

The Importance of an Historical Adam

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Abstract

The question of whether man was specially created directly from the hand of God or whether he evolved from an ape-like creature has long been a controversial issue. In today's secular culture it is common to view the biblical history of Adam as a story, myth, or a parable but this is now also becoming the standard interpretation for many within the evangelical community.

In order to understand Genesis this way we have to sacrifice the clear teaching of the Bible to fit with a particular evolutionary view of earth's history.

Keywords: Adam, historical, myth, BioLogos, Fall, sin, theistic evolution

Introduction

Each and every generation of Christians will eventually have to face its own theological challenges and will be called "...to contend earnestly for the faith which was once and for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3). This generation is no different.

From childhood we are informed with ideas in our culture that are inherently pagan and often we are not even aware of this. These ideas are usually accepted into our mindset uncritically shaping the way we think. One of the most common invasions of secular thought even into the Christian mind in our own day is the current pagan understanding of the created realm, evolutionary naturalism. Unfortunately, many Christians uncritically accept the pagan view of the created order.

The debate over whether Adam was historical is ultimately a debate over whether we trust what the Scriptures clearly teach. If we cannot be certain of the beginning, then why would we be certain about what the Scriptures teach elsewhere? The uncertainty of truth is rampant in our culture partly due to the influence of post-modernism which is why many believe the issue over Adam's historicity is unimportant.

Moreover, belief in a historical Adam stands against a dominant intellectual system that establishes what is called "credibility" in the secular academy. Evangelicals who feel intellectually accountable to the academy then have to come up with another way to read Genesis 1–11.

This paper will seek to show that the arguments against Adam being a historical person who existed in space-time history are not based upon the clear teaching of Scripture but upon evolutionary based presuppositions. It will then show why understanding Adam as a historical figure is important for a coherent understanding of the biblical message of creation, Fall and redemption.

The Foundation of Adam Denial

Ever since the enlightenment the historicity of Adam has been questioned. Today an increasing number of evangelical scholars are beginning to deny Adam's historicity, while others would even say it is an open question or that it is not an important issue (Ostling 2011, pp.23–27). The Jewish scholar Louis Jacobs observed that,

There is no doubt that until the nineteenth century Adam and Eve were held to be historical figures, but with the discovery of the great age of the earth...many modern Jews [and Gentiles] have tended...to read the story as a myth... (Jacobs 1995, pp.13–14)

The neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) is probably the modern influence behind the denial of Adam being a historical individual. Barth understood the Creation account in terms of *Geschichte*. For him *Historie* is that which is reported as fact and *Geschichte* is the interpretation of the fact (Trueman 2008, p. 14). According to Barth, Genesis was not a myth, an event that never happened, but pure saga distinguishing itself from "history" on the one side and myth on the other (Barth 1958, p. 90). Barth viewed Adam as acting as a symbol for everyone. He denied the Fall took place believing that Adam "...was immediately the first sinner" (Barth 1956, p.508) leaving him to be guilty before God at the beginning of creation.

Barth's *Historie-Geschichte* distinction led him to believe that the events in Genesis 1–3 did not take place in space and time, as they were *Geschichte*, another kind of history (existing in the noumenal realm). This means that there is no creation in the orthodox meaning of the term and that Genesis is written in an unhistorical fashion. Barth rejected the doctrine of creation in order to impose a modern philosophical view on the book of Genesis. This *Historie-Geschichte* distinction is attractive to a form of evangelicalism that has picked up on certain currents in linguistic

philosophy (Trueman 2008, p.15). This is what the interpretation of Genesis as “myth” or “saga” is based upon and is the foundation for many theologians today in their interpretation of Adam.

Modern Adam Denial

The most prominent theistic evolution organization, today, BioLogos has had a number of theologians and scientists comment on what the Bible and science say about a historical Adam.

For example, English theologian Alister McGrath understands why people see Adam as a historical figure but it makes more sense for him to see Adam and Eve as stereotypical figures who:

...represent human potential as created by God but also with the capacity to go wrong. The story of Adam and Eve is the story of all of us—people with both the greatest intentions and the greatest of gifting—but still with the ability to fail. The Adam and Eve story tells us that this is not accidental—this is what it means to be human. (McGrath 2010)

The influence of Barth echoes in the language McGrath uses to describe Adam and Eve. Just as Barth believed Adam was always a sinner McGrath sees the Adam and Eve story as what “it means to be human” that we were created by God with the “capacity to go wrong.”

If sin were just a part of who Adam was and always a part of life then what are we guilty of? Moreover, why do we need forgiveness if God made us like this to begin with? However, Adam’s experience is not, in fact, our experience because Adam was not in a state of sin to start with. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s command their “eyes...were opened” (Genesis 3:7) indicating that they now knew their prior created goodness was a memory and because of their disobedience they became aware of their guilt and hid from the Lord (Genesis 3:8). Adam was afraid of God because of his nakedness which brought shame, which in his innocence he had been without (Genesis 2:25), which in the ancient Near East and in the Bible was a terrible disgrace (Genesis 9:24–25). Adam and Eve’s shame is explained as the consequence of the guilt of sin (Genesis 3:8–10). When a person yields to temptation he does not become a sinner since he already is a sinner because of the fact that he is a descendant of Adam (Romans 5:12–21). Adam was not already a sinner when he was created but he fell from a state of innocence and from the fellowship he once had enjoyed with the God.

N.T. Wright, another popular English theologian, denies Adam is a historical individual. Instead he believes that the Jews from the Babylonian exile to the Jewish people at the time of Jesus would have understood:

...the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden—and

their ultimate expulsion after violating the terms of their covenant with God—would have identified with the story on a deep level. These readers would have thought “this is our story” because Israel had repeated this experience. (Wright 2010)

How Wright knows this is simply pure speculation. Wright does not believe Adam was a historical figure but is a metaphor for Israel “When they fail [Israel], like Adam and Eve, they are exiled from the land” (Wright 2010). Peter Enns also sees Adam as “...an Israel story placed in primeval time. *It is not a story of human origins but of Israel’s origins*” (Enns 2010). If you support this argument however, it is possible to go ad infinitum with it and deny that Israel actually existed and if Israel never existed, then what of Israel’s Messiah?

Interestingly, Wright previously held to a historic Adam (Wright 2000, p.526). Furthermore, Wright goes on to state that:

Readers of Genesis who focus simply on the smaller, literal picture—that is, the number of days of creation and whether there is evidence in the text pointing to an old or new earth—are in effect not reading the complete text. To fully appreciate the richness of the text, we should think about the functionality and reception of the text as opposed to solely the words on the page. (Wright 2010)

Wright does not mention how a person can get to the “functionality and reception” of the text without thinking about “the words on the page.” If this approach to Genesis is taken then the meaning of the words in the text are unreliable and can mean anything to anyone. Wright’s understanding of the text is nothing more than the result of interpreting the text through the lens of evolutionary dogma. Our Lord and the apostles understood Genesis in its plain sense:

- Matthew 19:4–6:

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

- 1 Timothy 2:13–14:

For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

- 2 Peter 3:5:

But they deliberately forgot that long ago by God’s word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

These texts should serve as our example of how to understand and interpret Genesis.

Another denier of the historicity of Adam is Old

Testament professor Tremper Longman III who believes Genesis 2 is a second account of creation which contains much figurative language. Longman believes we should read the creation of Adam with the Babylonian account of *Atrahasis* as the background which the original audience certainly did. Longman writes:

The description of how Adam was created is certainly figurative. The question is open as to whether there was an actual person named Adam who was the first human being or not. Perhaps there was a first man, Adam, and a first woman, Eve, designated as such by God at the right time in his development of human beings. Or perhaps Adam, whose name after all means "Human," is himself figurative of humanity in general...there is nothing that insists on a literal understanding of Adam in a passage so filled with obvious figurative description. The New Testament's use of Adam (Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15) does not resolve the issue as some suggest because it is possible, even natural, to make an analogy between a literary figure and a historical one. (Longman 2010)

What is the relationship between the ancient Near Eastern parallels such as *Atrahasis*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Bible? Should we read them as the background to the creation account or is the creation account rooted in the mythological worldview of its time?

By using ancient Near East literature scholars are going outside the Bible, which is committing *eisegesis*—reading meanings “into” the biblical text as opposed to “out of” the biblical text exegesis, in order to substantiate what they want the Bible to say in order to accommodate those views. There is much dissimilarity between the ancient Near Eastern accounts and the Bible. For example, how does one explain the polytheism, the theogony (creation of the various gods), the cosmic wars, the magic that is at the centre of these epics. These are not found in the Bible. The Scriptures on the other hand give a true historical, chronological account of the event.

Longman and others come to the biblical account, and read all the ostensible ancient Near Eastern creation parallels associated with it and then interpret the passage in the light of the parallels. The parallels then dictate what the passage must mean because all those parallels show the worldview, the frame of reference in which this is operating, thereby reading the parallels into the text. Longman and others are guilty of reading Genesis in light of ancient Near Eastern sources.

The revelation of God however, says something completely different from those ancient Near Eastern documents. Far from being domesticated by the background of the ancient Near Eastern

texts, Genesis confronts the background, revises the background and challenges the background of those other texts.

The problem with this view is that it understands Genesis 1–11 as being based on legends from other creation accounts in the ancient Near East and is inconsistent with divine inspiration of Scripture. The text of Genesis 2 is used numerous times in the New Testament (Matthew 19:4–6; Mark 10:6; 1 Corinthians 11:8–9; Ephesians 5:31; 1 Timothy 2:13) and if the account in Genesis 2 is untrue, that is, did not occur in space-time history, then it calls into question the meaning and theology of these texts. However, there is no biblical evidence that God ever uses myths as a basis to teaching truth. On the contrary, Scripture clearly distinguishes truth from myth (2 Timothy 4:4; 1 Timothy 1:4; Titus 1:14; 2 Peter 1:16).

Is the description of Adam figurative as Longman believes? The literal hermeneutic, which is often caricatured when it comes to the opening chapters of Genesis, simply means that the words are taken according to their grammatical and philological sense. However, the primacy of the grammatical, plain, straightforward sense must be assumed before searching for the figurative sense.

In Genesis 2:7 the text is simply telling us that the form of man’s body was made by God. The forming of the man from the dust of the ground shows that God formed that body immediately from the dust of the ground and this rules out the idea that the body of man developed from a lower form of man. Old Testament scholar E.J. Young comments on the figurative language in Genesis 2:7:

...whereas it might apply to some elements of Genesis 2:7; it does not include all of them. In other words, if anthropomorphism is present, it is not present in each element of the verse...The man was real, the dust was real, the ground was real as was the breath of life. (Young 1964, p. 57)

The question may be open for Longman whether Adam was the first man but the Bible is clear that Adam was the first man (1 Corinthians 15:45) and Eve the first woman (Genesis 3:20). Adam is placed at the beginning of two chronologies in the Bible (1 Chronicles 1:1; Luke 3:38) which were understood in a straightforward sense (Jude 1:14). Those genealogies contain figures such as Abraham and David so if Adam is only a literary figure what about the rest, and how can you be descended from a literary figure? Moreover, Paul preached to the Greeks on Mars Hill that God created from “one blood every nation of mankind” (Acts 17:26). Longman’s assertion of Paul’s understanding of Adam is arbitrary and controlled by evolutionary dogma rather than by what the Scriptures clearly teach.

In an article entitled *Were Adam and Eve Historical Figures?* BioLogos offers several further biblical objections to a historical Adam. The articles states:

Genetic evidence shows that humans descended from a group of several thousand individuals who lived about 150,000 years ago. This conflicts with the traditional view that all humans descended from a single pair who lived about 10,000 years ago. (BioLogos 2011)

Dr. Robert Carter points out that there are two issues that need to be considered when it comes to interpreting this genetic evidence:

The first is their *a priori* exclusion of the biblical model from any and all consideration...The second is their appeal to mutation as the sole source of genetic diversity. (Carter 2011)

When these considerations are taken into account, rather than evolutionary assumptions, the data fits into the biblical model of humans descending from a single pair.

In the article BioLogos go on to state that a literal reading of Genesis 1–3, despite its “attractive simplicity,” does not fit the evidence. They argue that a literal reading runs into historical trouble in trying to reconcile the chronological details of the two very different creation accounts found in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and Genesis 2:4–3:24.

The idea of two creation accounts comes from the proposal that the Pentateuch is based upon a number of documents, known as the documentary hypothesis, put together by a redactor late in Israel’s history. Old Testament scholar Gleason Archer, who rejected the documentary hypothesis, states that this hypothesis suggests that the Pentateuch

...was a compilation of selections from several different written documents composed at different places and times over a period of five centuries long after Moses... (Archer 1985, pp. 83–84)

If this is true, then why did the redactor of the Pentateuch make such a glaring mistake at the beginning as to put together two contradictory accounts of creation?

However, Genesis 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–3:24 are not two separate accounts of creation. The Hebrew phrase *toledot* is the key to understanding Genesis chapter 2. The only place where *toledot* is not found as a heading is Genesis 1:1–2:3 and this is because there was nothing created prior to it (Mathews 1996, p. 35).

Unlike the other uses of *toledot* in Genesis this is the only time the genitive phrase does not contain a personal name. The reason for this is that Adam as the first man had no direct predecessors. The purpose of the *toledot* in Genesis 2:4 is twofold. First, it looks back at Genesis 1:1–2:3. Brevard Childs understands the *toledot* to formulate the structure of Genesis and the role of the *toledot* in Genesis 2:4 “is to connect the creation of the world with the history which follows”

(Childs 1979, p. 146). This is indicated by the fact that Genesis 2:4–25 is an expansion of chapter 1 by the similarity of Genesis 2:4 as with Genesis 5:1 and Numbers 3:1. *Toledot* is followed by a temporal clause “when” (*beyom*) and in both Genesis 5:1 and Numbers 3:1 the content of the “when” clause refers to the former prominent information, in order to bring it to the attention of the reader for understanding the context of the following *toledot* section. Second, Genesis 2:4 also

...connects 2:4–25 with 1:1–2:3...while v. 4 looks back to 1:1–2:3, its main purpose is to shift attention to the creation of man and his placement in the garden. (McCabe 2006, p. 73)

The purpose of the *toledot* in Genesis 2:4 is not only looking back to Genesis 1:1–2:3 but moving the attention of the text to the focus of God’s creation of Adam and his place in the Garden of Eden. Mathews contends that:

Scholars are recognizing that chaps. 1 and 2 are not a repetition of the same matters that in places are at odds with one another, but rather chap. 2 is a thematic elaboration of the key features found in 1: 1–2:3...Particularly, the sixth day’s events regarding the creation of man and woman and their dominion (1:26–28) are taken up in 2:4–25. (Mathews 1996, pp. 188–189)

Genesis 2:4–14 focuses on man in the Garden of Eden and is not a separate contradictory account of creation. This shift of focus can be recognized by the use of the divine names that are used in the text. The divine name used in Genesis 1:1–2:3 is *Elohim* which appears 35 times and stresses God’s sovereign might and creative nature. Whereas in Genesis 2:4–3:23 the divine name *Yahweh Elohim* appears 20 times, and is often used with God’s covenant keeping ability.

This is the commencement and history of the human race. It should be obvious that this is not a second account of creation as there is no mention of the heavens and earth, sun, moon, stars, atmosphere, land etc.

Furthermore it is often the case in the ancient Near East that Semitic historians gave a historical overview (chapter 1) followed by a recap of the details concerning events that have already taken place (chapter 2) (Genesis 10–11 have a similar relationship—see also 1 Kings 6–7) (Keil and Delitzsch 1980, p. 87).

BioLogos also suggest that difficulties arise if one believes the human race began with only two initial people. One of these difficulties is the age old question “where did Cain get his wife?” They object to the possibility that she was the sister of Cain, saying:

...this conflict[s] with later biblical commands against incest, but there is no reference in Genesis to Cain having a sister or any other humans who could populate another area. (BioLogos 2011)

However, if we start with Scripture as the foundation for our thinking it is clear that there was one man and one woman to begin with (1 Corinthians 15:45; Genesis 3:20). The Old Testament scholar Franz Delitzsch comments:

...the actual unity of the human race is a fundamental doctrine of Scripture which is never broken through, and intends the descendants of Adam to be regarded as the entire human race. In any case we must regard Cain's wife as a daughter of Adam (5:4). (Delitzsch 1888, p. 190)

It is interesting that the objection raised by BioLogos was answered by Delitzsch a long time before they wrote! Genesis 4:17 says nothing about Cain's marriage. It simply assumes that the marriage has taken place and even though Cain's wife is not named she must be one of the daughters of Adam (Genesis 5:4) (Hamilton 1990, p. 237). Delitzsch commented on the idea that this was incest:

It is quite unjustifiable...that Cain's marriage with his sister involves the origin of mankind in incest. If the human race was to be propagated from a single pair, such closely related marriages were unavoidable. The notion of incest was originally limited to the reciprocal relation of parents and children, and afterwards extended in proportion as the possibility of conjugal connections was diversified. (Delitzsch 1978, p. 190)

The problem of incest is a modern idea and it was not until the time of Moses (Leviticus 18) that brother and sister relationships were forbidden.

The fact that Cain fears for his life (Genesis 4:13–14) after killing Abel is seen as another problem:

The people trying to kill Cain would have to be his extended family—siblings, nieces, nephews, and so on—all united in trying to kill him. But the text taken literally does not allow it...All of this points strongly toward a nonliteral, symbolic reading of the creation stories. (BioLogos 2011)

However, Delitzsch suggests that the idea that Cain feared being recognized beyond Eden presupposes that only the family of Adam existed, he states:

Blood-vengeance was not indeed as yet a custom, but it is the most primitive form of capital punishment of the murderer. Hence it was natural that Cain should fear for his life when his father's family should be increased. (Delitzsch 1978, p. 187)

Yet another contributor to the attack on the historical Adam from BioLogos is from the prominent theistic evolutionist Dr. Dennis Alexander. Alexander sees the narrative of man's disobedience in Genesis 3 as the "story of everyman" (as Barth and McGrath) presenting the truth in a vivid narrative style that is about theology rather than history (Alexander 2011a, p. 2). Alexander believes the two books' analogy is a powerful analogy which challenges us to see how the

two "books" speak to each other because all truth is God's truth (Alexander 2011a, p. 2).

Caution must be taken in understanding the "two books" analogy. Although all truth is "God truth" truth exists in various forms of certitude and "all truth" does not rest on the same authority (Thomas 2002, pp. 121–124). Moreover, not all truth claims are actually true. There are lots of "truths" that are accepted by "all scientists" that are false (the history of science repeatedly demonstrates this as scientists are constantly correcting the textbooks). So scientific "truth" is not infallible, whereas special revelation given in the Bible is infallible and unchanging.

This does not mean that we cannot learn anything from studying nature. It just means that our interpretation of what we observe must be consistent with the infallible revelation of Scripture. Since general and special revelation both proceed from God, they cannot ultimately conflict each other and they do not when they are correctly interpreted in the light of Scripture.

Alexander argues on the basis of Hebrew vocabulary for the figurative meaning of Adam. He observes that the very first mention of "Adam" in the Bible comes in Genesis 1:26–27 where the meaning is "unambiguously humankind." He goes on to write of Genesis 2:

...there is a perfectly good word for "man" in Hebrew (*'ish*), the word most commonly used for man in the Old Testament (in fact 1671 times), so the choice of "*adam*" here for man seems a deliberate teaching tool to explain to the reader that *adam* not only comes from the *adamah*, but is also given the important task by God of caring for the *adamah*—earthy Adam is to be God's earth-keeper. (Alexander 2011a, p. 4)

Alexander rightly mentions that the definite article in front of *adam*, means "the man," noting personal names in Hebrew do not carry the definite article. He observes that the definite article remains in place all the way through to Genesis 4:25 when Adam without a definite article appears and "lay with his wife again" (Alexander 2011a, p. 4). Hamilton notes however, that

...this neat rule does not apply to all of the instances of *adam* is borne out by an examination of some of the modern English translations of the Bible...these modern versions disagree as to the first legitimate appearance of "Adam" as a personal name: 2:19 (AV, also LXX and Vulg.); 2:20 (NIV); 3:17 (RSV); 3:21 (NEB); 4:25 (JB). (Hamilton 1990, pp. 159–160)

It should be noted, that Alexander does recognize that some ambiguity exists in the use of *adam* as used as a personal name for the first time (Alexander 2011a, p. 4).

The Hebrew word for "man" does sometimes refer to mankind (Genesis 1:26). In Genesis 1:27 however,

we have an individual (him—third person singular pronoun) being described. The narrative in Genesis 2–4 speaks of Adam as an individual and not simply referring to mankind. For example:

- Genesis 2:7: "...God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils..."
- Genesis 2:23: After, God makes the woman from man's side the man says "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh;..." How could the whole of mankind say "bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh?"
- Genesis 2:25: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife,..." Was the whole human race naked?
- Genesis 3:17: The noun, *adam*, is used here for the first time without the definite article indicating a proper name.
- Genesis 4:1: "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived..." Did the whole human race know (relationally) Eve?

Alexander and others who argue that the Hebrew word *adam* only means man or mankind must deal with the fact that the context of the Genesis narrative clearly depicts Adam as a singular individual. The narrative in Genesis presents Adam as acting, speaking, and as reproducing. Hebrew vocabulary does not support theistic evolution.

Alexander puts forward two possible models for understanding Adam. First is the "Retelling model" which represents a gradualist proto-historical view:

...meaning that it is not historical in the usual sense of that word, but does refer to events that took place in particular times and locations. The model suggests that as anatomically modern humans evolved in Africa from 200,000 years ago, or during some period of linguistic and cultural development since then, there was a gradual growing awareness of God's presence and calling upon their lives to which they responded in obedience and worship. (Alexander 2011a, p.5)

The second model that Alexander suggests is the "Homo divinus" model:

According to this model, God in his grace chose a couple of Neolithic farmers in the Near East...to whom he chose to reveal himself in a special way, calling them into fellowship with himself—so that they might know Him as the one true personal God. (Alexander 2011a, p.6)

The Homo divinus model apparently draws attention to the representative nature of "the Adam" "the man" as suggested by the definite article:

"The man" is therefore viewed as the federal head of the whole of humanity alive at that time...Adam and Eve, in this view, were real people, living in a particular historical era and geographical location, chosen by God to be the representatives of his new

humanity on earth, not by virtue of anything that they had done, but simply by God's grace. (Alexander 2011a, p.6)

Alexander claims that the advantage of the Homo divinus model is:

...that it takes very seriously the Biblical idea that Adam and Eve were historical figures as indicated by those texts already mentioned. It also sees the Fall as an historical event involving the disobedience of Adam and Eve to God's express commands, bringing death in its wake. The model locates these events within Jewish proto-history. (Alexander 2011a, p.7)

These interpretations of Adam require that there were *Homo sapiens* who were not the image bearers of God. It requires an adoptionistic understanding of Adam rather than a special creation of Adam. Furthermore, is this in anyway even a possible legitimate exegetical reading of Genesis? It is difficult to imagine that any person without being taught this previously would come to the conclusion that Adam was a Neolithic farmer. The Neolithic period is an evolutionary interpretation of archaeological evidence not a valid interpretation of Scripture. Alexander's suggested models for understanding Adam and Genesis 1–3 should cause us to be wary because it is far from the plain reading of Scripture.

More recently, Peter Enns in his book *The Evolution of Adam*, argues why one should reject Adam as a historical individual. According to Enns:

Our thinking about Adam must change...I am arguing that *our understanding of Adam has evolved over the years* and that it must now be adjusted in light of the preponderance of (1) scientific evidence supporting evolution and (2) literary evidence from the world of the Bible that helps clarify the kind of literature the Bible is... (Enns 2012, p. xiii)

Enns goes on to state the following:

A historical Adam has been the dominant Christian view for two thousand years. We must add, however, that the general consensus was formed before the advent of evolutionary theory...Evolution demands that the special creation of the first Adam as described in the Bible is not literally historical. (Enns 2012, p.xvi)

Enns is clear where the authority lies in his interpretation of Scripture, his belief in the theory of evolution. Dr. Enns goes on to say,

After a virtual silence in the Old Testament, Adam makes a sudden and unprecedented appearance in two of Paul's Letters (Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15). (Enns 2012, p.xvi)

Dr Enns's suggestion of the virtual silence of Adam in the Old Testament seems to imply that Adam was unimportant to the Old Testament authors. Is this the case however?

First of all it is uncommon for the Old Testament to

refer to any Genesis text. One of the most important texts in Jewish theology is the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 however it is not even cited in the rest of the Old Testament.

Second, it is assumed that the Old Testament does not speak of Adam specifically. There are a number of passages which either specifically mention Adam or assume knowledge of Adam and the effects of the Fall in Genesis 2–3. While there is no definite scholarly consensus to the mention of Adam in the Old Testament, outside of Genesis 1–5, there can be a good exegetical case made for him and the effects of the Fall in a number of Old Testament passages:

1. The most obvious reference to Adam is found in 1 Chronicles 1:1 as the head of the genealogy of Israel. First Chronicles was written to those returning from exile in Babylon in the sixth and fifth centuries and the genealogies to them represented the charter of their identity. In the genealogy there are individuals whose historicity would not even be questioned. The author of Chronicles does not distinguish between historical and figurative as he clearly understood Adam as historical individual.
2. There is a possible allusion to Adam in Deuteronomy 32:8 where “the sons of adam” may be the proper translation (King James Version; New King James Version; Orthodox Jewish Bible). The context is that of God distributing mankind from its earliest time, which possibly refers to the event of the confusion of tongues and division of the nations mentioned in Genesis 10 and 11. The providential movements of the nations and races of mankind, from Deuteronomy 32:8, could be what Paul is referring to in Acts 17:24–28 when he speaks to the Greeks on Mars Hill. Here Paul clearly refers to Adam in order to show that all people have their roots in the one man God originally created.
3. In Hosea 6:7 the Hebrew word *adam* is used but it is disputed as to whether it means “Adam” or “man.” Hosea the prophet is addressing the Israelites who are in exile, appealing to them to return to the Lord. In verse 7 it says “But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant” (New American Standard Bible). Some scholars suggest “like Adam” should be translated “like men” as *adam* in Hebrew can also mean man. However, “...this is to intrude an inanity into the text, for how else could Hosea’s contemporaries transgress than “like men” (Reymond 1998, p. 430)? “They,” *הֵם*, in verse 7 refers to Israel and Judah and not the Priests first mentioned in verse 9. The Old Testament scholars and experts in biblical Hebrew, Keil and Delitzsch, suggest that *מִנָּך*, like Adam, does not mean...“after the manner of men,” or

“like ordinary men,”—for this explanation would only be admissible if *תְּמִימָנָן* referred to the priests or prophets...but “like Adam,” who transgressed the commandment of God, that he should not eat from the tree of knowledge (Keil and Delitzsch 1889, pp.99–100).

4. The phrase “like adam” also occurs in the book of Job 31:33 which reads: “If I have covered my transgressions as Adam, By hiding my iniquity in my bosom,...”

Again the phrase “as [like] Adam” is disputed as to its meaning. However, a reference to the first man Adam, rather than “man” in general, would be appropriate as it was Adam who tried to cover his own transgression back in the garden (Genesis 3:7). Franz Delitzsch notes that to translate “as [like] Adam” here as “like men”:

...would be as tame here, and altogether expressionless in the parallel passages Hos. vi 7...since the force of the prophetic utterance: “they have *מִנָּך* transgressed the covenant,” consists in this, “that Israel is accused of a transgression which is only to be compared to that of the first man created: here, as there, a like transgression of the expressed will of God”...The point of the comparison is only the sinner’s dread of the light, which became prominent as the prototype for every succeeding age in Adam’s hiding himself. (Delitzsch 1976, pp. 193–194)

Although there is debate as to where and when the events of the book of Job actually take place many of the circumstances in the story of Job point to a setting in the early second millennium with Job possibly being a contemporary of the patriarchs (Archer 1985, p. 465). For example:

- Job offers sacrifices without the benefit of a priest
- His wealth is measured in terms of flocks and servants
- His longevity—after his restoration Job lived 140 years which harkens back to Genesis (Job 42:10, 16). These circumstances suggest a pre-Mosaic origin for the book. This would mean that he would be more likely to have a knowledge of Adam passed down through either oral tradition or written documents.¹ There are also references in Job to the first man and the usurping of knowledge (Job 15:7–8) which recalls the sin of Adam in Genesis 2–3, to death and the Curse (Job 14:1; 34:15) that suggest a knowledge of Adam and the effects of God’s curse on the earth due to his sin.

5. In Psalm 82:7 the Hebrew *אַתָּה כָּאָדָם תִּמְרוֹתָן* reads literally: “Surely you will die like *adam*” this phrase echoes the command God gave to Adam in the Garden (Genesis 2:17) and “...for judges inflated with pride because they bear the divine

¹ The text of Genesis 5:1 specifically claims to be dependent on a “scroll” (Hebrew, *sepher*). This would allow us to assume that one or more of the toledots (Genesis 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27) may have been derived from written sources (Kaiser 2001, pp. 57–58).

- image a reference to Adam would be appropriate" (Blocher 2000, p.373). To the hearers of Psalm 82 the reference to Adam would recall his fate in Genesis 2–3.
6. Ecclesiastes 7:29 reads "Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes." This speaks of God making man, using the article with *adam* אָדָם, "upright" *yashar* יְשָׁרֵךְ which here can be translated "just" (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 2006, p.449) having to do with the disposition of Adam's mind, before the Fall, being "just" before God (Ephesians 4:24). This may be the clearest Old Testament text that provides a clear reference to the state of man prior to the Fall.
7. In Ezekiel 28, where the imagery is dependent on the Genesis account, there is an explicit reference to Eden in (verse 13). Ezekiel's oracle against the King of Tyre compares him to the first "prince" of creation by using the phrase "You *adam*" (Ezekiel 28:9; "...you shall be a man,...") (Blocher 2000, p.373). Verses 11–19 "...abound in allusions to Genesis 2–3... The connecting link is doubtless in the sin of pride which both Adam and Tyre were guilty of..."(Taylor 1969, p.196). There are further mentions of Eden, the garden of God, in Ezekiel 31:9, 16, 18. The oracle in verses 10–14 gives reasons for the cedar's downfall, to which the Pharaoh is likened, alluding to pride as the preceding pattern of downfall of the cedar tree. God therefore casts the tree out just as Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden.
- Furthermore, the Old Testament writers were well aware of the teaching of the Genesis narrative that death was a returning to the dust of the ground (Genesis 3:19) thus there would have been knowledge of the one, Adam, who brought death into the world. For example, many books in the Old Testament reflect the very language of Genesis 3. In Psalm 90:3 the Psalmist wrote: "You turn man back into dust And say, 'Return, O children of men.'" (New American Standard Bible).
- [T]he idea of returning to it [dust] almost certainly alludes to the curse of Adam while the phrase "children of men" could be translated "sons of Adam." (Kidner 1975, p.328)
- There are many other Old Testament passages that refer to man returning to the dust (Job 34:15; Psalm 104:29; Ecclesiastes 3:20; 12:7).
- Further proof of Adam's importance for Israel's theology is found in examples from Second Temple Judaism. For example, the idea of original sin, which in some quarters is often seen as an invention of western Christianity, is found in many of the writings of the Second Temple period. Old Testament scholar Brevard Childs states: "Judaism shared the view that human sin derived from Adam (IV Ezra 3.7; Sifre Deut. 323)" (Childs 1993, p.579).
- An even clearer example of the belief in original sin being derived from Adam is found in 2 Esdras:
- The same fate befell all of them: just as death came upon Adam, so the flood upon them [of Noah's generation]...For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent; the law was in the hearts of the people along with the evil root; but what was good departed, and the evil remained...in everything doing just as Adam and all his descendants had done, for they also had the evil heart. (2 Esdras 3:10, 21–22, 26 NRSV)
- The nation of Israel in her exile understood that she was "in Adam" and that the effects of his first disobedience were entrenched within Israel's understanding of their own disobedience. This concept of cooperate solidarity is foreign to many in the western church with an individualistic theory of human "rights" but it was basic to the biblical worldview of Israel (see Joshua 7).
- The consequences of Adam's disobedience in Genesis are felt throughout the Old Testament. Genesis 4 onwards is a testament to the Fall, the Flood, Babel, Israel's scattering and the constant human failure. Paul an inspired apostle in the New Testament gives us theological insights and explains the significance and meaning of Adam. The Old Testament gives the information that speaks of the Fall of the human race due to Adam's disobedience. Paul looks back with theological reflections in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 teaching an inseparable tie between the historical reality of Christ's work of redemption and the historical reality of the fall in Genesis 2–3.
- The majority of these scholars reject the belief in a historical Adam because of the "supposed" evidence from evolution. However, C.J. Collins, while believing that God used evolution, contends for a "version" of the traditional understanding of Adam and Eve as historical people. Collins argues that the stories of Genesis 1–11 include
- ...divine action, symbolism, and imaginative elements; the purpose of the stories is to lay the foundation for a worldview, without being taken in a "literalistic" fashion. (Collins 2010, p.151)
- Collins believes the biblical storyline teaches that Adam and Eve:
- ...are historical persons at the headwaters of the distinctly human kind. To say that they are "historical," of course, lays on us no requirement of "literalism" for reading Genesis, if the material itself does not invite it. (Collins 2010, p.158)
- There is no textually valid reason however not

to take Genesis literally (naturally). Jesus clearly interpreted it this way (Matthew 19:4–5) as did the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 11:8–9; 1 Timothy 2:13–14). Collins's "literalistic/literalism" caricature is unfortunate as it stereotypes the young earth position by setting up a straw man argument against it. Young-earth creationists explain their hermeneutic as historical-grammatical which seeks to understand the text according to its literature.

Because Collins sees Genesis 2:17 as referring to the spiritual death of Adam and Eve, his answer to the question "what of the fossil record, which many interpret to imply that the humans had ancestors, who died" (Collins 2010, p. 157) is somewhat disconcerting. As it leads Collins to conclude, that "...this particular couple were a fresh start, for whom physical death was not their intended outcome" (Collins 2010, p. 159). A "fresh start" hardly seems appropriate language to describe God's creation of Adam and Eve. What does Collins believe that God was doing with his "other creations" before this?

With regards to Genesis 2:17 Collins has overlooked the plain meaning of Genesis 3:17–19, which is also part of the fulfilment of the threat of Genesis 2:17 and which began to take effect immediately after Adam's disobedience. Also, the apostolic interpretation of this event is that both physical and spiritual death was brought about through this act of disobedience (Romans 5:12–14; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45). Collins and others who accept evolution have to view Genesis 2:17 as referring to spiritual death because if it does refer to physical death it contradicts the theory of evolution. Furthermore, we do not have to separate physical death from spiritual death in our understanding of Genesis 2:17. It is a false dilemma to say that it had to be either or. Rather we can accept that both spiritual death (Genesis 3:7–8) and physical death (Genesis 3:17–19) came about as a result of Adam's disobedience.

Collins's authority for coming to a conclusion on the historicity of Adam and Eve seems more to do with "scientific evidence" than with what Scripture says, he states:

From the palaeontologists, we learn that Adam and Eve, if they are indeed at the headwaters of the human race, must come before such events as the arrival of modern humans in Australia, which means before about 40,000BC. (Collins 2010, p. 159)

Again the language Collins uses in his conclusions regarding the historicity of Adam and Eve "if they are indeed at the headwaters of the human race" is troublesome. The biblical data is clear that Adam and Eve are the first human couple.

Collins's use of the "special creation" of Adam is also questionable as he states, regarding the process of the creation of Adam:

Young-earth creationists, and many old-earth creationists, commonly think of Adam and Eve as fresh creations, with no animal forebears. Others allow for God to have refurbished a pre-existing hominid into Adam. While I am not making an issue of this...I think it is nevertheless crucial to affirm that, whatever the process, it was not a purely natural one. Regardless of where God got the raw material, we can say that humans are the result of "special creation." (Collins 2011, p. 160)

The process of Adam's creation, however, is the most crucial part of this debate. The text of Genesis 2:7 is clear as to where God got the material to make Adam, the key word being "dust," and it can only mean this in the context of Genesis 2–3 (see Genesis 3:19; 23). God took dust from the ground, made Adam from it, breathed into his mouth the breath of life and consequently man became a living creature. If Adam was not the first man, however, and there were other creatures prior to Adam then what God does with Adam is not that special and in what sense was he the first man (1 Corinthians 15:45)? Before Adam's creation Genesis 2:5 has already stated that there was no man yet to till the ground, and after his creation Genesis 2:18–20 states that there was no helper suitable for Adam, which is why God made Eve. The context of Genesis 2 is quite clear that Adam was the very first human being.

Yet even other evangelical Christians, who are considered conservative in their view of Scripture, seem to be quite happy in being agnostic regarding the process by which Adam was created:

Whatever one's conclusions concerning the process of human origins, Christian theology stands or falls with a historical Adam and a historical fall. (Horton 2011, p. 424)

While Horton is correct in what he says concerning a historical Adam, his statement shows a complete lack of understanding of the origins debate. As we have seen, many theistic evolutionists today who claim to be evangelical because of their beliefs about the process of human origins have rejected a historical Adam and a historical fall along with him.

Collins rejects the biblical timeline for Adam and Eve because he believes that there are gaps in the biblical chronologies (Collins 2010, p. 158). He concludes that the special creation of man occurred somewhere between 100,000 and 40,000 years ago (Collins 2010, p. 160).

The presupposition for all of these scholars seems to be that we have to find a way to rescue the tension between the theory of evolution on the one hand and the Bible on the other. It is an accommodationist's approach to the Bible. These scholars are interpreting Bible passages in ways in which one would never do if he were not first reading the evolutionary theory

into the text. They are placing, whether they intend to or not, scientific dogma at a higher and more controlling authority than the Scriptures. The clear meaning of the biblical text is being changed in order to conform to the external, dogma of the day. This should cause great concern because it would require the theistic evolutionist interpretation of Scripture to understand what the Bible says. This is similar to pre-Reformation times when lay people had to depend on the priest for a correct interpretation of Scripture.

Is Genesis Poetry? The Genre of Genesis

Behind the idea that Adam was not an historical figure, that is, mythical, for many of these scholars is the assumption that the text of Genesis 1–11 is poetry. Nevertheless, only if Genesis 1–11 were, in fact, written as poetry would it make sense to understand Adam as a symbolic or non-historical.

However, Genesis falls neither under the category of myth nor of poetry for “...the characteristics of Hebrew poetry are lacking, and in particular there is an absence of parallelism” (Young 1964, pp. 82–83). Although there may be a discussion concerning artistic elements of the Genesis creation account, there is compelling textual evidence to conclude that Genesis is not a poetic text (Blocher 1984, p. 32; Hasel 1994, pp. 19–21; Kaiser 2001, pp. 80–82).

Genesis 1–11 is clearly written as historical narrative, although this does not exclude figures of speech. The repeated use of the *waw* consecutive, which is an essential characteristic of narrative adding to the past narration an element of sequence, helps to identify it as so (Kaiser 2001, p. 80). Appearing 55 times in the 34 verses in Genesis 1:1–2:3, the *waw* consecutive is consistent with the narrative material found in the remainder of Genesis (McCabe 2009, p. 217).

Moreover, the text of Genesis 1–11 is obviously historical narrative because it intends to give historical data. For example, Genesis 5:1–5 gives dates and events for Adam’s life. Furthermore, in Genesis 11–12 there is no transition from non-historical to historical and it is not treated as a separate literary category from Genesis 12–50. There is no difference in Genesis 1 grammatically and in form to the other historical accounts in Genesis as there is no break in the literary style in the first twelve chapters. These are all in the same literary category as they use the same rubric *toledot* to tell the story (Kaiser 2001, p. 82). Also, we know Abraham and Jacob were historical figures; therefore, there is no valid reason not to accept Adam as historical. Unfortunately, for these and other scholars Genesis 1–5 neither presents Adam as symbolic nor as non-historical.

The Biblical Basis for a Historical Adam

Scripture clearly teaches that the human race began in a singular first man, Adam, who was brought into existence by the creative act of God. In an interview with National Public Radio Albert Mohler, the President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said:

The moment you say “We have to abandon this theology in order to have the respect of the world,” you end up with neither biblical orthodoxy nor the respect of the world. (Mohler 2011)

Mohler is exactly right because theistic evolution is neither biblical orthodoxy nor does it win respect with the world (not that the Christian should be looking for the respect of the world). The decline of the church in Europe since the acceptance of Darwinian evolution in the late nineteenth century is evidence of this. At the same time it is blatantly obvious to the world that denying the historical existence of Adam and Eve is absurd, as Richard Dawkins points out:

Oh, but of course, the story of Adam and Eve was only ever symbolic, wasn’t it? Symbolic? So, in order to impress himself, Jesus had himself tortured and executed, in vicarious punishment for a symbolic sin committed by a non-existent individual? As I said, barking mad, as well as viciously unpleasant. (Dawkins 2006, p. 253)

Yet even Dawkins can see the inconsistency of Christians who also hold to evolution:

I think the evangelical Christians have really sort of got it right in a way, in seeing evolution as the enemy. Whereas the more, what shall we say, sophisticated theologians are quite happy to live with evolution, I think they’re deluded. I think the evangelicals have got it right, in that there really is a deep incompatibility between evolution and Christianity. (Dawkins 2011)

Scripture repeatedly warns Christians against comparing ourselves to the world system (John 15:19; Romans 12:1–2; Colossians 2:1–10; 1 John 2:15–17) or seeking the approval of the secular world (Luke 6:26; James 4:4; 1 John 4:5).

The biblical chronologies in the Old Testament such as Genesis 5–11 and 1 Chronicles 1:1 present Adam alongside numerous historical individuals.

Interpreting “Adam” as a symbolic figure alone flies in the face of the chronologies that link Adam as a person to Israel’s father, Abraham. (Mathews 1996, p. 111)

Furthermore, in the New Testament these genealogies are understood as accurate (Luke 3:3–28), again, presenting Adam alongside many other historical figures which are included in the genealogy of Christ. Luke is a credible historian, and shows that Christ’s genealogy can be traced back to the first man and father of all humanity (Luke 3:3–28). If Adam is not a historical figure then it undermines

Luke's point by using a mythical figure to make a theological point. In the same manner, in Acts 17:22–33 Paul preaches the gospel to pagans who have no background in Jewish theology and starts with "one man" Adam. Schnabel recognizes that:

The reference to one ancestor in Acts 17:26...is an unambiguous reference to the biblical tradition of the beginning of all human existence in the creation of Adam, the first man whom God brought into being (Gen 1:26–27; 2:7). There is no clear parallel in Greek thought or mythology to this conviction that the human race can be traced back to one man who was created by God. (Schnabel 2008, p. 115)

In the context of Paul's gospel presentation in Acts 17, it would undermine what he is trying to teach if one man is mythical and the other (Jesus, verse 31) is historical. Robert Strimple points out that in Romans 5:14 Paul teaches that Adam is:

...a "type" of the one to come, i.e., Christ. In the Bible a type is always an historical person, action, or event appointed by God to be a foreshadowing, a pointer, to the fulfilment, yet to come in history in Christ. To speak of a type is to speak in terms of redemptive history. A type is not merely an allegory but an historical reality. (Strimple 2010)

Whenever Adam is presented in Scripture, the author believes him to be historical as Moo points out "...Adam and Christ are too closely compared in this passage [Romans 5] to think that one could be 'mythical' and the other 'historical'" (Moo 1996, p. 325).

Paul's teaching concerning Adam being the first man is clear in his writings. In Romans 5 there is an emphasis on the singularity of the one man (Romans 5:12, 15, 17, 18, 19) as there is in 1 Corinthians 15:45 where again Paul states that Adam was "the first man." Paul's argument, in Romans 5, is fatally undermined if Adam means mankind in general, a metaphor for everybody. If it was not by one man that sin, condemnation, and judgment came upon all, then how can it be by one man, Jesus Christ that salvation comes? The parallel is broken and the analogy does not work if Adam is a metaphor for mankind.

The Bible is clear that Adam was "the first man" and that Eve was the first woman created. There is nowhere in the Bible any hint of a pre-Adamic race. In Genesis 2:7 we read that Adam was "formed" *yatsar* (is used of what potters do with clay in Jeremiah 18:4–6) from the dust of the ground which suggests a direct act of God. Robert Culver comments on Genesis 2:7:

...the word '*adham*...' bears the article *ha* prefixed, viz *ha 'adham*. "[T]he man" (NIV, ESV) is grammatically correct, but the true sense is better conveyed by "...the LORD God formed a man" (NEB), i.e. a single specimen. (Culver 2006, p. 241)

In Genesis 3:19 God curses Adam for his

disobedience towards His command and is told that he will return to the dust of the ground (Genesis 3:19). If Adam is a metaphor for an ape-man then into what kind of ape-man would one return when he dies?

Furthermore, Genesis 5:6 is very specific about the details of Adam's age, that he lived 930 years. Not only is this very specific but it is internally consistent with the longevity of Adam's descendants (Genesis 5:7–32) and with those who lived after the Flood, although their age starts to decline due to the effects of sin and the climatic changes after the Flood. For example, Job lived 140 years, after his restoration (Job 42:16), Moses lived 120 years (Deuteronomy 34:7), and when Joseph presented his father Jacob in front of Pharaoh in Genesis 47:8–9 Pharaoh says to Jacob:

"How old are you?" And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."

Jacob's fathers were Abraham who lived 175 years (Genesis 25:7) and Isaac who lived 180 years (Genesis 35:28). Many believe Adam's age is a sign that the text of Genesis is a myth however, the internal consistency of the longevity of many biblical figures after Adam clearly suggests otherwise.

The question as to whether Adam was historical is also equally important with regards to Eve. In Genesis 3:20 Adam named his wife *hawwa*, meaning, "living," which is traditionally rendered "Eve." In Hebrew *hawwa* is phonetically related to the word *hay* ("living");

...thus by a phonetic play, Adam explains why she is named Eve. She is the "mother of all living," for all human life will have its source in her body. (Mathews 1996, p. 254)

Theistic evolutionists have no problem explaining Adam away as a lower form of man, however, a problem for them is explained by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

...if you do not accept this history, and prefer to believe that man's body developed as the result of an evolutionary process, and that God then took one of these humanoid persons, or whatever you may call them, and did something to him and turned him into a man, you are still left with the question of how to explain Eve, for the Bible is very particular as to the origin of Eve. All who accept in any form the theory of evolution in the development of man completely fail to account for the being, origin, and existence of Eve. (Lloyd-Jones 1992, p. 76)

As a matter of pure logic the New Testament agrees with the Old. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church "For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but

woman for the man,” (1 Corinthians 11:8–9) he was not ambiguous and the order is exactly as Genesis teaches. Moreover, 1 Timothy 2:13 “For Adam was formed first, then Eve,” also agrees with the created order in Genesis.

Why the Historicity of Adam is Important

Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains why the issue of Adam is important in his book *What is an Evangelical*:

We must assert that we believe in the being of one first man called Adam, and in one first woman called Eve. We reject any notion of a pre-Adamic man because it is contrary to the teaching of the Scripture...If we say that we believe the Bible to be the Word of God, we must say that about the whole of the Bible, and when the Bible presents itself to us as history, we must accept it as history. (Lloyd-Jones 1992, pp. 74–75)

The reason why men must accept Adam as historical is because it is the clear teaching of Scripture. The question that needs to be considered is what is the theological cost if one does not hold to an historical Adam?

Again, Albert Mohler points out the logical consequences for denying Adam as a historical person:

...we would have to tell the Bible's story in a very different way than the church has told it for centuries as the Bible has been read, taught, preached, and believed. If there is no historical Adam, then the Bible's metanarrative is not Creation-Fall-Redemption-New Creation, but something very different. (Mohler 2011b)

Once this metanarrative goes then so do vital doctrines of the Christian faith. If we reject an historical Adam then some important biblical doctrines will be eroded with it.

Doctrine of Sin

The question: was Adam a historical individual leads to the real question which is: “Was the Fall a real event in human history?” (Strimple 2010). If Adam were not a historical individual in space and time then it obviously follows that sin and death cannot have originated with him. If evolution is true then there was never one uniquely created man who started out good and rebelled against God, from whom all human beings descended, and therefore are all in need of a savior. If evolution is true then man’s rebellion did not bring death into the world. Instead, the human race began as a group of hominids who had no knowledge of God or righteousness, struggling for existence in a world already filled with death.

Dennis Alexander contests the idea that the Bible teaches the doctrine of “original sin” admitting that the doctrine is incompatible with evolution. In an article in an English newspaper, *The Guardian*,

concerning the doctrine of “original sin” he states:

...there is clear incompatibility with evolution, in which anatomically modern humans first start appearing in Africa about 200,000 years ago through a process involving countless deaths over thousands of generations. (Alexander 2011b)

Alexander goes on to say: “Nowhere does the Bible teach that physical death originates with the sin of Adam, nor that sin is inherited from Adam...” (Alexander 2011b).

Alexander’s statement clearly overlooks what Genesis 2 and 3 teach concerning physical death. Genesis 2:17 implies the process of physical death of humans came about as a result of man’s disobedience to God’s command. The grammatical construction “you shall surely die” is very similar to the way Mosaic law threatened capital punishment—“he will surely die,” or “they will surely die” (Exodus 21:12; Leviticus 20:9–16). These were formulaic ways of declaring a death sentence. God was not saying Adam and Eve would die immediately but that death would certainly follow disobedience. This can be seen in the Curse man received from God in Genesis 3:19:

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.

The Curse would lose all meaning if physical death was already a natural part of the world before this. The New Testament also teaches that the penalty for sin is physical death (Romans 5:12–14; 6:23). If Adam’s death was just figurative or “spiritual,” then why did Jesus have to die a real physical death?

What of Alexander’s claim that the Bible does not teach that we inherit Adam’s sin? Does man have a sinful nature into which he is born or are all born into a state of moral neutrality and innocence? It can be understood from Paul’s comments in Romans 5:19 that Adam’s disobedience (sin) rendered all of his descendants guilty by virtue of his first sin.

The reformer, John Calvin, implied that human nature fell in Adam in his comments on Romans 5:19–21:

We must, therefore, hold it for certain, that, in regard to human nature, Adam was not merely a progenitor, but, as it were, a root, and that, accordingly, by his corruption, the whole human race was deservedly vitiated. (Calvin 2009, p. 150)

George Eldon Ladd also understood that for the apostle Paul:

It is quite clear that Paul believed in “original sin” in the sense that Adam’s sin constituted all people sinners. When Paul says “in Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:21), he is expressing a common Old Testament idea of human solidarity, which is very different from our modern individualistic thinking. (Ladd 1994, p. 443)

For many in the western world it is difficult to grasp the concept of humanity's union with Adam (Romans 5:12) and the concept of cooperative solidarity because of the dominance of individualist thinking that prevails in western culture. However, the real reason many reject the idea of inherited sin from Adam is stated by the late James Montgomery Boice:

I am convinced that the major reason why the liberal scholars want to regard the opening chapters of Genesis as mythology is that they do not want to face the reality of the fall of the race in Adam or the guilt that flows from it. (Boice 1992, p. 583)

There is a vigorous protest within our hearts with the value of the imputation of guilt from one person to another.

Jesus (Matthew 19:4–5; Mark 10:6) and Paul (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45) clearly thought of Adam as a historical person and not as an allegorical example. If Adam is put into the genre of mythology and the Fall with him then death will be seen as a natural phenomenon with no relation to sin.

Doctrine of Christology

If Adam were not a historical individual, then what would make one think he could trust the Scriptures when it speaks of Christ as a historical person? The parallel Paul draws between Adam and Christ in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 is too close for one to be historical and the other not to be. Our Lord accepted the historicity of Adam (Matthew 19:4–6) so was he then mistaken? If he were, then how could one trust in anything else he says? This issue calls into question the reliability of the Lord's teaching.

In Mark 10:6 Jesus said "But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.'" The statement "from the beginning of the creation" (see John 8:44; 1 John 3:8 where "from the beginning" refers to the beginning of creation) is a reference to the beginning of creation and not simply to the beginning of the human race (Mortenson 2009, pp. 318–325). Jesus was saying that Adam and Eve were there at the beginning of creation, on Day 6, not billions of years after the beginning. Jesus understood from the text of Genesis that Adam was created at the beginning of creation which is directly opposed to the evolutionary opinion of the origin of man.

Some suggest that Jesus's teaching was merely accommodating to the cultural beliefs of his day. However, Jesus never hesitated to correct erroneous views common in the culture (Matthew 7:29). This is demonstrated in the gospels when he confronted error and corrected erroneous views (Matthew 22:29). Furthermore, in John 14:6 we are told that

Jesus is the truth and if he is the truth he must always tell the truth. Jesus did nothing on his own authority (John 5:19, 30; 6:38), and He spoke the things that the Father taught him (John 8:28). Jesus was not self-taught but His message came directly from God and therefore it was ultimately truth (John 7:16–17). Jesus's use of Scripture was authoritative and infallible (Matthew 5:17–20; John 10:34–35) because He spoke with the authority of God the Father (John 5:30; 8:28).

Denial of a literal Adam also affects one's view of justification and the imputed righteousness of Christ. John Piper writes:

The basis of our justification before God is a divine righteousness that comes to us in a way analogous to the way Adam's sin came to us. As we were in him and share in his sin, so we are in Christ and share in his righteousness. (Piper 2002, p. 93)

If we deny a historical Adam then Paul's argument for our being counted righteous in Christ falls apart. This is because it rests upon the argument that because of one man's act of disobedience (the historical Adam), we can be counted righteous by one man's (the historical Christ's), act of righteousness.

Doctrine of Salvation

Paul's teaching in Romans 5 is that mankind is either in Adam or Christ. In Adam all are declared guilty and justly deserve our punishment. However, for those found in Christ they will be justified and declared righteous in Christ. If Adam is not historical then Paul's whole argument concerning the atonement is called into question. Again, Dr James Boice states:

You do not need a historical atonement to undo a mythological fall or a mythological transgression. All you need is another myth. But if Christ needed to be real to save us, then Adam was real, too. It is because Adam was real that Christ also had to be real to make atonement. (Boice 1992, p. 583)

Belief in Adam as a real person is foundational to having a right understanding of the gospel and why Jesus atoned for sins. Jesus, the last Adam, came to succeed where the first Adam had failed in keeping the law of God. Jesus had to do what Adam failed to do to fulfil the required sinless life of perfection to "fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

Theistic evolutionist Denis Lamoureux, believes Adam never existed, and this fact has no impact whatsoever on the foundational beliefs of Christianity, although he rightly acknowledges that the apostle Paul understood Adam to be a real person. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 15:1–7, 14, 17, he states:

This is the Gospel as stated in the Bible, and there is no mention whatsoever of Adam and whether or not he existed. Christian faith is founded on Jesus,

not Adam...we must also separate, and not conflate, the historical reality of Jesus and His death and bodily resurrection from the fact that Adam never existed... (Lamoureux 2010)

Lamoureux's reasoning is the consequence of following fallible man's ideas about the origin of man rather than God's revealed Word. The apostle Paul does not separate Christ's work of redemption from Adam's disobedience. In 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45–49 Paul grounds the bodily death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus in the reality of the history of Genesis. It was a real man, Adam, who brought about physical death (Genesis 3:19) and corruption (Romans 8:19–22) into God's very good world (Genesis 1:31). This is the reason Paul says Jesus came to earth as a real man in order to undo the work of the first man. Moreover, Paul's foundation for sharing the gospel in a pagan culture begins with a biblical understanding of creation (Acts 14:15–17; 17:24–28) specifically with reference to "one man" (Acts 17:26; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45), which leads him to speak of Jesus and the resurrection (Acts 17:31).

Lamoureux goes on to say: "The central message in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 is this: we are sinners and God judges us for our sins;..." (Lamoureux 2010).

For Lamoureux to say that Adam never existed and that this has no effect on the foundational aspects of Christianity and then to go on to say that we are sinners and God judges sin is to beg the question. Paul's point in Romans 5 is that because of one man, Adam's, disobedience we are sinners (Romans 5:19). Adam broke God's command (Genesis 2:17) and God consequently judged Adam for his disobedience. The Bible tells us that sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4). If Adam never existed then why does man sin and what is sin?

Moreover, for Jesus to substitute for the sins of humanity he must be fully human (Hebrews 2:14–17). This is only possible because this Savior is a physical descendant of the first man Adam via Mary (Luke 3:38)—and is called "the Last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45)—which makes him the relative of all humans in all "races" or people groups who have ever existed.

The historicity of Adam as the ancestor of Jesus and humanity is at the foundation of the gospel. The apostle John begins his gospel by showing that Jesus was God and creator (John 1:1–3). However, this is what Darwin was undermining, because if there were no creator then there is no need for Christ. Seven hundred years before John's gospel God spoke through the prophet Isaiah saying "I, even I, am the LORD, And besides Me there is no savior" (Isaiah 43:11). For Jesus to be our Savior he has to be Yahweh Himself. Not only is Jesus God but he is also the mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

The prophet Isaiah also said that "the Redeemer will come to Zion" (Isaiah 59:20). The Hebrew word for redeemer is *go'el* which means kinsman redeemer and speaks of one who is related by blood to those he redeems (see Ruth 2:20). The kinsman redeemer concept goes back to the nation of Israel who had a law which enacted them to protect their families (Leviticus 25:23–28). If a person became poor and had to sell his inheritance, his kinsman was to come and buy it back so that it would remain in the family and so that the poor relative would not become destitute (verse 25). Jesus is our kinsman redeemer. As Adam is the head of the fallen race of man (Romans 5:12–19) so Christ, as the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), is the head of the race of redeemed mankind. On the cross, Jesus paid the price of our redemption from the race of Adam.

Theistic evolution doesn't just undermine Genesis and a literal Adam, but it also undermines this vital concept of the kinsman-redeemer. The idea of there being a first man is critical to the doctrine of salvation and to the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, 21–22, 45).

Conclusion

This modern view of many theologians that Adam is a myth ultimately has nothing to do with the ambiguity of Scripture because the Bible clearly views Adam as a historical figure. Instead it is driven by a desire to syncretise evolutionary thinking with the Bible. This always ends in disaster because syncretism is based on a type of synthesis blending together the theory of naturalism with historic Christianity. Christianity essentially is antithetical to naturalism. Since the rise of Darwinian evolution in the nineteenth century it has become the custom to reinterpret the biblical account of creation in light of modern scientific theory. Instead of calling into question the "sure results of science" it is the Bible that is often rewritten to say something it clearly doesn't mean.

Moreover, the objections given by theologians to a historical Adam are all based on fanciful eisegesis of the biblical text and not exegesis.

To negotiate the headship of Adam over the human race by mixing it up with theistic evolution is not a side issue or irrelevant. The doctrines of sin, Christology, and salvation are severely undermined if Adam is viewed as a myth. The historicity of Adam is of vital importance for a coherent understanding not only of the Scriptures but of the gospel. One must stand firm on the clear scriptural teaching of a historical Adam.

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