

The Creation and Historicity of Adam and Eve

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Introduction

Christians and Jews, through much of the past twenty centuries, have pretty much believed that the Biblical Adam and Eve of Genesis 1-3 were actual persons who were directly created by God, and from whom all other human beings have descended.¹ In addition to this, Christians believe that because of the disobedience of this original couple, sin entered into the human experience, and so all were judged to be sinners as a result of their “fall” into sin. Furthermore, Christians continue to confess by means of creeds such as the Apostles Creed that, “[We] believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.”

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So if this has been the traditional belief, especially of Christians for so many in the past twenty centuries, what has happened recently that has led some to abandon, or seriously modify, their belief in the fact that God in particular created a real Adam and Eve as the first human couple? When this question is seriously put to many Christians who have so suddenly changed their minds and their positions about an actual historical Adam and Eve being directly created by God as their Maker, they generally point to two recent advances in studies outside of the Bible that have impacted their thinking: (1) the myths on the origins of the world from the ancient Near Eastern cultures that purport to have been partially borrowed and used by the writer of Genesis and (2) the discoveries about the human DNA from the genome project that require, as it is claimed, that the human population arose from as many

as several thousand members, not just an original pair of two persons. These two topics have tended to dominate the current agenda for investigating this issue of an historic Adam and Eve. But first, let us summarize some of the teaching of Genesis 1-2 that form the background for our investigation.

I. AN ABSOLUTE BEGINNING – GENESIS 1:1

The first verse of the Bible begins with a distinct and unique sentence that asserts an absolute beginning for the whole universe: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” No further details are given on this beginning, but it did claim to involve the whole universe, for while Hebrew has no distinct word for “universe,” or “cosmos,” it does have the use of the expression “heavens and the earth,” which is a figure of speech called a hendiadys, where two words are used to speak of a single reality, the universe.

This concept of an absolute beginning of the world was shared by a good number in the Jewish community as well, for the Hebrew Masoretes (Jewish scholars who copied the text of Scripture from the fifth to sixth centuries A.D.) punctuated the Hebrew word bereshith, “in the beginning” with a disjunctive accent marker called a tiphchah, thereby indicating a break, or a separation of this word, from what follows in the text (somewhat like we would use a comma for punctuation). By doing so, the early Hebrew scribes highlighted “In the beginning” as an absolute beginning and its legitimacy by rendering it: “In the beginning” (with the article). Likewise, the early Church Father, Origen, in his Hexapla, also indicated that some scholars read the first word in the Bible as “In the beginning.” Generally Hebrew adverbial expressions routinely deleted the Hebrew article in these types of constructions, but in one of Origen’s eight columns of his Hexapla, where he transliterated the Hebrew letters into

Greek letters, he wrote this first Hebrew word in the Bible with a long “a” vowel, indicating once again that it was read and understood as meaning “In the beginning.” There was no clearer way of making this very point.

However, this first great principle of an absolute beginning in the Bible is contrary to some of the ancient schools of philosophy, which classically have held that matter was “eternal.” Thus, Epicurus taught, “know first of all that nothing can spring from a non-entity.” Likewise, Plato taught that matter was “co-existent with God.” But Christianity affirmed that the universe (and therefore matter) had a beginning and that all varieties of spontaneous combustion or the eternity of matter were decisively excluded and opposed to Biblical theism. Only God was eternal; all matter was of recent vintage and came from the hand of God.

II. CREATION BY THE WORD OF GOD

The second great evangelical principle is that the creation narrative also recorded the method God used in creating the universe, which was by the powerful word of God. This is affirmed by its repetition in the Genesis record nine times over; “And God said.” But this same affirmation is underscored in numerous places elsewhere later on throughout the Biblical text, such as in Psalms 33:6, 9, which says: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made For he spoke, and [they, i.e., the heavens and the earth] came to be; he commanded, and [they] stood firm.”

This creative and authoritative word of bringing into being something by supernatural means of the spoken word of God can be understood as similar to another event in the New Testament narrative, where Jesus’ word to the Centurion, who came to Jesus in Matthew 8:5-13 with a request that Jesus would heal him simply by his speaking the divine word. He did not want to trouble the Lord to

come to take time to come all the way to his house, for if Jesus merely spoke the word, he believed his servant would be healed – which he was!

Moreover, John’s Gospel takes a similar stance when it affirms:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (Jn. 1:1-2a).

Surely this points to the direct hand of our Lord Jesus in particular with all that now currently appears on earth and in heaven. The point is clear: evangelicals must cease declaring that Genesis merely teaches “that God created the heavens and the earth,” but it does not tell us how he created it. In fact, it does tell us how: it was by his powerful word that he spoke the heavens and the earth into existence!

III. A NARRATIVE PROSE LITERARY GENRE
FOR GENESIS 1-11

In a paper prepared and read for the twentieth anniversary of the Evangelical Theological Society in 1967,² I argued there as I do now, that the author of Genesis intended the events of Genesis 1-11 to be treated as being just as real and historical as he intended the events of Genesis 12-50. The author of Genesis indicated this by using the same rubric or heading ten times over to headline the materials in both parts of Genesis, viz., “The generations/accounts of ...” He used this rubric six times in Genesis 1-11 (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27), while he used the same rubric in Genesis 12-50 four [or five] times in a section of the book of Genesis that has been illuminated by many archaeological finds, viz., Genesis 12-50 (25:12, 19; 36:1 [9]; 37:2).

² It was subsequently published: Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Literary Form of Genesis 1-11,” in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*. Ed. by J. Barton Payne, Waco, TX. 1970, 48-65.

As a matter of fact, this same type of header continues the larger story of the whole Bible in Numbers 3:1; Ruth 4:18 and Matthew 1:1. Abraham Malamat³ even compared the Hebrew toledoth, “generations/histories” of Perez (Ruth 4:18) (or we might even add the genealogies of Genesis 4, 5, 11), to the number of palus, “eras” or “dynasties” found in the genealogy of Hammurabi. Based on this comparison, Malamat surmised that these terms might well have indicated earlier genealogical documents which were used as sources for the present compositions. Therefore, Genesis 1-11 matches instances of corresponding materials from the ancient Near East and the concept that Moses did indeed utilize sources under the inspiration of God, just as Luke argued that is what he did for the life of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4).

³ Abraham Malamat, “King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88 (1968), 164-5, 170-1.

The best case for the literary genre of Genesis 1-11, and especially Genesis 1-3 can be made for calling these texts “narrative prose;” not poetry, allegory, myth, fable, or parable, or any other similar genre. What pushes us to this conclusion of “narrative prose” is the presence of the Hebrew waw consecutive verbal construction, the frequent use of the Hebrew direct object sign eth, and the presence of the so-called relative pronoun asher, all of which are almost never used in the poetical sections of the Bible. Moreover, there is the emphasis on defining the things spoken of, which again would be unique to prose, but not usually included in poetical writing.

This does not mean that there are no figures of speech involved, for as E. W. Bullinger properly called to our attention, there are some 150 different illustrations of tropological materials in Genesis 1-11.⁴ However, it must

⁴ E. W. Bullinger. *Figures of Speech*, 1898, r.p. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968, pp 1032-33.

be strongly asserted that all such examples of figurative language are controlled by an exact literary science, which first names the figure of speech, then defines that figure, followed by giving examples from classical Greek and Roman sources, and then finally cites examples from the Bible for comparison and accessing the meaning of the figure.

In addition to this, Genesis 1-11 has given to us numerous occasions to inspect the authenticity of the text by adding some 64 geographical terms, 88 personal names, 48 generic names and 21 cultural items such as gold, bdellium, onyx, brass, iron, gopher wood, bitumen, mortar, brick, stone, harp, pipe, along with such features such as towers and cities themselves. By way of contrast, the single tenth chapter of Genesis alone has five times more geographical data than is found in the entire Koran. Every one of the items listed in Genesis 1-11 exposed the Biblical writer to a challenge to his reliability, if one of more of this

plethora of data could be found to be misplaced in time or location. But no one has ever demonstrated such anachronistic material in the text.

IV. GOD CREATES A GARDEN AND A MAN – GENESIS 2:4-25

For some, it would appear that Genesis 2:4 - 3:24 is a second account of creation, for if chapter one appears to have just described the creation of the world, then it looks as if all of a sudden we are beginning all over again with a time when plants, animals and humans have not yet been created. Is this then an alternate account of creation? Does it contradict what had been described already in chapter one? What is the solution to this problem? This brings us to the fourth great evangelical principle of creation, which is that Genesis 2-3 continues the same creation story, but with an emphasis on a special garden that was made for the first couple, Adam and Eve.

Of course, critical scholars have been in the habit of claiming that there are two stories of beginnings in Genesis,

based on documentary evidence of “J” and “P.” But “P” and “J” are not real sources which have been epigraphically identified, or archaeologically discovered in our digging, but “P” and “J” are only hypothetical sources created by scholars’ ingenuity. Moreover, the tactic of the Genesis writer, seen throughout the book of Genesis, is to cover the wider area of what he wants to say, such as the broader aspects of the subject first (here: such as the universe and the earth in its broadest sense), and then to focus in more narrowly on the specific detail that he is after: in this case it was the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2-3. In the rest of the book of Genesis, the author of this book will exhibit this same stylistic device. For example, he will briefly cover Esau’s descendants briefly in in Genesis 36, but then he will focus extensively in on Jacob’s child Joseph in Genesis 37 – 50, for that was his purpose in raising the issue.

We would contend that the materials in Genesis 2-3 deal exclusively with the Garden of Eden where God

introduced grain seeds and thorns and thistles for the first time, because up to that point no man had been there to till the ground in order to perpetuate the nurture of grains, and no rain had fallen on the ground, which would allow the thorns and thistles to grow. Thus these plants were now introduced in Eden, but had not been mentioned in Genesis chapter 1.

V. AN HISTORICAL ADAM AND EVE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Some affirm that Genesis 2-3 would seem to favor the fact that God used the evolutionary biological process (hereafter EBP) to bring humans into being, so that they are viewed as the products of natural selection and the evolutionary biological process (EBP) as some scientists have taught. On this view, “Adam and Eve” would only function as “types,” or as an “allegory” or a “symbol” of the human race. But other scholars who have also recently adopted an evolutionary view of the active mechanism for the origin of all the cosmos, plants, fish and animals, to be the real

explanation for what took place in Genesis 1. However, some of these same theological scholars have nevertheless rejected such a biological process for the sudden appearance of Adam and Eve in the Biblical record, because of the serious theological consequences this would raise for our understanding of someone no less than the Apostle Paul. This group of scholars regard this couple as a real historical set of individuals, who appeared in real space and time. But how can they stop the EBP at the end of chapter 1, and simply say that Genesis 2-3 do not show any of the signs of the literary style exhibited in Genesis 1? That is even more difficult to explain. There is a tacit recognition that we are indeed dealing with “narrative prose” genre in all three chapters of Genesis 1-3, but there is a tendency to adopt a new literary genre which is known as one of “exalted prose,” terms that were first used by E. J. Young in a somewhat different sense, but now it has have been adopted and reinterpreted by some to imply another

type of possible poetic-like prose writing, whatever that means. Others have gone in a different route and have tried to show a tendency to adopt a new purpose for Genesis 1-2, by saying these chapters are meant to describe a “functional” view of the story of beginnings, and not the method of creation!

To argue, however, that Adam and Eve were merely symbols, or mythic representations, of the whole human race (or even merely a description of the functions of creation), rather than a record of the divine introduction of a set of historic individuals, would put us at odds with Jesus who in Mark 10:6 declared: “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female’ ... and the two will become one flesh.” That is a serious consideration for a believer in Christ. It involved a theology of the unity of the race, as well as a theology of marriage and a theology of creation.

Such a symbolic designation would also mean that we would be at odds with the apostle Paul, who certainly held in Romans 5:12 ff. that Adam was just as real a man as Jesus was (1 Cor 15:21-22), for the two are linked in these statements.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all have sinned. Romans 5:12

For if the many died by the trespass of one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Romans 5:15

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. I Corinthians 15:21-22.

The rejoinder that assumes these Biblical authors were by these means exhibiting that they were merely persons of their times, who used ancient methods common to that day to teach their readers, is a difficult position to take, for it raises a new set of criteria (usually unstated) for deciding

which parts of the Bible can be trusted and which parts are merely the outward husks that embody or contain the essential inside contents of correct doctrine! But this again assumes that the writers were not divinely aided as they received their messages, but merely reflected their own culture and thinking. Furthermore, unless there is this unity of humanity in the one man Adam, we could have some mortals who might be less sinful than Adam, or some who were derived from another line of humans, that may have been exempt from original sin into which Adam and Eve fell, but Scripture insists on an equal sinfulness of all who belong to the human race. Such a claim is foundational to the Biblical disclosure, both federally and paternally! This will be our fifth evangelical principle in the doctrine of creation.

The key to determining meaning of any portion of Scripture is to return to the author's original sense or meaning as the determinate basis for deciding what is

authoritatively taught in any Biblical text. Therefore, when we refuse to take or understand the author, as he himself intended his truth assertions to be taken in the first place, is to substitute another, or an alternative authority, in place of the individual writer of Scripture, who first stood in the council of God to receive this revelation from God.

Nevertheless, a few evangelicals still wish to treat Adam and Eve as real hominids, or as the products of evolutionary biological developments from the existing primates. But this raises the problem of those other descendants who arose by the same EBP, as we have already noted, but who may not have been represented, either federally or paternally, by Adam. How will they fit the declarations of the Apostle Paul or Jesus to the contrary -- that all came from one man and are sinners in need of a Savior?

In the intellectual capital of the world of that day, e.g., in the city of Athens, the apostle Paul preached this message on Mars Hill,

The God who made the world, and everything that is in it, is Lord of heaven and earth... From one man he [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth (Acts 17:24, 26).

Thus, while the Church over the centuries has held that the manner in which “Eve” is spoken of in Scripture, as being “formed” by God from a portion taken from Adam’s “side,” must be understood as a direct creation by God, a looser view is more recently often held by others for the derivation of “Adam.” His origins are said to be more symbolical and thus he was the result of an EBP. But Paul’s argument about the unity of humankind as coming from this one man is more than a federal headship argument; it is a paternal argument and Biblically such an argument does not seem to allow for multiple individuals to arrive on the scene at the same time that Adam arrived.

This whole discussion brings up a sixth evangelical principle of Biblical creation. With the assumed view of a large number of biologically emerging primates all available to play the part of Adam and Eve, how did God decide to affix his own image to one, or even two of these primates, and not to any of the others? Genesis 1: 27 decisively announced: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” While this “image of God” is difficult to define in detail, most identify it with the following: (1) the gift of immediate speech (Adam and Eve are not taught in the Biblical narrative how to talk to each other or to God, but they are able to communicate immediately!), (2) the gift of love (Adam is wild about Eve, when he is first introduced to her!), (3) the gift of “having dominion” or of being a steward of all that God has made, ruling over the natural order on behalf of God, (4) along

with a gift of knowledge (Col 3:10): “renewed [in the new birth] in knowledge in the image of [one’s] creator.”

The fact that Adam and Eve were invested with “having dominion,” and given a charge to “subdue” the earth, did not necessarily imply that the garden was not yet in the shape God wanted it to be. The doctrine of work implied here in this setting had none of the negative concepts that we now attach to work, but it was a joy to continue to see creation in God’s order sustained to its full potential under the supervision of this couple who answered to God for its effectiveness and beauty.

**VI. ALL THINGS WERE CREATED BY CHRIST
JESUS – COLOSSIANS 1:15-17**

Paul taught in Colossians 1:15-17 that Jesus held the honor of being first in rank and preeminence (“firstborn”) over all creation, (not number one in chronological order of creation, as if God created his Son first, which is a heresy of the Arians and Jehovah Witnesses). “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible

and invisible.... All things were created by him and for him.” Even if one takes this statement as exhibiting only permission, and secondary causation, but not direct agency, one must name what the figure of speech it is that was allegedly used here, define it in terms of its wider usage, and then show how it is specially functioning here. A mere wave of the hand, with a summary conclusion that this is but a “figurative expression,” will not pay the proper respect such as text deserves or that the writer is worthy of enjoying.

In conclusion there is one other matter and that is the designation “theistic evolution.” In order to remove the explanation of this title from what could more aptly be called “Deistic Evolution,” where the watch-maker wound the clock up and then let the EBP take it to its natural conclusion, early twentieth century advocates of this view, such as James Orr, Augustus Hopkins Strong, or Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, tried to locate three definite spots

where God directly intervened into the evolutionary process: viz., (1) with the creation of matter in the beginning (Gen 1:1); (2) the creation of life (Gen 1:20-21), and (3) the insertion of the image of God into man and woman (Gen 1:27). These men linked these interpretive moves with thesis that this should be named “Theistic Evolutionary;” a view of the text of Scripture (for they were exegetes and theologians) that the Bible itself taught. They emphasized the fact that the Hebrew verb bara’, “create,” was only used in these three spots in the Genesis text – Genesis 1:1, 21, 27. It was only at these three moments where God interrupted the evolutionary process and directly intervened in the creative process according to their views.

It is true that this verb, bara’, which occurs some 45 times in the Old Testament, is never used with any agency of material and exclusively has God as its subject in all of its occurrences; so, therefore, it is the closest verb mortals

could have (which mortals would otherwise not need such a word in their vocabulary, since we mortals are unable to create anything out of nothing) to mean “creation out of nothing,” ex nihilo. But of course it does not mean that, since, as we have said, mortals have no need for such a verb of their own works, God cannot create things out of nothing! However, two other Hebrew words for “create” are alternately used along with this verb bara`, viz, `asah, “to make,” and yatsar, “to form.” It is doubtful, then, that it was the intention of the writer of Genesis to reduce all of these Hebrew words to mean the identical concepts for all three Hebrew verbs – there were nuances of meaning to each! What helps us, however, are the circumlocutions found in other texts that show that what now appears was indeed made out of what was not visible or part of our mortal existence prior to God’s making it in creation. See, e.g., Hebrew 11:3 –

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what was seen was not made out of what was visible.

So if we are understandably fainthearted about translating bara` as "creating out of nothing," do not despair, for Hebrews 11:3 will send what a single word could not denote or mean by giving the same concept to us in a fully expression!

Therefore, God did create out of nothing, for he had to initially call each thing into existence. But the attempt to focus on the three uses of bara` as the door that allowed "Theistic Evolution" into our exegesis is unwarranted.

CONCLUSIONS

1. There was nothing in the absolute beginning of the universe except God. Matter is not eternal, but is derived from God.

2. The method God used to create the universe was by stating his word as the grounds for all that appeared (Ps 33:6, 9).
3. The unity of all humanity meant that all mortals were by nature and by practice sinners who needed the redemption of Jesus Christ.
4. At the heart of the Biblical narrative is the story of the harm that came to all persons because of the sin of one man, but by the work of another one incarnate man, Christ Jesus, salvation was provided to the saving of the souls of all who will believe.
5. Mortals are not junk, but have dignity, value and worth because they have been gifted with the image of God.
6. Attempts to introduce “Theistic Evolution” by means of noting the three places where Genesis 1 used the term “created” (bara`) is flawed, because it argues for a use and meaning of a verb (i.e., “to create out of nothing”) that cannot be sustained in the parallel verbs used

elsewhere in that same text and in the rest of the Old Testament.

7. Many who of those who currently espouse a view of “theistic evolution” almost always forget to tell us where God entered the picture, in distinction from those theistic evolutionists of the early twentieth century, who attempted to attach God’s entry into the picture at the point of the three appearances of bara` in Genesis 1. So what makes “theistic evolution” “theistic,” as determined by the text of Scripture? This needs to be shown from Scripture.