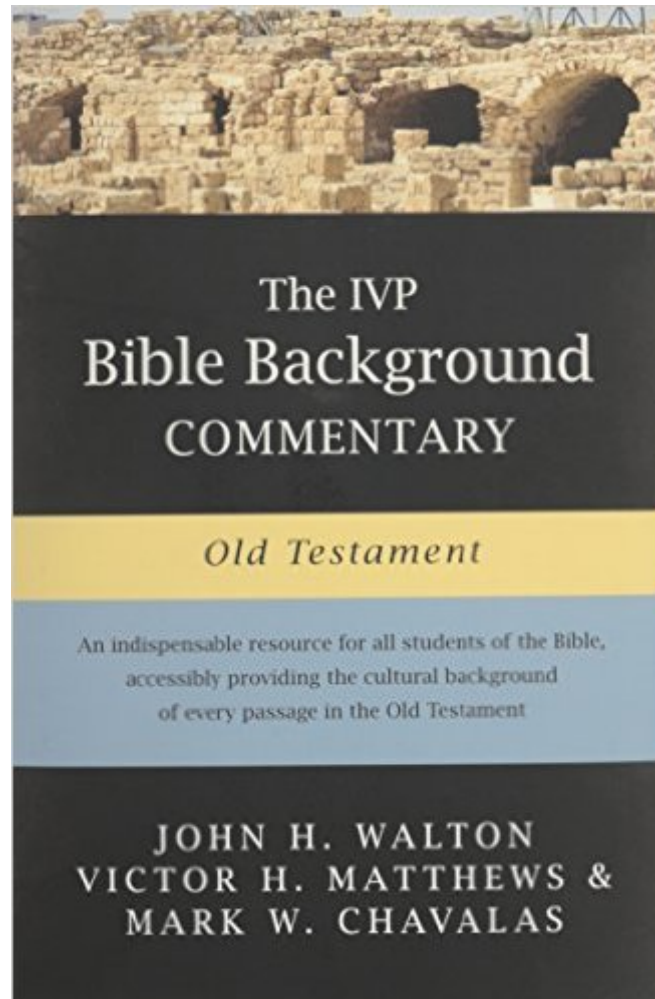


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# The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament



## Synopsis

Preaching's Preacher's Guide to the Best Bible Reference for 2014 (General Reference) How can we account for the "Book of the Law" suddenly being discovered during Josiah's renovation of the temple (2 Chron 34:14)? We know from Egypt and Mesopotamia that it was common to seal important documents--including theological documents--in the masonry or foundations of a palace or temple in order to inform a future king who might undertake restoration of the building. What might the psalmist have had in mind when praising God for removing our transgressions "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps 103:12)? In an Egyptian hymn to Amun-Re, the deity is praised for his judgment of the guilty. As a result of the god's discernment the guilty are assigned to the east and the righteous to the west. What is meant by God "weighing the heart" (Prov 21:2)? In Egyptian religious tradition we find the notion of the dead being judged before the gods. As the soul is examined, the dead person's heart is weighed in a scale against a feather symbolizing Truth. If the answers are correct and the heart does not outweigh the feather, the soul may enter the realm of everlasting life. The narratives, genealogies, laws, poetry, proverbs and prophecies of the Old Testament are deeply rooted in history. Archaeologists, historians and social scientists have greatly advanced our knowledge of the ancient world of the Bible. When we illuminate the stories of Abraham or David, the imagery of the Psalms or Proverbs, or the prophecies of Isaiah or Jeremiah with this backlight of culture and history, these texts spring to new life. The unique commentary joins The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament in providing historical, social and cultural background for each passage of the Old Testament. From Genesis through Malachi, this single volume gathers and condenses an abundance of specialized knowledge--making it available and accessible to ordinary readers of the Old Testament. Expert scholars John Walton, Victor Matthews and Mark Chavalas have included along with the fruits of their research and collaboration a glossary of historical terms, ancient peoples, texts and inscriptions maps and charts of important historical resources expanded explanations of significant background issues introductory essays on each book of the Old Testament The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament will enrich your experience of the Old Testament--and your teaching and preaching from Scripture--in a way that no other commentary can do.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The IVP Bible Background Commentary is an excellent resource for understanding the Bible in its historical context. Sure, that means it sometimes reads counter to tradition, but if tradition is being refuted by physical evidence, I'd rather know that than be left in my blind tradition. The book does lean toward a more Earth-bound discussion of the Bible. It shows how political, economic, and societal influences helped shape the way the books of the Bible were written (or spoken) and passed down through history. It shows how the writers, even though they were inspired by God, were still influenced by the times in which they lived. This is not a book for the strict Fundamentalist Christian unless you want your beliefs challenged. But it's a wonderful book for the literary Christian who likes to engage in some healthy Biblical discussion. The only thing that really disappointed me (and kept it out of the 5-star category) was that a few of the historical discussions are sometimes cut short. But I'm sure that was a balance between depth of research and final page count. Overall, this is definitely worth the money, and it will keep many people thinking critically about the Bible for quite some time.

I have been using this resource for more than four years in a variety of contexts--academic classes, Bible studies with high school and college students, and so on. This book is an invaluable resource. Two main reasons to buy this book: 1) We are all very removed from the cultural perspective of the authors who wrote the Old Testament. This book helps bridge that gap by pointing out details we would consider irrelevant and giving context to other details we would otherwise misunderstand. 2) The text is highly readable and accessible for a wide selection of readers. The scholarship is very strong, fair, and thought-provoking, and furthermore, the editorial

team did an excellent job ensuring that the information was presented in a clear and interesting manner. I've often found myself provoked to curiosity and ended up reading more than I originally intended to (and, no, that is not a habit for me with most reference books!). A brief word, too, about the fact that an evangelical publisher is responsible for this book being published. First, every publishing house has biases, so to judge an evangelical publisher for publishing work sympathetic to evangelical tendencies is a bit harsh. Secondly, as one who reads a fair amount from a variety of sources, I have often found that IVP Press books exhibit an uncommon level of integrity and fairness in the way their books are written. Thirdly, it is a logical fallacy to argue that a book does not contain truth or is inaccurate due to its origin. Have an open mind and judge the accuracy of the material on its own merits. Really, this is a great text. I know several dozen men and women who regularly use this book in their work and who consider it very helpful for the purpose of presenting Scripture accurately. I strongly encourage you to buy and use this book.

I was mildly disappointed with this book. It is supposed to be a verse by verse tour of the Old Testament, giving cultural, historical, and social information that lies behind the text. But even though the Old Testament is three times bigger than the New Testament, this book is a tad shorter than the NT companion volume written by Keener. Moreover, the book is very uneven. Some parts of the Old Testament are loaded with information, and other parts of the Old Testament are skipped entirely. And then you have paragraphs of scripture that have only one or two lines of comment that are not always helpful to the preacher who is looking for a bit more to give to the people. Yet in some sections, Walton, Mathews and Chavalas deliver the goods. For example, the information in Genesis 12 about how difficult and unprecedented it would be for a man like Abram to leave everything behind to follow God was very helpful to me as I was preparing a sermon on this portion of scripture. And I really appreciated the background information in Exodus 5-8 about how there was an Egyptian god that was overpowered in every area where Moses raised his staff. Therefore, I am giving this book 4 stars, but really, you will need another book to give you the rest of what you will need when teaching through the Old Testament. Perhaps the IVP Dictionary of the OT Pentateuch and the IVP Dictionary of the OT Historical Books will do just fine. Or you may want to add the New Nelson's Manners and Customs of Bible Times.

This is one of those tools that many people overlook, but everyone who teaches or preaches from the OT needs. It is packed with useful information. For example, this past week I was working on a sermon from Micah 3 (where leaders in Israel are condemned for cannibalism). Some of my

resources focused on the symbolic nature of this comment. BBCOT (this book) focused my attention on the 8th Century BC problem of siege warfare that purposely caused starvation as a common technique with cannibalism as a commonly prescribed curse in some cultures. This was tied to 2 Kings 6 where cannibalism is reported from that very time period. Unfortunately my other resources led me down a wrong path on Micah 3. But this tool provided a couple of key insights that not only enhanced my own understanding, but helped me to reject a wrong assumption that some of my resources were propagating. I know the author, Dr. Walton, from a class I audited by him at WCGS. He's an excellent man with a great grasp of the issues related to this book. I'm very glad we have this tool. It's too bad there are not more supporting photos, but I understand the publishers' limitations on the size and number of volumes put a damper on that very issue. Still, it's a great tool and I use it regularly. Five stars!

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