

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE HISTORICITY OF ADAM (PART II)

The BioLogos Foundation and Peter Enns (who served as their senior fellow for Biblical studies) repeatedly declare that the whole question as to whether Adam was in fact a real-life historical figure and *the* first man – is completely irrelevant. Adam’s historicity has no bearing – they assure us – on the real value and substance of the Christian Faith. Really? I sought to show in Part I that without a real Adam there is no FALL and without the Fall, sin and guilt likewise become categories that are theological vacuous. Over a century ago Donald MacDonald, a noted Scottish theologian, wrote an extremely valuable book on the Biblical doctrine of Creation and the Fall. In it he observed, “With the doctrine of Creation is thus inseparably linked that of the Fall, together with all the scriptural declarations respecting the evils, both physical and moral, thereby introduced into the world, entailed upon the human race, and transmitted from sire to son throughout all generations. On the doctrine of man’s fall, again, is reared the doctrine of his recovery. The one supplies not indeed the condition, but the occasion of the other. Man is convicted and condemned, and the very ground is cursed on his account; but the very sentence of condemnation is preceded by an intimation of deliverance. Man, now guilty and depraved, is expelled from the garden of delights – the scene of his innocence and of his sin – which thus becomes a paradise lost; but amidst the doubts and darkness which, as previously remarked, had in these circumstances settled down upon the earth, there breaks forth one bright ray which hopefully points to a paradise restored. As a happy augury of this restoration it is of importance to find that the blessed effects of the Divine intimation of mercy are strongly depicted in an act of faith described in the memorable words, - “Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living,” (Gen. 3:20;) an incident to which further reference will be afterwards made. If then, in this narrative, there is seen the outburst of that fountain of depravity whose streams have deluged and desolated the earth, and poisoned the whole human family, no less distinctly may be discerned the germ of that promised power which shall heal this fountain and stay its baneful streams. If the third chapter of Genesis points to the origin of sin, and records the sentence which, on account of it, condemns the guilty to death, no less does it announce a Saviour to deliver from the sin and the death thereby incurred. Without the sin recorded in that chapter, there had been no substitution, no sacrifice, no gospel, no grace – arrangements unknown, because unneeded in a state of innocence, and so there would not have been made known to principalities and powers in heavenly places, by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God as now displayed, (Eph. 2:14-18) If, then, all the denunciations against sin, and all the warnings to the sinner, which are contained in the Bible, point to the narrative of the Fall, equally so do the invitations to seek the Lord, with all the accompanying offers of pardon and peace. If all the crimes and outrages ever perpetrated on earth find their origin and explanation in the history of the Fall, no less all the law-honouring acts and the propitiatory sacrifice of the Saviour and Surety of sinners. If we can there discern our relation to the first Adam, with the nature and amount of the obligation which that relation involves, we shall by these lessons be also prepared for the New Testament doctrine of the Second Adam, the Lord from heaven, and prepared too for the apostolic commentary on the relation in which, through the grace of God, we stand to our second Head, who has assumed the human nature, and will ever retain it, associated with the Divine. In one word, all the peculiar doctrines of Christianity and the Bible cluster round the narrative of the Fall, and find their explanation in its statements.”¹

Note the following ways the Bible underscores the historicity of Adam:

I. The Biblical Genealogies

Beginning in Genesis (5:3) Adam is regarded as a real person. In 1 Chron. 1:1 and later in Luke 3:38 Adam is declared to have been the ancestor of the other historical people, i.e. Abraham, David, Jesus. If I were to tell you that in researching my family tree I discovered that I am directly related to Sinbad the Sailor, Pecos Bill and Paul Bunyan, you could conclude that I had some serious mental problems! If Adam falls into the category of a mythical figure, then the Biblical record is seriously flawed, as well as being historically unreliable.

II. The Testimony of Jesus

As Brian Schwertley has written “If one does not accept the historicity of Adam, then one is left with only two alternatives regarding Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 19:4-6 and Mark 10:6-8. One can argue that Christ was merely human and was simply mistaken when He regarded Adam as a literal, historical, first created man. In other words, Jesus was finite, limited in knowledge and subject to errors in judgment just like everyone else. This view is blatantly unscriptural, anti-Christian and wicked. Another approach is to argue that Jesus was accommodating Himself to the culture and society in which He lived. He knew that the Scriptures were full of mistakes, lies and myths, but He *pretended* they were inerrant because He didn’t want to upset His first century audience. These arguments (which are typical examples of Modernist unbelief) must emphatically be rejected by all professing Christians. The idea that Jesus Christ (who is God [Mt. 1:23; Jn. 1:1-3, 14; Rom 9:6], who cannot lie [Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18], who is omniscient [Heb. 4:13; Rom. 11:22]) would appeal to a lie, or a myth, or to a redaction of evil, con artist priests to establish a doctrine or ethical teaching and present that teaching as God’s word which is absolutely true, is an explicit denial of Christianity. If Jesus was *unaware* of the mythological nature of the creation account or purposely lied to the people (to cater to erroneous Jewish teachings regarding Adam), then He could not be the Messiah or the Son of God. A Jesus who was not God, who was a lying, sinful man cannot be an atonement for the sins of the elect. One must either believe the words of Christ or cast Christianity aside. There is no middle ground on this issue.”²

III. The Teaching of the Apostle Paul

I pointed out earlier that Peter Enns categorically declares the Apostle Paul to be hopelessly in the dark about Adam’s historicity. But what is at stake with such a view? In addition to the impact this has on the Fall, sin and guilt. Todd Fisher points out that the “key problem with denying the literal existence of Adam and Eve is what such a rejection does to the veracity of the Bible itself. It is clear that when the Bible talks about Adam and Eve and the origins of life it is not only referencing them as literal people, but also making truth claims. There is nothing in the text that would point to the need of using a figurative hermeneutic (e.g. texts that include hyperbole, such gouging out your eye and cutting off your hand). The children and descendants of Adam and Eve are presented as literal people describing actual events that occur in their lives. This is further evident in the genealogies of the OT (1 Chron. 1:1) and the NT (Matt. 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38). If the authors of biblical texts did not see their descendants (including Adam and Eve) as literal people, why include them in a genealogy? There is little doubt that Jesus thought Adam and Eve were literal, physical people in His teaching on marriage and divorce in Matt. 19:3-6- “*He made the male and female... and the two shall become one flesh.*” If they were merely figurative representations for humanity, it is inconceivable that Jesus would use the term “flesh” in association with Adam and Eve. The Apostle Paul also affirmed the literal existence of Adam and Eve and clearly demonstrated the theological importance of such. To begin, in 1 Tim. 2:13 Paul says that “*Adam was first created [or formed], and then Eve.*” These are hardly the vocabulary choices Paul would have made if he thought Adam and Eve were figurative beings. In Rom. 5:12-14, Paul states that sin and death entered into the world through one man- Adam. Again, such a statement does not fit an evolutionary construct. If evolution is true, exactly how and when was sin and death introduced into human history? In 1 Cor. 15:45-49, Paul links Jesus to Adam saying that the first Adam was “*the first man... a living soul*” and the last Adam, Jesus, is the One who restores mankind to life. These two texts from Paul reveal that Adam and Jesus are linked together. The first Adam brought death to humanity; the last Adam brought life through salvation. Notice that none of this works if the first Adam is not a literal, physical person. If Adam and Eve are not the parents of all humanity, we really don’t have a clear understanding of sin, which means we don’t have a clear understanding of the need for salvation and the person and work of Christ. The gospel simply does not work if Adam and Eve are not real people. Finally, Christians who espouse theistic evolution have a problem as to the mechanics of understanding when the figurative aspect of the biblical metanarrative stops and the literal takes over. I have had discussions with Christians who say Adam and Eve were not literal, nor is the account of a universal flood, and particularly not the story of Jonah and the whale. However, they believe the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus are literal events. When I ask the question, “If the people and events in Genesis and other OT texts are figurative, what is the reasoning for believing the people and events in the NT are not figurative as well?” I have yet to hear a satisfying answer to that question. My point is that in the biblical metanarrative, once you open the gate to a figurative understanding of the text (of course, not withstanding those texts intentionally meant to be so), how and when does that gate close? If Adam is figurative, what keeps us from thinking Jesus is figurative as well? Failing to view the literal existence of Adam and Eve is a theologically impossible and fatal thing to do. It is especially egregious when one understands that such an approach is taken in order to capitulate to a secular philosophy such as evolution. The Scripture is clear on how the metanarrative begins. If we muddle that clarity, we muddle the rest of the story and have thus attempted to change the very foundation and framework of Christianity itself.”³ **CONCLUSION:** “The account of the origin of mankind given in Genesis, and referred to in other parts of the Old Testament, (e.g. Mal. ii. 15,) is fully

endorsed by New Testament authority. Christ refers to it as the foundation of the marriage institute, introducing his remarks with “have ye not read?” (Matt. xix. 4.) The Athens as strongly as words can express it: “God hath made of one blood (of one kindred) all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, “ (Acts xvii. 26.) The pointedness of the apostle’s statement will be more apparent when it is considered that the Athenians regarded themselves as sprung from their native soil and as a people highly exalted above all others. But it is not as a bare historical fact that the New Testament views the unity of mankind; it is the very foundation of the cardinal doctrine of Christianity – the atonement through Christ. It is on the assumption that all men are descended from the first Adam, and involved in his guilt, that the atonement proceeds, and the offers addressed to sinners of the blessings procured by the second Adam, the new head of humanity, (Rom. v. 14, 19.) The denial of this doctrine, then, involves more than the rejection of so-called Hebrew myths. It is practically a rejection of Christianity, and, in a personal point of view, raises doubts, which on this theory are from their nature incapable of solution. For, if there be any tribe not descended from Adam, how can any individual assure himself or those around him of this connexion, and so of any title to participate in the blessings of the gospel?”⁴

ENDNOTES

¹ D. MacDonald, *The Biblical Doctrine of Creation and The Fall* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1984) p. 212.

² <http://www.reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/Adam.htm>

³ <http://etoddfisher.com/?p=792>

⁴ MacDonald, op.cit. p. 373