

Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters*

C. John Collins



C. John Collins

The best way to account for both the biblical presentation of human life and our own experience in the world is to suppose that Adam and Eve were real persons, and the forebears of all other human beings. The biblical presentation concerns not simply the story in Genesis and the biblical passages that refer to it, but also the larger biblical storyline, which deals with God's good creation invaded by sin, for which God has a redemptive plan; Israel's calling to be a light to the nations; and the church's prospect of successfully bringing God's light to the whole world. The biblical presentation further concerns the unique role and dignity of the human race, which is a matter of daily experience for everyone: all people yearn for God and need him, depend on him to deal with their sinfulness, and crave a wholesome community for their lives to flourish.

Throughout most of the church's history, Christians, like the Jews from whom they sprang, have believed that the biblical Adam and Eve were actual persons, from whom all other human beings are descended, and whose disobedience to God brought sin into human experience. Educated western Christians today probably do not grant much weight to this historical consensus. After all, they reason, for much of the church's history, most Christians thought that creation took place in the recent past over the course of six calendar days, and even that the earth was the physical center of the universe. We are right to argue that we do not change the basic content of Christianity if we revise these views, even drastically. Effective revisions are the ones that result from a closer reading of the Bible itself—when, after further review, we no longer think that the Bible “teaches” such things. Well, then, may we not study the Bible more closely and revise the traditional understanding of Adam and Eve as well, without a threat to the faith?

Some of the factors that lead to questioning a real Adam and Eve include the perceived impossibility that we could be affected at our deepest level by anything done long ago; the parallels between the themes in Genesis and what we find in stories from other Ancient Near Eastern cultures (which lead some to conclude that Genesis is just as “mythical” as these other stories are); and advances in biology that seem to push us further away from any idea of an original human couple through whom sin and

Jack Collins is professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. He was a teen-aged herpetologist, and went to MIT for his SB and SM (computer science and systems engineering, 1978), to Faith Lutheran Seminary for his MDiv (1985), and to the University of Liverpool for his PhD (Hebrew linguistics, 1989). He has been a research engineer, a church-planter, and, since 1993, a teacher. His early work focused on the grammar of Hebrew and Greek, but he has branched out into studies in science and faith, in how the New Testament uses the Old, and in biblical theology. He was Old Testament chairman for the English Standard Version Bible, and Old Testament editor for the English Standard Version Study Bible. He is the author of *The God of Miracles: An Exegetical Examination of God's Action in the World* (Crossway, 2000); *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* (Crossway, 2003); *Genesis 1–4: a Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (P&R, 2006). He and his wife have been married since 1979, and have two teenaged children.

Article

Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters

death came into the world. Evolutionary history shows that death and struggle have been part of existence on Earth from the earliest moments. Most recently, discoveries about the features of human DNA seem to imply that the human population has always had at least as many as a thousand members. Prominent among the Christian biologists is Francis Collins and his “Biologos” perspective, which agrees that traditional beliefs about Adam and Eve are no longer viable.¹

In this study, I aim to show why we should retain a version of the traditional view, in spite of these pressures. I will argue that the traditional position on Adam and Eve, or some variation of it, does the best job of accounting, not only for the biblical materials, but also for our everyday experience as human beings—an everyday experience that includes sin as something that must be forgiven (by God and by our fellow human beings) and struggled against as defiling and disrupting a good human life.

We look first at the shape of the biblical story—from creation to Fall to redemption and final consummation—and the worldview that rides on that story, and see whether it requires a historical Adam and Eve and a historical Fall. Second, we consider the biblical view of human uniqueness and dignity, and relate these to everyday moral and religious experience, asking whether these, too, favor the traditional position. And finally, we look at some sample scenarios for a scientific understanding of human origins. Due to space, I must save a great deal of detail for another venue—namely, a book-length treatment of these questions.

Admiring the way that C. S. Lewis used “mere Christianity” as his stance, I will christen my position here “mere historical Adam-and-Eve-ism.” I am not entering into distinctions between various Christian positions on such topics as the origin of Adam’s body, or how long ago he lived; the meaning of “the image of God”; how the sin of Adam and Eve comes to affect us; how Genesis 1–2 came to be part of the same book.² In fact, even though I will critically examine some of the specific views that Collins presents, I am not here offering a general critique of the Biologos perspective.

I have said “a version of” and “some variation of” the traditional ideas. One of the basic principles of critical thinking is expressed in Latin as *abusus usum non tollit*, “Abuse does not take away proper use.”

It is entirely possible that some killjoy has used a traditional view of the first sin of Adam and Eve to quell all delight in pleasure and beauty. But that is a *misuse*, and the possibility of misuse is not a logically valid argument against the traditional view. Suppose we do find some difficulties. This may mean that we should try to make some adjustments to the traditional view, but it does not, of itself, mean that we ought to discard the traditional view altogether.

Critical thinking also requires us to be careful in how we approach some of the terms traditionally used, such as “the Fall” and “original sin.” When people deny a historical Adam and Eve for theological reasons, they are commonly objecting to these ideas. I cannot always tell whether they object to *some* version of these ideas, or to *every* one of them. As I have just observed, though, even if we are right in rejecting one version, that does not mean we are right in rejecting all versions. Further, it simply will not do to argue that since the Bible does not use these terms, therefore they are “unbiblical.” Most people have been well aware of the absence of these terms as a philological fact, and have still used the terms as a theological shorthand. To the extent that I use the terms myself, I employ them as a shorthand as well. I imply, not simply that humans are “sinful” (which is something we all can see), but that sinfulness was not part of our original make-up, and derives from some primal rebellion on the part of our first ancestors. I am not developing a “doctrine” of original sin, since I am not trying to explain *how* that primal rebellion comes to affect all of us.³

This is important to clarify, because some authors suggest that we only hold on to Adam and Eve because of western and “Augustinian” views on “original sin”—views not shared by sectors of the church that do not consider Augustine (AD 354–430) reliable. Now it is true, for example, that the eastern churches do not talk about original sin the way that Augustine did; but it does not follow that they therefore have nothing to say on the subject. As a matter of fact, it is common for eastern writers (speaking Greek and Syriac) and pre-Augustinian western writers from the early church to accept Adam and Eve, and their first disobedience, both as historical and as having consequences for us their children. Examples of such writers include the Greek speakers Irenaeus (d. 202), Origen (185–254), Athanasius (293–373), John Chrysostom (c. 344–407), and Theodore of Mopsuestia (350–428); the Syriac speaker

Ephraem the Syrian (306–73); and the Latin speakers Tertullian (c. 160–220) and Cyprian (d. 258).⁴

Whenever we read something, we must pay attention to what kind of literature it is. Certainly, the book of Genesis includes Adam and Eve in its story, using a narrative, which is “history-like” in its form. But just identifying that form does not, of itself, settle anything; there are at least four possible ways of taking the material in Genesis:

1. The author intended to relay “straight” history, with a minimum of figurative language.
2. The author was talking about what he thought were actual events, using rhetorical and literary techniques to shape the readers’ attitudes toward those events.
3. The author intended to recount an imaginary history, using recognizable literary conventions to convey “timeless truths” about God and humans.
4. The author told a story without even caring whether the events were real or imagined; his main goal was to convey various theological and moral truths.

I think option 2 best captures what we find in Genesis, and best explains how the Bible and human experience relate to Adam and Eve. Option 1 is ironic: it is held both by many traditional Christians, especially young-earth creationists, and by many biblical scholars who endorse what is called “historical criticism.” The difference is that the young-earth creationists think that Genesis was telling the truth, and the critical scholars think that Genesis is largely incorrect in its history. Mind you, this does not mean that critical scholars find no value in Genesis; they commonly resort to something like option 4.

Critical biblical scholars often (though not always) deny that Adam and Eve were real people, though they agree that the author of Genesis *intended* to write of real people. Those who follow option 3 say that the author never intended for us to think of Adam and Eve as real, while those who follow option 4 say that it simply does not matter. When a particular scholar denies that Adam and Eve were historical, I cannot always tell which interpretive option he or she has followed; sometimes I wonder if the scholar knows! Of course, all of us, traditional and otherwise, run the danger of *starting* with the affirmation or denial of a real Adam and Eve, and

then looking for a way of reading our starting point into the Bible.

The Shape of the Biblical Story Story and Worldview

A number of developments in biblical studies over the last several decades have deeply enriched our ability to read the Bible well. One of these is the way we have come to appreciate the literary qualities of the biblical books, and the rhetorical purposes that may govern the way the authors tell their stories.⁵

Another development is that we pay more attention to how the biblical writings function to shape a worldview in the people of God.⁶ I am using the term “worldview” in the way students of ideology use the term, for the basic stance toward God, others, and the world that persons and communities hold.⁷ It has further become clear that a worldview is instilled by means of the grand story, which tells a community where it came from, what went wrong, what has been done about it (whether by gods or by humans, or some combination), where it now is in the whole process, and where the whole world is headed. One missiologist suggests that tribal peoples learn their worldviews through the sacred stories their culture tells; but this is true of *all* peoples, not just of tribal ones.⁸

A number of theologians have argued that the Bible presents us with an overarching worldview-shaping story, and not simply with a bunch of edifying stories.⁹ We will take up the specific contours of this story shortly. Albert Wolters and Michael Goheen have shown why this is a crucial insight:

To miss the grand narrative of Scripture is a serious matter; it is not simply a matter of misinterpreting parts of Scripture. It is a matter of being oblivious to *which story is shaping our lives*. Some story will shape our lives. When the Bible is broken up into little bits and chunks—theological, devotional, spiritual, moral, or worldview bits and chunks—then these bits can be nicely fitted into the reigning story of our own culture with all its idols! One can be theologically orthodox, devotionally pious, morally upright, or maybe even have one’s worldview categories straight, and yet be shaped by the idolatrous Western story. The Bible loses its forceful and formative power by being absorbed into a more encompassing secular story.¹⁰

Article

Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters

People who write about the relationship between worldview and overarching story do not always use the same verbs for the relation between the story and the worldview. Does the story *carry* the worldview, *equate to it*, *communicate* it, or something else? However we articulate this, there is one common affirmation: the worldview is not an abstraction derived from the story; one cannot treat the story simply as the husk, which we then discard once we have discovered the (perhaps timeless) concepts. Of course, there may well be transcendent truths (such as moral norms); but they gain their power from their place in the story—that is, they equip the members of a community to play their parts in the story meaningfully.¹¹ It is the worldview story that, if well told, captures the imaginations of those who own it, thereby driving them on and holding their loyalty.

History, Myth, and Worldview Story

This notion of a worldview story ties in with the sense of “myth” in C. S. Lewis’ essay, “The Funeral of a Great Myth.”¹² Here Lewis is describing the story of “developmentalism,” a purely naturalistic evolutionary tale of how we got here and where we are going. He distinguishes this story from the theories of the particular sciences: the story uses the theories to the extent these theories support the story.¹³ What makes this “myth” attractive is its imaginative appeal; as Lewis said, “I grew up believing in this myth and I have felt—I still feel—its almost perfect grandeur.”

Could it be that “myth” is the right category for the kind of stories we find in the ancient world, whether from the Egyptians, Mesopotamians, or even the Hebrews? The difficulty is that the word “myth” has so many different meanings;¹⁴ in popular usage, the term implies a judgment that the story is not true. Further, consider how the Old Testament scholar Peter Enns defines “myth”:

It is an ancient, premodern, prescientific way of addressing questions of ultimate origins and meaning in the form of stories: Who are we? Where do we come from?¹⁵

One problem (among several) with Enns’ definition is that telling stories to explain origins and meaning is by no means limited to “ancient, premodern, prescientific” cultures. Modern Western culture does exactly the same. For example, George Gaylord Simpson drew this conclusion from his study of evolution: “Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process

that did not have him in mind.”¹⁶ This is, in fact, a story, albeit a bleak one, that puts our lives in perspective. If it is the true story of the world, it is a heightened version of what Macbeth said when he discovered that Lady Macbeth had committed suicide: “Life’s ... a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”¹⁷

We are comfortable applying the word “myth” to the stories from Ancient Near Eastern or Graeco-Roman peoples other than the Jews and Christians—because we do not accept them as factual. However, the evidence is that, at least in Mesopotamia (whose tales are the closest correlate to Genesis 1–11), the stories were felt to be true: true, that is, in the sense of talking about real events.¹⁸ As Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen has observed,

The ancient Near East did *not* historicize myth (i.e., read it as imaginary “history”). In fact, exactly the reverse is true—there was, rather, a trend to “mythologize” history, to celebrate actual historical events and people in mythological terms ... The ancients (Near Eastern and Hebrew alike) knew that propaganda based on real events was far more effective than that based on sheer invention.¹⁹

Kitchen further argues,

As to definition [for the flood story], myth or “protohistory,” it should be noted that the Sumerians and Babylonians had no doubts on that score. They included it squarely in the middle of their earliest historical tradition, with kings before it and kings after it.²⁰

Thus, if we try to see those peoples from the inside, we can say that they thought they were telling the truth, of which history is a part. The function of the stories is to present life in terms of a coherent story, that is, the stories serve to convey a worldview and to equip the hearers to live in the world.²¹

Now, Genesis 1–11 has so many points of contact with Mesopotamian stories of origins, ancient kings, the flood, and subsequent kings, that we should find those stories as the proper literary backcloth against which the Genesis stories were written. Genesis 1–11 aims to provide the true pre- and protohistory of the Bible’s alternative worldview story, whose “purpose is to shape Israel’s view of God, the world, and mankind, and their place in it all.”²²

This leads us to the question of the relationship between “history” and the worldview story; but to

address this question, we must first decide what we mean by the word “history.” The word “history” can be used in a variety of senses, and when writers are not clear on what sense they attach to the word, we can get confusion. A text might be “historical” in one writer’s sense but not “historical” in another’s. For example, some scholars use the word “historical” for an account that is told in proper chronological order, with few imaginative elements. Others restrict the word “history” to the kinds of accounts that trained historians write, or even to accounts that leave out all references to actions of God or the gods—and this could lead to the odd assertion, “This narrative is not *historical*, but that doesn’t mean it didn’t happen!”²³

Some connect “historicity” very tightly with “literalism” in interpretation, assuming that if a story is “historical,” it must not make much use of figurative elements. This connection is common ground between the strict young-earth creationist Douglas Kelly and the evolutionary creationist Denis Lamoureux. Kelly apparently reasoned thus: since the creation story of Genesis is “historical,” it therefore must be read in what he calls a “literal” fashion.²⁴ I think this leads to a poor interpretation of the creation story, but that is not my point here. Lamoureux comes to very different conclusions from the same starting point: since the creation passage is not “true” when read literalistically, therefore it is not “historical.”²⁵ A proper reply to this assumption would require discussion of what happens when people communicate, drawing on speech act theory and rhetorical criticism. I hope to take that up elsewhere; for now, I simply observe that there is nothing in the meaning of the word “history,” nor in common human behavior, that requires this tight connection.

I use the ordinary language sense of the word “history.” A story is “historical” if the author wanted his audience to believe that the events recorded really happened. This definition does not settle every question of how we should correlate the literary statements with the way *we* would describe things, since we have to take into account the communicative purpose of the text we are considering. In particular,

1. “historical,” in this sense, is not the same as “prose,” and certainly does not imply that our account has no figurative or imaginative elements;

2. “historical” is not the same as “complete in detail” or “free from ideological bias,” neither of which is possible or desirable anyhow;
3. “historical” is not the same as “told in exact chronological sequence,” unless the text claims that for itself.²⁶

This means that we should think of “history” less as a literary *genre* (another word that has multiple, and unregulated, meanings), and more as *a way of referring to events*. That is, if we say that something is (or is not) historical, we are describing, not the kind of literature it is, but the way it talks about (or does not talk about) real events. Differing literary genres refer to events in different ways for different purposes—or make up fictitious events.

The conclusion to which this discussion leads us is this: If, as seems likely to me, the Mesopotamian origin and flood stories provide the context against which Genesis 1–11 are to be set, then they also provide us with clues on how to read this kind of literature. These stories 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. We should nevertheless see the story as having what we might call a “historical core,” though we must be careful in discerning what that is. Genesis aims to tell the story of beginnings the right way.²⁷

No one knows what materials the author of Genesis used in composing this story. Probably he had access to some versions of the Mesopotamian stories; but beyond that, God alone knows what else he might have had. Maybe there were Hebrew stories of the patriarchs, beginning with Abraham; some of them might even have been written. Perhaps Henri Blocher’s suggestion is best, that the author of Genesis “reconstructed” the past, working backwards from ordinary human experience to what must have caused it, giving us a tale that provided a contrast to the other stories:

Genesis aims to supply the true reconstruction, guided and guaranteed by divine inspiration, over against the fantasies and errors reconstructed by the others. There is nothing in that which allows us to take the event as a symbol.²⁸

Blocher also points out that “the presence of symbolic elements in the text in no way contradicts the

Article

Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters

historicity of its central meaning."²⁹ Another observation from Blocher is also helpful:

The real issue when we try to interpret Genesis 2–3 is not whether we have a historical account of the fall, but whether or not we may read it as the account of a historical fall. The problem is not historiography as a genre narrowly defined—in annals, chronicles, or even saga—but correspondence with discrete realities in our ordinary space and sequential time.³⁰

If we recognize this, then we can see that authors who say things like, “Genesis 1–11 aims to tell us, not history or science, but theology,”³¹ are trying to say something worth saying about Genesis 1–11, but they are indulging in a problematic disjunction. The theology is not separable from the story, as we can see from the fact that one of those “theological truths” is that the One who created the world is the good God who revealed himself to Israel, and not the capricious gods of the other peoples—a historical assertion!

Some authors go even further, and propose that the main goal of the early part of Genesis is to convey “timeless truths.”³² I doubt whether these truths are really as “timeless” as supposed. Besides the “timeless theological truth” that “God created,” which is actually historical (and therefore *not* “timeless”), scholars thinking along these lines might suppose that Genesis 3 teaches that “humans are sinful.” But this is not a timeless truth on its own. Sooner or later someone will want to know, did God create humans with a tendency (or at least an openness) toward sinning, or did he make them good, only for humans to *become* sinful? If they became sinful, how did that happen? Do not our innermost intuitions favor the explanation that humans have somehow declined from a prior state of goodness and health? In other words, the supposed timeless truth, once it interacts with actual human experience, demands answers to historical questions.

If we recognize that these stories serve to convey a worldview, then that also guides us in how to receive these stories as Scripture. The stories tell us what combination of choices and actions, on the part of God and humans, have led up to where we are now. They call on us to learn from those choices, and they enlist the faithful to play their part in the ongoing story.

Now, this has not always been the way that Christian and Jewish preachers and devotional writers

have approached the stories; often these preachers and writers have treated the tales as instantiations of some “timeless” moral or spiritual truism. I do not deny a place for this approach; we find something like it, for example, in Hebrews 11. But the historical element should always be there. The common devotional approach among Christians and Jews, however, usually loses the historical element altogether, in favor of the “timeless.” This approach has a theorist, Aristotle, who wrote (*Poetics*, 9.1–3) about his preference for what he called “poetry” (fictional narrative) over “history” (a tale of things that actually happened, even if told in verse). For Aristotle, “poetry” deals with the universal and thus is more “philosophical,” while “history” is too particular.

The recent Genesis commentary of Leon Kass strongly advocates that we read Genesis “anthropologically” and “philosophically” (intentional echoes of Aristotle?) rather than “historically”: as a record, not of what *did* happen, but of what *might* happen, and what *always* happens.³³ This, he contends, gives us a much richer way of reading. Literary scholar Alan Jacobs, however, sees clearly that Genesis itself does not invite this kind of reading, since its audience is the heir of its events. Jacobs, reviewing Kass’ book, observed:

Philosophical reading strives to locate in the text whatever is universal to human experience, and to find ways of describing the particular experiences of particular people in the most broadly relevant terms possible ...

From one who belongs to a covenant community, then, the appropriation of the biblical narrative must be done by *historical* rather than what Kass would call philosophical means. Our task is not to find a conceptual vocabulary that will allow us to build analogical bridges between the biblical text and our experience; rather, we must understand that we dwell in the same history that the people of Israel relate in the Pentateuch ... Genesis is not *analogous* to our experience, it *is* our experience, in its historical aspect.³⁴

Against Kass’ claim that Genesis is primarily about whether it is “possible to find, institute, and preserve a way of life that accords with man’s true standing in the world and that serves to perfect his godlike possibilities,” Jacobs replies,

Genesis, and the culture from which it emerges, doesn’t seem to give a damn about our “true

standing in the world” and our “godlike possibilities”; rather, as far as I can tell, it is about God and what he has done, and is doing, to repair what his rebellious and arrogant creatures have broken: our relations with ourselves, with one another, with the creation, and with God Himself.³⁵

To see individual biblical stories in relation to the larger worldview story enables us to appreciate that laying stress on the particularity of a historical event takes nothing away from the personal and experiential side; rather, the historical guarantees that our experience is in touch with reality. Relating the biblical narratives to the overarching worldview story, therefore, treats those narratives as they deserve.

Features of the Biblical Story

Here is a simple summary of the biblical story and its function as Scripture:

The OT is thus the story of the one true Creator God, who called the family of Abraham to be his remedy for the defilement that came into the world through the sin of Adam and Eve. God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt in fulfillment of this plan, and established them as a theocracy for the sake of displaying his existence and character to the rest of the world. God sent his blessings and curses upon Israel in order to pursue that purpose. God never desisted from that purpose, even in the face of the most grievous unfaithfulness in Israel.

This overarching story serves as a grand narrative or worldview story for Israel: each member of the people was to see himself or herself as an *heir* of this story, with all its glory and shame; as a *steward* of the story, responsible to pass it on to the next generation; and as a *participant*, whose faithfulness could play a role, in God’s mysterious wisdom, in the story’s progress ...

The NT authors, most of whom were *Jewish* Christians, saw themselves as heirs of the OT story, and as authorized to describe its proper completion in the death and resurrection of Jesus and the Messianic era that this ushered in. These authors appropriated the OT as Christian Scripture, and they urged their audiences (many of whom were *Gentile* Christians) to do the same. There is debate over just how the NT authors used the OT as Scripture ..., but the simplest summary of the NT authors’ stance would be to say that they saw the OT as constituting the

earlier chapters of the story in which Christians are now participating.³⁶

Any telling of the biblical story must include the notion of *sin*. Humans are estranged from God, and Israel is God’s means of bringing light to the world. The theologian Cornelius Plantinga describes sin as “culpable disturbance of shalom,” and though this will not work as the actual definition of any Hebrew or Greek word, it does capture one of the ruling ideas in the biblical worldview.³⁷ Sin is an intrusive element, a disturbance, which is why Israel’s ritual system includes provisions for dealing with personal and corporate sin. Some of the sacrifices “work atonement” (e.g., Lev. 1:4; 4:20; 5:16), and though scholars of Leviticus debate over just what this expression means, at the very least it tells us that the sacrifices deal with sin as a defiling element that ruins human existence and renders people unworthy to be in God’s presence.³⁸ The New Testament authors use these atoning sacrifices to explain the benefits of Jesus’ death in dealing with the sins of believers. For example, when Peter tells Christians that they were ransomed “with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet. 1:19), he is using the burnt offering—one of the atoning sacrifices—to explain what Jesus achieved.³⁹

Further, the biblical authors show a keen interest in seeing moral improvement in the faithful, portraying it, fundamentally, as *restoring the damaged creation pattern*. Christopher Wright observes that the two crucial aspects of proper moral conduct are imitating “the character and ways of God” and returning to the good pattern of creation. He goes on to say,

The purpose of the ethical provisions given in the context of redemption, which include both the covenant law of the Old Testament and the ethics of the kingdom of God in the New, is to restore to humans the desire and the ability to conform to the creational pattern—God’s original purpose for them.⁴⁰

The way that Genesis presents the call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3) indicates that God’s intention was that through this man and his family, the rest of humankind was to find blessing. Genesis presents Adam in such a way that we can see Abraham, and Israel, as a “new Adam.” This presupposes in all human beings some kind of common situation: a need for God, a distance from him due to sin, and the possibility of their moral transformation as they receive

Article

Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters

the message. This commonality has traditionally been held to stem from their common origin.

The biblical story of God's expanding influence among all kinds of people is headed to a glorious conclusion, the final defeat and banishment of sin from human experience; those who cling to their sins will have no place in such glory (Rev. 21:1–8). Humanity's original task was to work outward from Eden, spreading Edenic blessings throughout the earth, turning the whole world into a sanctuary. Human sin interfered with humanity's ability to carry this out, but did not deter God from this plan. The book of Revelation portrays the final victory of God's purposes, using Edenic and sanctuary imagery to describe glorified human life—for believing Jews and Gentiles.⁴¹

Many contemporary theologians, however, see “evil” as something inherent in the very idea of a creation in which rational beings have free will. Take one example among many: W. Sibley Towner surveyed trends in twentieth-century interpretations of Genesis 3, and the impact of those trends in contemporary formulations of “original sin.” After describing formulations of “original sin” in Roman Catholicism and in traditional Presbyterianism, Towner asserts,

Modern believers and unbelievers alike tend to hold as patent nonsense the notion that all human sin and all death are generically descended from a single act by a single pair of human beings who lived at a single moment in time, or that the cause of their original transgression was Satan in the guise of a snake.⁴²

He quotes with approval the opinion of Bruce Vawter:

There was, therefore, no “fall” in the sense that men and women became something other than what they had been created ... The story of the “Fall” is a paradigm of human conduct in the face of temptation, not a lesson in biology.⁴³

This pattern of conduct is, apparently, inherent in being human.

We could criticize Towner's study on a number of levels. He wants to make his presentation more persuasive by mentioning the tendency of “modern believers and unbelievers alike.” But who are these “modern” people, and why should we follow them? What does it mean that they “tend” to think a certain way? Can Towner cite a survey, or does he simply mean the modern people he knows? Have these

modern people given reasons for their tendency, and do those reasons account for other deep instincts these people doubtless share (see *Human Uniqueness and Dignity*, p. 155)? And if they are now a majority, what of it? By Towner's own admission, a majority once held the view he rejects. Majorities can be wrong.

Towner claims Irenaeus (d. AD 202), a leading Greek-speaking theologian of the early church, as a forerunner to this modern view, in seeing “the Fall as a movement from childish innocence toward adult maturity.” If this is right, then it should give us pause. However, Towner has distorted Irenaeus' actual view. According to Irenaeus, the first humans were created morally innocent, their innocence being more like that of a child than of a full adult. God's goal was for them to mature into moral confirmation, but the Fall *interrupted* the process.⁴⁴

Further, Towner is selective in presenting biblical scholars, leaving out anyone who takes Genesis 3 otherwise—from the moderately critical S. R. Driver to the fairly conservative Derek Kidner, not to mention Alexander Heidel, a highly respected Assyriologist also competent in handling biblical material.⁴⁵ Heidel's being an Assyriologist leads to another, and larger point: the biblical scholars he cites respond to the similarities between Genesis and other Ancient Near Eastern stories by treating both kinds as equally unhistorical; but students of the other Near Eastern cultures often just as easily conclude that the Bible writers had a concern for actual events (see *History, Myth, and Worldview Story*, p. 150). Finally, Towner never analyzes whether the trends in exegesis find their attractiveness more in the preferences of “modern believers and unbelievers,” than in the features of the Bible itself.

A number of theological motivations lie behind these contemporary efforts, and each scholar has his own subset of this group of motivations. One motive is to defend the reality of human freedom; another is to address the existence of pain and suffering in a world that God is supposed to have made.

No one can avoid these big questions, it is true, but I judge efforts like Towner's a failure to do justice to those questions. If we say that being prone to sin is inherent in being human with a free will, then we must say the Bible writers were wrong in describing atonement as they did, and we must also say that Jesus was wrong to describe his own death in these

terms (e.g., Mark 10:45). Further, we have now made nonsense of the joyful expectation of Christians to live one day in a glorified world from which sin and death have been banished (Rev. 21:1-8). Do these theologians mean to imply that those who dwell in a glorified world will be less human because they no longer sin?

Nor do these attempts let God off the hook for pain and suffering; or if they succeed in doing so, then the price is sickeningly high. Did God know about evil before he made the world? Most believers would say yes, and they trust that he had his reasons for “allowing” it. But these recent efforts seem to imply that somehow God just could not help himself; the only world he *could* make was one in which people commit evil. At least in the traditional understanding, *humans* are to blame for the evil they do and the pain they inflict; here, we can only blame God. This is not the biblical view of God, whose very power and moral purity provokes such perplexity among his faithful (cf. Hab. 1:12-13). Neither does the modern approach give us any reason to hope that God will be able to succeed in achieving his final victory.

Another way to put my objections to these alternatives is to say that they end up telling a very different story from the one we find in the Bible. They also make God out to be a very different character from the One the Bible writers describe. Finally, they fail utterly to address one of our deepest intuitions, that there is something wrong with sin and death, and that we need God to help us and to heal us. This is exactly why Paul can describe the resurrection of Jesus as the firstfruits, the guarantee of our final healing (1 Cor. 15:23). In that same passage, he describes sin and death as enemies (cf. 1 Cor. 15:26, 56) that God will finally and utterly defeat for the sake of his faithful. Jesus, in rising from the dead, set in motion the undoing of Adam’s first sin (1 Cor. 15:21-22).

On the whole, then, the features of the biblical story strongly support Plantinga’s main point, that in “sin” we have something that is “not the way it’s supposed to be.” As he puts it,

“Culpable disturbance of shalom” suggests that sin is unoriginal, that it disrupts something good and harmonious, that (like a housebreaker) it is an intruder, and that those who sin deserve reproach ...

A bad strain has gotten into the stock so that we now sin with the ease and readiness of people born to the task ... This fact, empirical as well as biblical, lies behind a broad consensus on original sin. Although, partly because of the silence of Scripture, Christians of various theological orientations differ on central issues in the doctrine of original sin—for example, how a child acquires the fateful disposition to sin, whether this disposition is itself sin, how to describe and assess the accompanying bondage of the will—they agree on the universality, solidarity, stubbornness, and historical momentum of sin.⁴⁶

The story of Adam and Eve, and their first disobedience, explains how sin, the alien intruder, first came into human experience, though it hardly pretends to explain how rebellion against God (as expressed in the serpent’s speech) originated to begin with.⁴⁷

Human Uniqueness and Dignity

Now I want to show how the biblical understanding of human nature—what is true of all people, and distinguishes us from the other animals—actually links up with everyday human experience, of believer and nonbeliever alike. The biblical picture, based on the biblical storyline, actually makes sense of this experience—and this very act of making sense commends the biblical picture to us all. A scientific history of humankind must account for this data, if it is to be worth believing.

The Image of God

The image of God is distinctly human in Genesis. Unfortunately, biblical scholars do not agree on just what the “image” means. Some suppose that this means that human beings are like God in some respects, such as intellectual, moral, and aesthetic experience. This “*resemblance*” view was once the most common interpretation, but two others are much more common today. Some think that the image of God is the way that humans are appointed to rule the creation on God’s behalf; call this the “*representative*” view. Others conclude from the way in which Gen. 1:27 describes human beings as “male and female,” that it is male and female together, or more broadly, humans in community, that functions as the image of God; this is the “*relational*” view.

It is common to treat these categories as mutually exclusive, but this is surely mistaken. The linguistic details favor the idea that “in our image, after our likeness” implies that humans were made with some

Article

Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters

kind of resemblance to God; this was to enable them to represent God as benevolent rulers, and to find their fulfillment in their relationships with each other and with God. I combine all three views, though I start with the resemblance position.⁴⁸

In the same way, anyone who is convinced of the representative or relational view must also recognize that these views presuppose some distinctive human capacities that make the ruling and relationships possible. Therefore, no matter which interpretation of the image of God we prefer, we can see that it implies something about human capacities that are different from those in any other animal. These capacities in humans echo those that God displayed in creation: intelligence, language, moral and aesthetic judgment, and a bent for relationships governed by love and commitment.⁴⁹ And these are not simply properties of the human *soul*; the interwoven body and soul express these capacities.⁵⁰

But how did the “image” come to be bestowed, and how is it transmitted? None of the biblical authors would imply that this image is the outcome of natural processes *alone*. The commentator Derek Kidner, who allows for a kind of “evolutionary” scenario leading up to the first human, still insists that the first man must be the result of a special bestowal; his conclusion, “there is no natural bridge from animal to man,” captures what the biblical text implies.⁵¹ Some have suggested that perhaps, to make the first man, God used the body of a pre-existing hominid, adding a soul to it. We should observe that, in view of the *embodied* image of God in Genesis, if this took place, then it involved some divine refurbishing of that body in order for it to work together with the soul to display God’s image.

It is reasonable, then, to observe how these features distinguish humans from the other animals. We do not even have to be Jews or Christians to recognize some of the basic tenets of this position. Aristotle (384–322 BC) says that “the human being is by nature a political animal,” meaning an animal that lives in political communities; he noticed a feature that distinguishes humans from other animals. He then observes that human communities go well beyond those of bees or gregarious animals, since humankind alone uses speech to discuss what is right and wrong, and what is advantageous and disadvantageous. Further, humans alone perceive moral qualities: “It is partnership in these things

that makes a household and a city-state” (*Politics* I.i.9–11). How can we gainsay him?

Other animals may have features that are analogous to these special features of human beings, but the total assembly of characteristics that we find in humans is distinct. As Aristotle observed, human beings, whether they are discussing mathematics or morals, claim to have access to something that transcends their immediate bodily needs, namely *truth*. This is not a merely natural development of the capacities in other animals.⁵²

Although some authors tend to be unduly optimistic about what it takes to get human language, linguists are aware of how distinct this characteristic is.⁵³ We should apply the linguists’ recognition to other aspects of the image.

Finally, it looks like the image is transmitted by procreation. God made Adam “in the likeness of God,” and Adam “fathered a son in his own likeness” (Gen. 5:1–3). Since Seth is presented positively in Genesis 4–5, this is not a low evaluation of Seth in comparison to Adam. Rather, it explains how human beings—all of them, and not only the first-created ones—come to be made in God’s own image (Gen. 9:6). Consider further that when humans form unions (loving marriages, I hope) across “racial” lines, the children born to them will also bear God’s image.⁵⁴

These features of human life that make up the image of God, being uniquely human and universally human and transmitted by procreation, strongly favor the idea that all human beings descend from the same source. The conventional Christian alternative, some form of what is called “polygenesis” (from Greek *poly*, “many,” and *genesis*, “origin”), held that God performed the special bestowal of his image in separate places of the world; a contemporary alternative, that perhaps God did this bestowing among several members of an existing population of hominids, is not really polygenism proper—but it will require more discussion below.

Universal Human Experiences: Yearning for Justice, Need for God

The biblical storyline, as outlined above, is one in which God’s originally good creature, humankind, has been corrupted by sin; that is, sin is not part of humankind’s created constitution. One of the major effects of that corruption was social: Adam against

Eve, Cain against Abel, Lamech the bigamist against everyone. One effect of redemption is to heal these ancient breaches, and one purpose of the Mosaic law was to make possible a just social system in one people, as an invitation for the rest of the peoples to come to know the true God (Deut. 4:5–8). God called Abram with a view toward bringing healing to the rest of the world, and the Old Testament nurtured the hope that the trickle of believing Gentiles (e.g., 1 Kings 8:41–43) would one day become a river, with widespread healing for all the world (e.g., Isa. 2:1–5; Psalm 87). The book of Revelation anticipates “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9); the New Testament authors insist on bringing this future reality into the present among Christian people (e.g., Rom. 15:5–7). When Christians call each other “brother” and “sister” (a manner of address inherited from the Jews), this is most naturally understood as more than a convention, and more than a legal fiction. It is an embracing of our common humanity as heirs of Adam rescued by God’s grace, embracing a renewed social system.

The Rabbis articulated an ideal for humankind (Sanhedrin 4:5):

But a single man was created [first] ... for the sake of peace among mankind, that none should say to his fellow, ‘My father was greater than your father,’ Again, [a single man was created] to proclaim the greatness of the Holy One, blessed is he; for man stamps many coins with the one seal and they are all like one another; but the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is he, has stamped every man with the seal of the first man, yet not one of them is like his fellow.⁵⁵

It was among the early Christians that some measure of this ideal of peacefully enjoying human diversity came to fruition; a major goal of church life is to bring this ideal into increasingly complete and convincing expression. The pagan despisers of Christianity also noticed these effects. The worldly Epicurean Lucian of Samosata (ca. AD 120–200) observed of the second-century Christians,

Their first lawgiver [Jesus, probably] persuaded them that they are all brethren of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws.⁵⁶

The Christian message has reached and persuaded all kinds of people. People find ways to communicate with one another—both by learning each other’s languages and by finding cultural analogies that illuminate the Christian message (think of *Peace Child*, or *The End of the Spear*). Even when some ignorant Europeans denied that some races were fully human—which removed all barriers to exploiting these “uncivilized” peoples—Christian missionaries at times stepped in on behalf of the oppressed.⁵⁷

Of the many avenues along which we might discuss the shared human experience of redemption, such as the moral sense, the craving for a just society, the concern for the life of the world to come, I have chosen the general human sense of being lost—of feeling that something is wrong with ourselves, something that demands an explanation. Blaise Pascal put his finger on this when he wrote in his *Pensées*,

Man’s greatness is so obvious that it can even be deduced from his wretchedness, for what is nature in animals we call wretchedness in man, thus recognizing that, if his nature is today like that of the animals, he must have fallen from some better state which was once his own.

Who indeed would think himself unhappy not to be king except one who had been dispossessed? ... Who would think himself unhappy if he had only one mouth and who would not if he had only one eye? It has probably never occurred to anyone to be distressed at not having three eyes, but those who have none are inconsolable.

Man’s greatness and wretchedness are so evident that the true religion must necessarily teach us that there is in man some great principle of greatness and some great principle of wretchedness. It must also account for such amazing contradictions.⁵⁸

Pascal imagines God saying to humankind, “You are no longer in the state in which I made you.” Anyone who wishes to be taken seriously must face this and account for it—and who has done better than the writer of Genesis?

Leon Kass’ commentary on Genesis unexpectedly supports Pascal. I say “unexpectedly,” because Kass insists on a purely symbolic reading of Adam and Eve, as we saw above. Earlier I commented on Kass’

Article

Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters

preference for “permanent truths”; now, however, a key admission undermines his whole position:

No matter how sophisticated and civilized we have become, most of us respond to this portrait of our mythical remotest past with something that feels, in fact, like nostalgia.⁵⁹

It is Pascal who has captured the experience of many all over the world who become Christian believers, and who has thus shown how this nostalgia corresponds to something real.

G. K. Chesterton captures the refreshment that comes from realizing this:

The Fall is a view of life. It is not only the only enlightening, but the only encouraging view of life. It holds, as against the only real alternative philosophies, those of the Buddhist or the Pessimist or the Promethean, that we have misused a good world, and not merely been entrapped into a bad one. It refers evil back to the wrong use of the will, and thus declares that it can eventually be righted by the right use of the will. Every other creed except that one is some form of surrender to fate. A man who holds this view of life will find it giving light on a thousand things; on which mere evolutionary ethics have not a word to say. For instance, on the colossal contrast between the completeness of man’s machines and the continued corruption of his motives; on the fact that no social progress really seems to leave self behind; ... on that proverb that says “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance,” which is only what the theologians say of every other virtue, and is itself only a way of stating the truth of original sin; on those extremes of good and evil by which man exceeds all the animals by the measure of heaven and hell; on that sublime sense of loss that is in the very sound of all great poetry, and nowhere more than in the poetry of pagans and sceptics: “We look before and after, and pine for what is not”; which cries against all prigs and progressives out of the very depths and abysses of the broken heart of man, that happiness is not only a hope, but also in some strange manner a memory; and that we are all kings in exile.⁶⁰

If we say, rightly, that there is a level of figurative and symbolic description in Genesis 1–4, we must still allow that the story we find there provides the best explanation for our lives now, and for our hunger for things to be better.

Some Scientific “Scenarios”

Preliminary Questions

In this section, I offer some guidelines for relating a historical Adam and Eve to various historical-scientific reconstructions. There are some questions we must settle before we can do that: unfortunately, space forbids me to discuss in detail such important issues as whether any kind of “harmonization” between the biblical materials and the scientific story is possible, or even right; what kind of “death” for Adam and Eve Genesis 2–3 has in view; whether Genesis 4–5 implies a Neolithic setting for Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel; whether Genesis 4 implies, or at least allows for, other people contemporary with Adam and Eve. Here I can only summarize my conclusions, and develop the arguments in another venue.

Quite briefly, I take the biblical storyline to imply 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. I think, for example, that the account of Cain and Abel uses “anachronism,” describing aspects of older times in terms of what the writer and his audience were familiar with. Therefore those who find that the farming and the crafts of Genesis 4 imply a Neolithic setting,⁶¹ are being unduly literalistic.⁶² Further, it is well established that the genealogies of Genesis 5 do not intend to list every generation; gaps are to be expected. There is no way to know what size gaps the literary conventions allow, or even if there are any limits at all; this is not the kind of information these genealogies aim to convey.⁶³ Nothing in Genesis 2–4 tells us how long these events are supposed to have taken, which means the other people Cain fears could be his siblings, or their descendants. Of those who think of contemporary humans, collateral with Adam and Eve, the best are careful about what Genesis 4 does and does not imply.⁶⁴

The “death” that Gen. 2:17 threatens is human “spiritual death,” namely, alienation from God. This becomes clear once we see what happens to the human pair when they disobey in Genesis 3. This “death” will have as its consequence “physical death” (Gen. 3:19). Does this imply that there was no physical death before the Fall? And what of the fossil record, which many interpret to imply that the

humans had ancestors, who died? For our purposes here, all we have to insist on is that this particular couple were a fresh start, for whom physical death was not their intended outcome. The spiritual death resulting from their disobedience ruined whatever process would have kept them alive.

Therefore, the best way to think about the “historical” persons of Genesis 1–11 is to set up some guidelines that preserve the historical core and allow some freedom for those who would explore.⁶⁵

Criteria for Good Scenarios

I have already given reasons to be very cautious about too strong a form of concordism for the early chapters of Genesis. It is easy to go wrong by ignoring the literary conventions. Another good reason for being cautious comes from Blocher, who appealed for modesty:

It is also difficult to forecast what aspect of being the image of God would actually show up in a scientific description of mankind; so it is not quite certain what it is we are looking for when we try to discover the first man largely in terms of incomplete skeletons.⁶⁶

He is speaking, of course, about reconstruction from the fossils; but the same would apply to the biochemical evidence. For these reasons, I will instead consider what I have called “scenarios,” ways that can help us to picture events that really took place; I would not call them harmonizations.

My discussion so far does, in fact, provide us with some criteria for sound thinking about human origins and sin, which can help us discover some boundaries to what makes for a good scenario. But first, what are some of the relevant findings from the sciences that we should try to account for?

From the paleontologists, 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 40,000 BC. According to John Bloom’s survey, there are two important gaps in the available record of human development. The first occurs with the appearance of anatomically modern humans around 130,000 BC. The second gap occurs when culture appears, around 40,000 BC. At this point, we find that art and “the complexity and variety of artifacts greatly increases.” As Bloom observes, “At present either of these transitions seems sharp

enough that we can propose that the special creation of man occurred in one of these gaps and that it was not bridged by purely natural means.”⁶⁷

The geneticists give us two matters to account for. First, they conclude from the genetic similarities between humans and chimpanzees that humans and chimpanzees have some kind of “common ancestor.” Second, some infer from features of the human genome that the human population needs to have been a thousand or more individuals, even at its beginning.⁶⁸ I will not assess this DNA evidence; I do not know whether the evidence is only *compatible* with these conclusions, or *strongly favors* them. I cannot predict whether future geneticists will still think the same way about DNA as contemporary ones do. I do know that biologists’ understanding of DNA (e.g., so-called “junk DNA” now appears to have a function) has changed over the years, but I cannot say what biologists might think in the future. Hence, rather than try to say whether these inferences are good or bad, I have sought ways to allow advocates of these conclusions to stay within the bounds of sound thinking. In other words, even if someone is persuaded that humans had “ancestors,” and that the human population has always been more than two, he or she does not *necessarily* have to ditch all traditional views of Adam and Eve; I have tried to provide for these possibilities more than to contend for my particular preferences on these matters.

Now then, how do we stay within the bounds of sound thinking? What criteria do all our reflections so far lead us to?

1. To begin with, we should see that the origin of the human race goes beyond a merely natural process. This follows from how hard it is to get a human being, or, more theologically, how distinctive the image of God is.
2. We should see Adam and Eve at the headwaters of the human race. This follows from the unified experience of humankind, as discussed earlier (pp. 155–8). How else could all human beings come to bear God’s image?
3. The Fall, in whatever form it took, was both historical (it happened) and moral (it involved disobeying God), and occurred at the beginning of the human race. The universal sense of loss described earlier (pp. 155–8) makes no sense without this. Where else could this universality have come from?

Article

Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters

Applying criteria 2 and 3 means that any valid model will cover, not only Middle Easterners and Europeans, but also those peoples who first populated what is now Australia and the Americas.⁶⁹

Theories about multiple origins for human beings, the lines developing in parallel in different regions (“polygenesis”), do crop up from time to time.⁷⁰ These theories posit a natural transition from pre-human to human, which is unreasonable. A Christian should not find these attractive, either. Even if a theory suggests separate *creations*, it implies that there are some humans who do not need the Christian message because they are not “fallen” – or else that every time God made human beings they “fell,” or that there is some other means of transmitting sin. The models that are more in favor among paleo-anthropologists today seem to focus more on unified origin (as in the “out of Africa” hypothesis).

4. If someone should decide that there were, in fact, more human beings than just Adam and Eve at the beginning of humankind, then, in order to maintain good sense, he or she should envision these humans as a single tribe. Adam would then be the chieftain of this tribe (preferably produced before the others), and Eve would be his wife. This tribe “fell” under the leadership of Adam and Eve. This follows from the notion of solidarity in a representative. Some may call this a form of “polygenesis,” but this is quite distinct from the more conventional, and unacceptable, kind.⁷¹

A Sampling of Scenarios Examined

I do not intend to propose my own “harmonization” of the biblical Adam and Eve with the paleontological and biological data, beyond the guidelines I have given above. The proposals that I will mention here can best be viewed as “scenarios,” ways of imagining what the events might have looked like.

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 preexisting hominid into Adam. While I am not making an issue of this, my first criterion (p. 159) shows why 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.”

An obvious scenario has Adam and Eve as the first members of the genus *Homo*. There are some difficulties with this proposal (e.g., about two million years with no specific cultural remains in the paleontological record) that make alternatives more attractive.⁷²

The paleontological record suggests that a major development, corresponding to the rise of truly modern humans, took place somewhere between 100,000 and 40,000 years ago. Therefore this seems a promising period for the origin of Adam and Eve, and several scholars have made proposals consistent with the criteria above, both with and without animal “forebears.”⁷³

Derek Kidner has made what he calls “an exploratory suggestion,” which “is only tentative, as it must be, and it is a personal view.”⁷⁴ Kidner wanted to allow for a kind of “ancestry” for Adam and Eve, while at the same time retaining principles like those I have given above. The creation of Adam and Eve may have involved refurbishing an existing hominid.

It is at least conceivable that after the special creation of Eve, which established the first human pair as God’s viceregents (Gen. 1:27, 28) and clinched the fact that there is no natural bridge from animal to man, God may now have conferred his image on Adam’s collaterals, to bring them into the same realm of being. Adam’s “federal” headship of humanity extended, if that was the case, outwards to his contemporaries as well as onwards to his offspring, and his disobedience disinherited both alike.⁷⁵

This suggestion is moving us away from the simplicity of the biblical picture, though it does have the virtue of seeking to preserve the “doctrine that mankind is a unity, created in God’s image, and fallen in Adam by the one act of disobedience.” Further, solidarity in the Bible is not based on legal fiction but on some actual connection; perhaps this can still apply to the “collaterals,” provided they are closely enough related. If we imagine Adam as chieftain, or “king,” whose task it is not simply to *rule* a people but more importantly to *represent* them (the basic idea of a king in the Bible), we can say that Kidner’s proposal satisfies the criteria mentioned earlier (pp. 159–60) and deserves consideration.

Kidner’s approach shows how we can adjust the scenario from C. S. Lewis that appeals to Francis

Collins. In the *Problem of Pain*, Lewis devotes chapter 5 to “The Fall of Man.”⁷⁶ The chapter’s thesis is “that man, as a species, spoiled himself, and that good, to us in our present state, must therefore mean primarily remedial or corrective good,” and he goes on to wonder what this spoiling might have looked like. Here is how he describes it:

For long centuries, God perfected the animal form which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the image of Himself. He gave it hands whose thumb could be applied to each of the fingers, and jaws and teeth and throat capable of articulation, and a brain sufficiently complex to execute all of the material motions whereby rational thought is incarnated ... Then, in the fullness of time, God caused to descend upon this organism, both on its psychology and physiology, a new kind of consciousness which could say “I” and “me,” which could look upon itself as an object, which knew God, which could make judgments of truth, beauty and goodness, and which was so far above time that it could perceive time flowing past ... We do not know how many of these creatures God made, nor how long they continued in the Paradisal state. But sooner or later they fell. Someone or something whispered that they could become as gods ... They wanted some corner in the universe of which they could say to God, “This is our business, not yours.” But there is no such corner. They wanted to be nouns, but they were, and eternally must be, mere adjectives. We have no idea in what particular act, or series of acts, the self-contradictory, impossible wish found expression. For all I can see, it might have concerned the literal eating of a fruit, but the question is of no consequence.⁷⁷

Lewis certainly meets the first three criteria (p. 159), and a small tweak will bring it into line with the fourth criterion. He is clear on the kind of divine supervision necessary (that is, humans resulted from a process that went beyond the purely natural) and on the moral issues involved. Also to Lewis’ credit, whenever it comes to imaginative presentation of the ideas in his other books, he keeps to a particular Adam and Eve, as he has great respect for the form of the story in Genesis.⁷⁸

Further, Lewis preserves the historical character of the Fall, that is, it is an event—or cluster of events—that actually took place, and changed

human life forever. This certainly sets his view apart from all views that see sin as the result of something nonhistorical, or as something inherent in God’s creation.

The main difficulty lies in Lewis’ clause, “We do not know *how many* of these creatures God made.”⁷⁹ He is not asserting that there *must* have been more than Adam and Eve; he is declaring the question irrelevant. If, however, we take our cue from Lewis’ own mention of solidarity, and “in Adam” (comments that escaped Collins’ attention), we see how to make it more like Kidner’s scenario, with Adam as the chieftain and Eve as his queen.

Two of these scenarios, from Kidner and Lewis, may be attractive to those who favor the “population size approaches” based on human DNA. As I have said, I am not assessing the science, but displaying how to keep our reasoning within the bounds of sound thinking. Nothing requires us to abandon monogenesis altogether for some form of polygenesis; rather, a modified monogenesis, which keeps Adam and Eve, can do the job.

I admit that these scenarios leave us with many uncertainties, but these uncertainties in no way undermine our right to hold fast to the biblical storyline with full confidence.

Conclusions

I do not claim to have solved every problem or to have dealt with every possible objection. But I trust I have shown why the traditional understanding of Adam and Eve, as our first parents who brought sin into human experience, is worthy of our confidence and adherence. Let me summarize why I think it is important for Christians to affirm the results of this study.

First, I have emphasized throughout that a major goal of the Christian story is to enable those who believe it to make sense of the world. If we abandon the conventional way of telling the Christian story, with its components of a good creation marred by the Fall, redemption as God’s ongoing work to restore the creatures to their proper functioning, and the consummation in which the restoration will be complete and confirmed, then we really give up all chance of understanding the world. Specifically, if we deny that all people have a common source that was originally good, but through which sin

Article

Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters

came into the world, then the existence of sin becomes God's fault, or even something that God could not avoid. In either case, there is little reason to be confident that any relief is headed our way.

Second, the notions of sin as an alien invader that affects all people, and of atonement as God's way of dealing with the guilt and pollution that come from this defiling influence, depend on the story of the original family and their original disobedience. The biblical terms for atonement, which have the associated ideas of propitiation, expiation, and cleansing, become meaningless without this part of the story. If this is so, then the death of Jesus loses a crucial aspect of its meaning as well.

Third, if we cannot insist on a common origin for all humankind, then we have given up the grounds, both from the Bible and common sense, for affirming the common dignity of all people, and their common need of the solution that the biblical faith claims to offer. Therefore, abandoning our common origin looks like a dangerous mistake. ♦

Notes

*This is a severely shortened version of a paper read to the 2009 ASA Annual Meeting in Waco, TX, 31 July–3 August. I thank all those who gave their feedback, and especially Walter Bradley, who invited me, together with my dialog partners Daniel Harlow and John Schneider, and Loren Haarsma who moderated. My fuller, book-length treatment of all this is coming soon; I apologize to all those whose work has received short shrift here due to space.

¹Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006). Collins and others have established the Biologos Foundation, with a website (biologos.org).

²Lewis made it clear that his own views were those of a faithful member of the Church of England, and he professed general adherence to the 39 Articles. Again, in imitation of Lewis' model, I come clean. I am a minister in a conservative Presbyterian body, which practices what it calls "good faith subscription" to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Like Lewis, who explained that no one is actually supposed to live simply on "mere Christianity," but must instead associate himself or herself with a church, I readily acknowledge that "mere historical Adam-and-Eve-ism" is not a suitable stopping point.

³Some noteworthy recent efforts to defend ideas of original sin are Edward Oakes, "Original Sin: A Disputation," *First Things* 87 (November 1998): 16–24; Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

⁴For example, Chrysostom (on Rom. 5:12) remarked, Adam "having sinned, even those who did not eat from the tree, all of them, became mortal because of him"; he describes humankind as "those who came from" Adam—just as

Augustine would do. Of course, there are many differences between Augustine and Chrysostom, and it is not part of my task here to adjudicate. See Panayiotis Papageorgiou, "Chrysostom and Augustine on the Sin of Adam and Its Consequences," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1995), 361–78, for a presentation that favors the Greek father. References for the other Patristic authors will be supplied in my fuller work.

⁵A highly regarded presentation of this approach is Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985); see also Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narratives Ethically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000).

⁶For a general discussion of worldview, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁷Some writers use the term "worldview" to include such concepts as the shape of the world and the things in it, e.g., John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 165–78. Similarly, Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 53–6. I find this confusing, and prefer to separate *worldview* from *world picture*, as I discuss in *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006), 260–2. Even more confusing is the way Francis Collins, *The Language of God*, describes the "scientific worldview" and the "spiritual worldview" as potentially complementary perspectives held by the same person.

⁸Don Pederson, "Biblical Narrative as an Agent for Worldview Change," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 14, no. 4 (1997): 163–6.

⁹These include N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992); Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004); Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005); Albert M. Wolters and Michael W. Goheen, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006). For a brief (and, one hopes, accessible) summary of this approach, see C. John Collins, "The Theology of the Old Testament," in *The English Standard Version Study Bible*, ed. Lane T. Dennis et al. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 29–31.

¹⁰Wolters and Goheen, *Creation Regained*, 125.

¹¹In "The Theology of the Old Testament," 30b–31a, I explain why we should be careful not to say that we read the whole Bible as a story, but rather *in relation to the story*.

¹²C. S. Lewis, "The Funeral of a Great Myth," in *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 82–9.

¹³Lewis rightly says that the sciences are logically separable from the mythic tale; at the same time, there seems to be something about the human mind that cannot rest content with an account of origins until it is given a "mythic" or "poetic" (i.e., imagination-capturing) quality. The last para-

graph of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (my copy is the 6th ed. of 1872, and was published in the Harvard Classics series by P. F. Collier and Sons of New York, 1909) has us contemplating a "tangled bank" as the product of the laws Darwin has described in his book. He tells us in words approaching poetry,

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

I do not count this "poetic orientation" as a shortcoming, whether of Darwin or of anyone else; instead, it simply illustrates the general point that no one lives life in airtight compartments. As Lewis observed elsewhere, "All world views yield poetry to those who believe them by the mere fact of being believed"; see his "Is Theology Poetry?" in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (1965; reprint, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 97.

¹⁴See the fascinating discussion of the many meanings in G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1980), 219–24; see also J. W. Rogerson, "Slippery Words, V: Myth," *Expository Times* 90 (1978): 10–4.

¹⁵Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 40.

¹⁶George Gaylord Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 365.

¹⁷William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V.v.26–8.

¹⁸My forthcoming book provides a fuller discussion, comparing Ancient Near Eastern texts and Genesis 1–11, to justify this evaluation of the Mesopotamian stories.

¹⁹Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 262, 300. The same issue that applies to origin stories—that is, can miraculous and figurative accounts refer to actual events, whether in the past or in the future?—applies also to language we find in the Gospels and in apocalyptic material; see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 424–7. As Wright observes,

The language of myth, and eschatological myths in particular (the sea, fabulous monsters, etc.), are used in the biblical literature as complex metaphor systems to denote historical events and to invest them with their theological significance. The Gospels, then, are "myth" in the sense that they are foundational stories for the early Christian worldview.

²⁰Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 425–6.

²¹John Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, puts it well: "Most peoples of the ancient world found the past interesting and found in it a key to social coherence lending meaning to life in the present" (p. 223). Similarly, S. G. F. Brandon finds in a Sumerian origins story, "a Sumerian aetiological myth designed to explain three things," among which is "the purpose of mankind, namely, to serve the gods." See Brandon, "The Origin of Death in Some Ancient Near Eastern Religions," *Religious Studies* 1 (1966): 222.

²²Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 242. See also Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*:

Gen. 1–11 is the Hebrew answer on how to present "prehistory/protocreation" before the time of their

first fully "historical" people, the patriarchs Abraham to Jacob. Again, the approach they adopted was common to their neighbors, using the same basic tools and concepts of that time: the succession of human generations, and how to span them. Mesopotamia chose to expand "heroically" the too-few reigns available. The Hebrew genealogies became telescoped through time, keeping a representative number. (P. 447)

Compare also Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984), 65.

²³For more discussion, see V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), especially 58–87 (chapter 2).

²⁴This notion of "history" serves as an unargued and therefore almost invisible premise of Douglas Kelly, *Creation and Change: Genesis 1.1–2.4 in the Light of Changing Scientific Paradigms* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 1997); e.g., see pages 41–2, 51 ("the text of Genesis is clearly meant to be taken in a literal, historical sense"). This is apparently also a premise in Kelly's fellow young-earth creationist Kurt Wise's *Faith, Form, and Time* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2002). For example, on page 44, Wise equates "taken at face value" with "intended to convey history."

²⁵Compare Denis Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 150: "Therefore, since the heavens are not structured in this way [i.e., according to a literalistic reading of Genesis 1], Gen. 1 cannot be a historical account of the actual events that created the heavens."

²⁶See Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 249–51. There I use the example of Ps. 105:26–38, which

retells the story of the plagues in Egypt, but it tells them in a different order from that in Exodus, and it does not tell about all of the plagues. Is the psalm—a poem—thereby unhistorical? Or should we set it against Exodus, and maybe declare Exodus the product of a different tradition? Neither: they are two different types of writing, with different communicative purposes.

²⁷Martin Emmrich (whose conclusions about authorship are to the "left" of mine) puts the matter well in "The Temptation Narrative of Genesis 3:1–6: A Prelude to the Pentateuch and the History of Israel," *Evangelical Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (2001), 3–20: "I think that the text demands the acknowledgment of at least a core of historical referentiality." Within that core he includes "an actual garden (the location of which we cannot be sure about) with two occupants, despite the mythical character of much of the J source [i.e., of the putative source of Genesis 2–3]. In all likelihood, this is the way the original audience would have taken the story" (page 4, and note 6). To support this last assertion, he calls in Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (1956; reprint, London: SCM, 1961), 73.

²⁸Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 159.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 155.

³⁰Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*, 50. Blocher has reaffirmed his views in the recent article, "The Theology of the Fall and the Origins of Evil," in *Darwin, Creation and the Fall: Theological Challenges*, ed. R. J. Berry and T. A. Noble

Article

Adam and Eve as Historical People, and Why It Matters

(Leicester: Apollos, 2009), 149–72. Throughout this article, Blocher also indicates his agreement with the relevant points in my *Genesis 1–4*.

³¹E.g., John Stek, “What Says the Scripture?” in *Portraits of Creation*, Howard J. Van Till, Robert E. Snow, John H. Stek, Davis A. Young (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 242, cf. p. 263. Gordon Wenham is far more careful when he writes,

Though historical and scientific questions may be uppermost in our minds as we approach the text, it is doubtful whether they were in the writer’s mind, and we should therefore be cautious about looking for answers to questions he was not concerned with.

(Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1; Milton Keynes: [Word, 1991], liii)

See also Bruce Waltke with Cathy J. Fredericks, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 75–8.

³²For example, see Daniel Harlow, “Creation According to Genesis: Literary Genre, Cultural Context, Theological Truth,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 37, no. 2 (2008): 198: one of his “timeless theological truths” is that “God created.” Actually, in light of his entire presentation, one wonders how the empirical sinfulness of human beings is a “timeless truth.” It seems to become “God created mankind with a tendency (or at least openness) toward sinning” — a historical statement with much to argue about!

³³Leon Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 9–11.

³⁴Alan Jacobs, “Leon Kass and the Genesis of Wisdom,” *First Things* 134 (June/July 2003): 30–5, at 32ab.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 34b (citing Kass, *Beginning of Wisdom*, 661).

³⁶Collins, “The Theology of the Old Testament,” 30b.

³⁷Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 16.

³⁸For a fine recent discussion, see Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005).

³⁹For a brief survey of these usages, see C. John Collins, “The Eucharist as Christian Sacrifice,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004): 1–23, especially 21–3. Of course, there are more aspects to what Jesus accomplished with his death, and I am not arguing here that we must make this the only, nor even necessarily primary, model for understanding the cross: only that it be included.

⁴⁰Christopher Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord: the Ethical Authority of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 13–45. See also Wright’s *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); and Gordon Wenham, *Story as Torah*. My discussion of creation ordinances, and of the reflections on marriage based on Gen. 2:24, in *Genesis 1–4*, 129–32, 142–45, applies these ideas.

⁴¹This is the main theme of Gregory Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004). I have supported this idea independently, e.g., Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 69, 185–6; *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology* 2: 582–3 (on Hebrew $\sqrt{k-b-d}$).

⁴²W. Sibley Towner, “Interpretations and Reinterpretations of the Fall,” in Francis A. Eigo, ed., *Modern Biblical*

Scholarship: Its Impact on Theology and Proclamation (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1984), 57–8.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 76. Others of this trend include James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993); and Keith Ward, *Divine Action: Examining God’s Role in an Open and Emergent Universe* (1990; reprint, Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2007).

⁴⁴Towner, “Interpretations and Reinterpretations of the Fall,” 60. For a careful study of Irenaeus, see Anders-Christian Jacobsen, “The Importance of Genesis 1–3 in the Theology of Irenaeus,” *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 8, no. 2 (2005): 299–316. The description of the temptation and fall that I advocate in, e.g., *Genesis 1–4*, 115–6, is actually closer to the “Irenaean” reading.

⁴⁵See S. R. Driver, *Genesis*, Westminster Commentary (London: Methuen, 1904); at 56–7, he accords a kind of historical core to the Fall story. Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 26–31. Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); see pages 122–26 comparing the Mesopotamian Adapa story with Genesis 3.

⁴⁶Plantinga, *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*, 16, 33.

⁴⁷For discussion of the literary portrayal of the serpent as Tempter, see Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 170–2.

⁴⁸For my discussion, see my *Genesis 1–4*, 61–7; *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 124–32 (with additional notes, 373–6).

⁴⁹Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 66.

⁵⁰See further Collins, *Science and Faith*, 130–1.

⁵¹Kidner, *Genesis*, 28–9.

⁵²Francis Collins has recognized this in his embrace of C. S. Lewis’ “moral argument”; see his *The Language of God* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 21–31 (cf. 200, point 6: “humans are also unique in ways that defy evolutionary explanation”; Collins does not explain how this is coherent with his points 4–5).

⁵³See my discussion in *Science and Faith*, 279–80, regarding what evolutionary biologist John Maynard Smith says he learned from his colleagues in the linguistics department, in his *The Theory of Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 343, and 24–5. See further in *Science and Faith*, 405, my discussion of the proposal of Steven Pinker for how language might have developed gradually in his book, *The Language Instinct: The New Science of Language and Mind* (London: Penguin, 1995), 403.

⁵⁴The biblical ethic welcomes interracial marriages, when the marriage partners are both Christians. See J. Daniel Hays, “A Biblical Perspective on Interracial Marriage,” *Criswell Theological Review* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 5–23.

⁵⁵Cited from Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 388, with comparison of the Hebrew. In the Talmud, see Sanhedrin 38a.

⁵⁶Lucian, *On the Death of Peregrinus*, c. 13; cited from J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to AD 337* (London: SPCK, 1968), 135–6. The Greek text is available in the Loeb series, *Lucian* (vol. v).

⁵⁷For an example, see John Paton, *John G. Paton, D.D., Missionary to the New Hebrides: An Autobiography*, ed. James Paton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1894). Paton worked primarily among the Melanesian islanders in the

New Hebrides, often protecting them from exploitation by French, British, and Americans. On pages 259–75, he tells an episode of his time in Australia (1863), when he combated the abhorrent idea that the Australian Aboriginals were nothing more than “brutes in human shape.” Paton gained the trust of the Aboriginals, and proved that they really did have a religion; and he lauded an Aboriginal Christian woman.

⁵⁸Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1995), nos. 117, 149. The French original can be found in Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Ch.-M. des Granges (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1964), nos. 409, 430 (using the Brunschvicg numbers). For insightful application of this line of reasoning, see Douglas Groothuis, “Deposed Royalty: Pascal’s Anthropological Argument,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41, no. 2 (1998): 297–312.

⁵⁹Kass, *Beginning of Wisdom*, 61.

⁶⁰G. K. Chesterton, *As I Was Saying*, ed. Robert Knille (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 160.

⁶¹E.g., Davis Young, “The Antiquity and the Unity of the Human Race Revisited,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 24, no. 4 (1995): 380–96. For more discussion, see my *Genesis 1–4*, 201–3.

⁶²This is one reason that I will not treat the suggestion of John Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 162–6, in detail here, since he makes Adam the first real human in the Neolithic period.

⁶³For fuller argument, see Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 203–7.

⁶⁴The wisest is Kidner, *Genesis*, 29–30 (see below).

⁶⁵The term “concordism” can have some connotations that I am not at all supporting, namely, a kind of literalism that leads to bending the evidence to make it all work out. This seems to underlie Daniel Harlow’s rejection of concordism in “Creation According to Genesis: Literary Genre, Cultural Context, Theological Truth,” 198, where he insists that “the theological truths that Genesis reveals are both timeless and vital” (see my discussion, pp. 150–3). Likewise Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution*, rejects concordism in favor of what he calls the “Message-Incident Principle” (pp. 110–1 and throughout); it appears that, first, he assumes that historical or scientific concordism requires literalism, and, second, that a timeless message can be abstracted from the story.

⁶⁶Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 231. See more recently his “The Theology of the Fall and the Origins of Evil,” in *Darwin, Creation and the Fall: Theological Challenges*, ed. R. J. Berry and T. A. Noble (Leicester: Apollos, 2009), 169–72.

⁶⁷John Bloom, “On Human Origins: A Survey,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 27, no. 2 (1997): 199–200.

⁶⁸See Francis Collins et al., “Question 21: Who Was Mitochondrial Eve? Who Was Y-Chromosome Adam? How Do They Relate to Genesis?” in *The Biologos Foundation: Questions* (biologos.org), 2009 (accessed July 13, 2009). The research behind this comes from Francisco Ayala et al., e.g., “Molecular Genetics of Speciation and Human Origins,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of the Sciences* 91 (July 1994): 6787–94. John Bloom shows why the conclusion is not above critique in “On Human Origins: A Survey,” 195–6.

⁶⁹The views expressed in Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), especially chapters 9–13, deserve more consideration

than space allows here. At this point, I will simply observe that he wants a historical Adam in the Neolithic period (and thus not the first human). His approach falls foul of the first three criteria here.

⁷⁰Described in Fazale Rana with Hugh Ross, *Who Was Adam? A Creation Model Approach to the Origin of Man* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), 36–7, 124–6.

⁷¹It appears that Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 202–3, would agree with my first three criteria, and perhaps the fourth. I consider his description of the Fall, that ‘adam [man or humankind?] freely chose to “follow their primitive animal nature,” to be inadequate, but it is still moral. I cannot say whether in referring to ‘adam and saying “their” he means to leave open how many humans there were to begin with. Waltke associates himself with Francis Collins’ perspective (p. 202, n. 81), but he is clearer than Collins on the special origin and importance of Adam and Eve.

⁷²See Bloom, “On Human Origins: A Survey,” 199, n. 72.

⁷³Fazale Rana with Hugh Ross, *Who Was Adam?* They discuss the genetic issues in chapter 4, pages 55–75. This general approach finds support in Bloom, “On Human Origins: A Survey.” Bloom tells me (personal communication, July 9, 2009) that he has updated his essay in light of new genetic evidence, and generally supports Rana’s approach—though he does not claim that the scientific evidence *proves* the model, or a single first pair. Bloom’s background in both physics and Ancient Near Eastern studies makes his opinions worthy of attention. Gavin Basil McGrath’s proposal, “Soteriology: Adam and the Fall,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 49, no. 4 (1997): 252–63, is in the same time ballpark, though he explicitly posits hominid forebears, specially upgraded. David Siemens commended aspects of McGrath’s approach in a letter in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 50, no. 1 (1998): 78, including his orthodox soteriology.

⁷⁴Kidner, *Genesis*, 26–31.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁶My copy is from 1943, published in London by Geoffrey Bles.

⁷⁷The portion of text in this block quote is the same as that excerpted in Collins, *The Language of God*, 208–9.

⁷⁸E.g., in *Perelandra*, and in Aslan’s words to Prince Caspian at the end of that story: “You come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve. And that is both honour enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor in earth. Be content.”

⁷⁹There are further demurrals from Lewis’ full presentation in Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*, 56–7 (Lewis could be taken to imply that sin was a natural consequence of human free will), 89 (Did humans by their fall actually lose their proper nature?). These are insightful, but do not affect our topic. (On pages 97–8, Blocher approves Lewis’ recognition of solidarity.)

Visit the ASA Store

www.asa3online.org/estore.php

Hank Hanegraaff, the host of the Bible Answer Man Broadcast, answers Kevin who wants to know if Adam and Eve are allegorical and metaphorical persons or literal, historical persons. - æ... Your financial support matters! Help us keep producing our content by becoming a partner: <https://www.equip.org/donate/> - Connect with Hank Hanegraaff and the Christian Research Institute (CRI): <https://www.youtube.com/user/CRIInstit> Subscribe to our channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/CRIInstit> Subscribe to the Bible Answer Man Podcast on Apple Podcasts: <https://www.apple.com/podcasts> Other Options for Understanding Adam and Eve. There are several options open to those who desire to remain faithful to Scripture and take science seriously. Some Christian leaders (such as Billy Graham) are open to models that see evolution as compatible with Adam and Eve as real historical people. In one version, suggested by theologian Henri Blocher and others, God entered into a special relationship with a pair of ancient historical representatives of humanity about 200,000 years ago in Africa. Genesis retells this historical event using cultural terms that the Hebrews in the ancient Near East use. That's why a historical Adam and Eve are so important. If you deny a real Adam and real Eve, many of the doctrines in the Bible (including the gospel) would be incoherent. On many occasions, New Testament authors connect a historic Adam and Eve to foundational doctrine and it does not make sense if Adam and Eve were mythological. In other words, we shouldn't believe Adam and Eve were real people because the primary account of their lives is found in a poetic section of Scripture. According to this view, Adam and Eve were merely poetic devices. Jesus and other New Testament authors refer to Adam and Eve as historical figures. That means the biblical authors read the first chapters of Genesis as history. Adam and Eve, in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, the original human couple, parents of the human race. Their first children were Cain and Abel. Abel, the keeper of sheep, was highly regarded by God and was killed by Cain out of envy. Learn more about the story of Adam and Eve in this article. Encyclopaedia Britannica's editors oversee subject areas in which they have extensive knowledge, whether from years of experience gained by working on that content or via study for an advanced degree. See Article History. Adam and Eve, in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, the original human couple, parents of the human race. In the Bible there are two accounts of their creation. Adam, in most (but not all) Judeo-Christian mythology, was the first human created by God. He was made after the plants and animals and put on Earth as boss of all of them. In some extra-biblical sources, Adam was made at the same time as Lilith. Adam thought he was Lilith's master as well, but she refused to make love below him saying they were made of the same earth at the same time and were equals. (Apparently Adam was unwilling to take a turn on the bottom.) Lilith flew off, married Samael Satan