

The historical Adam and what he means for us

What Happened in the Garden: The reality and ramifications of the creation and fall of man

Abner Chou (Ed.)

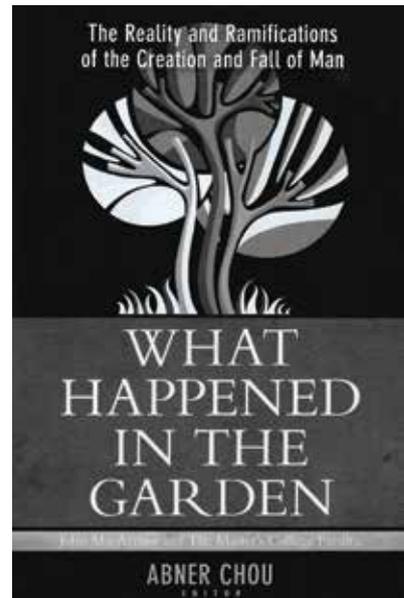
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Many ostensibly evangelical voices have arisen to question the reality and/or significance of the historical Adam and Eve in the last decade or so. Books such as Peter Enns’ *The Evolution of Adam*¹ and John Walton’s *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*² have led the charge. Much of the controversy goes back to claims made by the founder of *BioLogos*, Dr Francis Collins, in his 2006 book *The Language of God*.³ He claimed that, since population genetics implies that modern humans are descended from a population of c. 10,000 people around 100–150 thousand years ago, Adam and Eve could not be historical individuals.³

These claims have not gone unchallenged. Many articles and books have been written in response.⁴ Nonetheless, few books have had creation biologists address the biological objections Collins and others have advanced against the historical Adam.⁵ Moreover, few books have explored the ramifications the historical reality of Adam has for matters beyond biblical reliability and Paul’s soteriology.

What Happened in the Garden? provides the first major attempt explicitly by biblical creationists to address these wider questions in book form. It is a collection of essays organized by The Master’s College and



edited by Abner Chou, Professor of Bible at The Master’s College. As the subtitle points out, the book explores “*The Reality and Ramifications of the Creation and Fall of Man*”. It consists of three main parts: part 1 explores the historical reality of Genesis 1–3, part 2 explores the theological ramifications of the reality of Genesis 1–3, and part 3 explores several wider worldview ramifications.

Part 1: Adam and history

History actualizes theology

Abner Chou’s chapter on the interpretive issues of Genesis 1–3 in relation to the historical Adam is perhaps the best contribution of the volume. He addresses two main challenges to the historical reading of Genesis 2–3.

First, Chou shows that the Bible does not work as if it contains God’s inerrant ‘spiritual message’

supposedly packaged in the ancient authors' culturally conditioned assumptions. Rather, the Bible starts from authorial intent, and grounds theology in history from creation to consummation.

Second, Chou shows that more is made of certain Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literature discovered in the last 150 years than deserves to be made. If there are parallels, they are usually used in the ANE literature in different ways for different purposes than is found in Genesis. Chou argues that the interplay of parallels and differences is best explained if Genesis is myth-busting polemic grounded in history. I wonder if Noel Weeks' more skeptical approach to the significance of ANE literary parallels is more compelling,^{6,7} but Chou shows very cogently that the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1–3 fits well into the ANE context.

Adam and evolution

Evolution presents a massive challenge to the biblical understanding of Adam (figure 1). Can the patterns of similarity we observe in fossils and genetics be explained from a biblical perspective? Ph.D. creation biologists Todd Wood and Joseph Francis set out to answer those questions.

Wood and Francis basically accept the patterns of similarity evolutionists cite as evidence for common ancestry. However, they say it is by no means clear that these patterns admit of only evolutionary explanations. Regarding the fossils, many evolutionary methods of analysing the data *assume* evolution, and so cannot detect discontinuity. Creationists have instead developed their own methods for detecting discontinuity, such as *statistical baraminology*,⁸ which has revealed discontinuity between humans and apes.⁹

Wood and Francis are much less sanguine about our interpretive grasp of the genetic data. The data is often ambiguous, so that evolutionists

often overstate their case. Though at present underdeveloped, there are also many potentially fruitful avenues of explanation in the biblical framework.

They also present some intriguing genetic data that may suggest discontinuity between humans and other apes:

“Creationist research has shown that when we compare human DNA to other human DNA, we find a characteristic ratio of transversions¹⁰ to transitions¹¹ (about ten transitions for every one transversion), but when we compare human and chimpanzee DNA, the ratio is significantly different (about fifteen to one)” (p. 68).

Wood and Francis do not aim to refute evolution. Rather they try to show that evolutionists do not have a monopoly on explaining the data. This method has weaknesses—a direct challenge to evolution provides powerful intellectual permission to explore other options. Moreover, many creationists question their acceptance of certain arguments, and the tentativeness of some of their explanations.¹² Nonetheless, they successfully convey a need for epistemic humility to *both* evolutionary and biblical approaches to the data.

Adam and human genetics

Evolutionists have claimed that *modern human* genetic diversity implies humans could not have arisen from a single pair less than 10,000 years ago.¹³ Wood and Francis respond by examining whether the Bible can potentially explain the data.

Wood and Francis outline the basics of genetics, and the basic rationale behind evolutionary claims about human genetic diversity. They concede the power of the reasoning, but also say “there is still evidence in our own genomes that indicates that we did not come from a single pair of individuals” (p. 82). Why would biblical creationists say there



Figure 1. Evolutionists have claimed that evolution and genetics contradict the historicity of Adam. However, this reveals more about the biases of evolutionists than it does about the reality of Adam.

is “evidence for” ideas contrary to Scripture? They likely meant that there is data consistent with us coming from more than a single pair.¹⁴ But will the average reader understand this?

Next, Wood and Francis point out that creationists come to the human genetic diversity data with different assumptions. They point out estimates of the original population size from

modern human genetic diversity are not relevant to *total* genetic diversity. The estimates do not account for Neandertals or Denisovans, which have been shown by both genetics and baraminology to be human. This creates a special problem for Hugh Ross's ideas on human origins, which rest on the idea that humanity arose from a single pair around 50,000–70,000 years ago that *excluded* Neandertals and Denisovans. Nonetheless, it is an open question as to whether this affects the evolutionary argument.

Moreover, population growth estimates are consistent with biblical timeframe:

“For now, we can definitely emphasize that ancient population size estimates support a rapid population growth within less than one thousand generations. That would be less than twenty thousand years ago, which indicates that even under the conventional population genetics model, most of the genetic variation in the human population is very recent” (p. 89).

Wood and Francis note some important observations that help us see why the creationist need not think the Bible is inconsistent with the data. However, the critique of the objections is considerably milder than even the previous chapter. Showing that the Bible is not inconsistent with the data does not show that it can offer a *probable* explanation of the data. However, there is more to be said positively for the biblical framework, and against the evolutionary framework, than Wood and Francis say.¹⁵ Their method is also a dangerous apologetic gambit. If the creationist reader knows that the objections they are struggling with have problems, they will be less tempted to embrace them. By not engaging in the ‘evolution vs creation’ slugging match, the

authors blunt the effectiveness of their apologetic for the average creationist reader.

The Fall and fallen reading

Grant Horner, Associate Professor of English at The Master's College, reflects on the literary nature of Genesis 3, and why people often misread it. Genesis and the whole historical Creation-Fall-Redemption plotline of Scripture evince a clear historical intent. A metaphorical Adam makes for a meaningless Jesus. As such, the only ethical way to read Genesis 3 is as history.

But if Genesis 3 is so clear, why is it that “no amount of evidence will convince someone predetermined to consider this unsophisticated” (p. 106)? Genesis 3 points out that we're not ethical. We're fallen. Horner argues that Genesis 3 becomes the explanation for people's tendency to misread it—a literal Fall is too simple and sobering for sinners to see.

Detractors could easily see this chapter as diagnosing a problem that doesn't exist. That however would ignore the previous three chapters. Horner helpfully stresses the pastoral

and devotional significance of reading Genesis right, and reading the science in light of Genesis.

Part 2: Adam and theology

Adam and Original Sin

The church has historically seen Adam's role as the originator of sin, death, and suffering in creation as the bad news that makes the good news of Jesus good (figure 2). Former Professor of Theology at The Master's College Paul Thorsell reviews the doctrine of Original Sin, and explores whether Scripture and church have rested so much theological weight on the historical Adam.

First, Thorsell overviews the history of the doctrine of Original Sin. He shows that there was in even the earliest church fathers the notion of racial solidarity in Adam, and that his sin resulted in us having corrupt natures and being subject to death. East and West parted ways over the issue of inherited guilt. However, in their own ways both East and West undoubtedly retained the importance of Adam as the historical reason why sin and death reign over us all. Only in the last few centuries, because of Enlightenment thinking, has there been a significant movement away from Original Sin.

Second, Thorsell evaluates the evidence from Paul. He shows that Paul views Adam as the head of humanity, and the ultimate historical reason why Christ came. Paul's arguments are not simply about the benefits of Christ; they are about how Christ provides the historical solution to the historical problem of sin introduced by Adam's first sin.

Third, Thorsell looks at Genesis 3 to see whether Paul's ‘Original Sin’ reading of it is tenable. Genesis 3 explains so



Figure 2. The Fall is an integral part of the redemptive historical narrative of Scripture. Without it, Jesus' death is meaningless.

much of the tragedy in the rest of the narrative. And while it is rarely brought to the fore, Genesis 3 casts its shadow over the evil and futility of the fallen world in the rest of Scripture.

This chapter was one of the best in the book. Thorsell does a very good job summarizing the theological importance of the historical Adam—without a historical Adam, the historical Jesus is meaningless for our salvation.

Adam and prophecy

William Varner offers a defence of Genesis 3:15 as messianic prophecy. His exegetical defence, and his appeals to canonical context that show Genesis 3:15 is a divine word to Satan, and not simply to a snake (cf. John 8:44, Revelation 12:9), are relatively standard. He does, however, call into question an implicit reference to the virginal conception (p. 165).

However, I was left wondering why this chapter mattered. Varner says the significance is largely in the need to avoid separating theology and history (p. 168). But Genesis 3:15 can be history whether it's a messianic prophecy or not. Indeed, some Christian biblical creationists have doubted a messianic reading of Genesis 3:15 without rejecting its historicity.¹⁶ Moreover, if it's not a messianic prophecy, Adam was still historical and the historical cause of the bad news that makes the good news of Jesus good.

Part 3: Adam and worldview

Adam and human enterprise

Professor of Business Administration R.W. Mackey offers a helpful exploration of how we would expect the historical Fall to impact human enterprise. First, the Fall introduced distortion into our communication, making it harder to understand each other because we're corrupted in a

corrupted environment. Mixed signals, and deceptive signals, are common. Second, economic scarcity: man would work hard and compete for an uncertain yield that would deteriorate over time. Third, management became about damage control and holding people accountable. And this is of course what we face all the time in the fallen world of human enterprise.

Adam and thermodynamics

How was physics impacted by the Fall? This has been a source of much speculation for creationists. Taylor Jones (late Professor of Chemistry) helpfully moves away from older notions that the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics (2LT) started at the Fall. Rather he draws a distinction between 'functional entropy' and 'destructive/dissipative entropy' which produces 'waste'.

In some respects, this captures helpful distinctions. However, it also creates manifest oddities, e.g. that no cell died before the Fall (p. 201), or Adam and Eve didn't urinate or defecate before the Fall (pp. 203–204). The problem is that the Bible describes *situation-specific* differences between the pre- and post-Fall worlds in terms of *value* rather than *general* differences in terms of *calculable physics*. While there were physical differences, we have no way of parsing that difference out in terms of calculable physics. The best we can probably say is that God removed some of His sustaining power.

Adam and the law

Lawyer George Crawford offers a helpful perspective on how the Fall shapes and impacts our understanding of law. The fundamental aspects of law—indictment, investigation, due process, the punishment fitting the crime, etc.—are reflected in Genesis 3, and develop because of it. Their pervasiveness is consistent with the historical reality of Genesis 3.

We distort natural law and pervert natural justice because of the effects of the Fall, necessitating a formal legal tradition. Though our fallen state means that even the formal attempt to understand justice can be perverted, and when it is, many dreadful woes result. This also means that Christians have a legitimate role to play in the legal and political spheres; we must remind men of their fallen condition, and thus their need of the Saviour.

Adam and the psyche

Professor of Biblical Counselling Ernie Baker helpfully explores the ramifications of the historical Adam and the Fall for the human psyche. He notes that a right diagnosis is crucial to being able to work towards proper solutions. He overviews and evaluates numerous recent attempts to address the issue: getting our thinking straight, or reducing our psychological issues down to the effects of causes beyond us, like biology or our background. They all have important things to say, but they all ultimately fail.

Rather, Adam and Genesis 1–3 provide an important key in understanding mental problems and the human psyche. Sin as deviation from the proper moral order of Genesis 1. The Fall is the descent into sin, and slavery to sin. The result is that our whole cognitive framework (physical and spiritual) is in slavery to an idolatry problem. A key aspect of the solution is the Gospel.

Addressing the issue of mental illness, Baker strikes a good middle ground. We cannot take the notion for granted, because it came out of a non-biblical framework. However, the Fall affected our bodies as well as our souls, and so mental issues can have a significant neurobiological basis. But it's a spectrum, not a spiritual/physical either/or picture. And the Gospel is always central to addressing the issue.

Adam and the evangelical gender debate

Associate Professor of English Jo Suzuki argues that gender, distinguished from biological sex, is socially constructed and not innate. He says the Bible does not ground gender relations in essential differences between ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. Rather, he says gender relations are grounded in the creation order of Genesis 2, and in God’s specific commands. He also says gender relations reflect the essential unity and authority/submission relational structure among the divine persons as a ramification of being made in God’s Triune image.

This means, Suzuki argues, that we cannot extrapolate biblical commands on gender roles beyond their limits, i.e. outside marriage and the church, and beyond death. Suzuki also argues that this means women are called to submit in marriage and the church by God’s command, not because they are inferior to men.

However, at several points Suzuki’s argument seems to create more problems than it solves. First, Suzuki relies on a questionable model of distinguishing the divine persons.¹⁷ Second, drawing an analogy from the model of personal distinctions within the Trinity, which Suzuki uses, plausibly undercuts his rejection of innate gender differences, and his warrant for the implications he says arise from it.¹⁸ Third, Suzuki’s rejection of innate gender differences seems to push him to reject the reality of biological sex differences in the resurrection (p. 258). This conflicts with the physical fact of Jesus’ male resurrection body. If Jesus was raised biologically male, then we will also retain our biological sex in the resurrection.¹⁹

Suzuki’s attempts to address gender that go behind creation to the Trinity and forward from creation to the eschaton seem to create more

problems than solutions. Nonetheless, he is absolutely right to ground our understanding of gender relations in the historical facts of Genesis 1–3.

Adam and education

Alexander Granados, president of Southeastern Bible College, provides a helpful look at the importance of Adam for education. He argues that the modern West has taken in the fallacy that education is a panacea for social ills. Rather, “Higher education’s ultimate purpose became career training for self-promotion” (p. 278).

As Granados says, it’s Genesis 3 all over again. We live in a *fallen* world, where we reject God and exalt ourselves as if we know better than God. However, God would not have set up the world to run in the way it runs now. And this is exactly what Genesis 1–3 teaches.

As such, removing the historical Adam from our understanding of wisdom will distort our endeavours to gain wisdom. Removing the Bible from the centre of gaining wisdom results in making ‘under the sun’ pursuits central to gaining wisdom, which is ultimately futile. Education can only point to the One who can set the world right through the transforming power of the Gospel. And the Gospel is the only answer to the problem of Adam’s original sin.

Adam and us

John MacArthur, president of The Master’s College, closes out the individual chapters with a poignant reflection on the importance of the historical Adam. Original sin and the historical Adam are twin keystones in the biblical Creation-Fall-Redemption schema. If original sin is not true, corporate redemption in Christ is impossible. Why? Adam is the fountainhead of a coherent biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation, in which there is no room for evolution

and deep time. Relegating Adam to fiction rather than fact means the biblical story is no longer *our* story.

Assessment

As often happens with collections of essays from different authors, the quality of the contributions is uneven. There are some brilliant contributions, both at the scholarly (Chou and Thorsell) and pastoral (John MacArthur) levels. Most of the chapters provide a helpful look into a particular area, and all provided helpful information. However, some chapters possessed significant errors (Taylor’s chapter on the physics of the Fall), and others had some argumentative shortcomings (e.g. Wood and Francis on Adam and human genetics). Moreover, there are no indexes, either for Scripture references, subjects, or authors, which makes it unhelpful to search the book.

Nonetheless, *What Happened in the Garden?* is an important contribution to the literature on the historical Adam, and to the creationist literature. All the writers provide a clear testimony to biblical creation, and there is a lot of useful information in this book. It is also refreshing to see issues of genetics tackled by creation biologists (even as I demur at certain points from their arguments). Among biologists, theistic evolutionists have dominated the conversation about Adam in the books, so thoughtful responses from creation biologists are needed in that medium. Overall, *What Happened in the Garden?* poses a powerful challenge to those who would say that the historical Adam has no reality or relevance, and powerful impetus for biblical creationists to think clearly and deeply about why the reality of the Creation and Fall of man is so important.

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- Some articles have addressed this topic, however. For instance, Carter, R.W., The Non-Mythical Adam and Eve! Refuting errors by Francis Collins and *BioLogos*, creation.com/historical-adam-biologos, 20 August 2011; Sanford, J.C. and Carter R.W., In Light Of Genetics ... Adam, Eve, And The Creation/Fall, *Christian Apologetics J.* 12(2), 2014; Carter, R.W. and Hardy, C., Modelling biblical human population growth, *J. Creation* 29(1):72–79, 2015; Jeanson, N. and Lisle, J., On the Origin of Eukaryotic Species' Genotypic and Phenotypic Diversity: Genetic Clocks, Population Growth Curves, and Comparative Nuclear Genome Analyses Suggest Created Heterozygosity in Combination with Natural Processes as a Major Mechanism, *Answers Research J.* 9:81–122, 2016; Carter, R.W. and Powell, M., The genetic effects of the population bottleneck associated with the Genesis Flood, *J. Creation* 30(2):102–111, 2016.
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- Wood, T.C., Baraminological analysis places *Homo habilis*, *Homo rudolfensis*, and *Australopithecus sediba* in the human holobaramin, *Answers Research J.* 3:71–90, 2010. Wood's study cut against both evolutionary and creationist consensus on the identification of *A. sediba*, and provoked numerous responses from creationists: e.g. DeWitt, D., Habermehl, A. and Menton, D., Baraminological analysis places *Homo habilis*, *Homo rudolfensis*, and *Australopithecus sediba* in the human holobaramin: Discussion, *Answers Research J.* 3:153–158, 2010. Many were incensed that he included *Australopithecus sediba* in the human holobaramin, even raising questions about the theological propriety of doing so. The methodological and evidentiary issues require further discussion beyond what is possible here, but the theological objection of Wood's critics is faulty. Wood was clearly not saying that *A. sediba* is less than human. He said it was a full-blooded child of Adam, period—regardless of how strange it looked. This conclusion only sounds odd because the original discoverer Lee Berger labelled the find *Australopithecus sediba*. Had it been labelled *Homo sediba* it's unlikely creationists would have cared about Wood's conclusions as much. At worst, Wood's conclusions were based on skewed data or a faulty method. Whether true or false, though, Wood's study should remind us that evolutionary 'species' and 'genus' labels have limited heuristic value for discerning the limits of the biblical kinds, even with respect to humans. Evolutionists do not operate with Adam in mind, so we should not expect their classification of paleoanthropological finds to reflect the biblical picture.
- Transversions are mutational interchanges of nucleotide bases of different shape (i.e. of a one-ring purine (A or G) for a two-ring pyrimidine (C or T) or vice versa). This entails an exchange of one-ring and two-ring structures.
- Transitions are mutational interchanges of nucleotide bases of similar shape; i.e. an exchange of one-ring pyrimidines (C T), or of two-ring purines (A G).
- For instance, on issues such as '95–98% genetic similarity between chimps and humans', see Tomkins, J. and Bergman, J., Genomic monkey business—estimates of nearly identical human–chimp DNA similarity re-evaluated using omitted data, *J. Creation* 26(1):94–100, 2012.
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- One of the authors, Dr Wood, caused a stir on his blog in 2009 by claiming: "There is evidence for evolution, gobs and gobs of it [emphasis original]." Wood, T.C., The truth about evolution, toddcwood.blogspot.com, 30 September 2009. He later clarified what he meant by 'evidence': "A good explanation corresponds to lots of data (which we call 'evidence'), but it still might have inconsistencies, or pieces of data that correspond poorly to the explanation. Despite the presence of these inconsistencies, it's still quite reasonable to call something 'good science' if it corresponds to lots of data (i.e. has a lot of evidence)." Wood, T.C., The nature of science, toddcwood.blogspot.com, 6 October 2009. Wood used 'evidence' as synonymous with 'data', and he does not equate 'good science' with truth, or even the best explanation of all the relevant data.
- One biblical assumption Wood and Francis did not mention that helps mitigate the explanatory challenge is that some human genetic diversity is created diversity—it doesn't all have to be explained by mutation. This drastically drops the number of mutations creationists need to account for, so the age and population estimates also drop. See Carter, R.W., The Non-Mythical Adam and Eve! Refuting errors by Francis Collins and *BioLogos*, creation.com/historical-adam-biologos, 20 August 2011; and Carter, R.W. and Powell, M., The genetic effect of the population bottleneck associated with the Genesis Flood, *J. Creation* 30(2):102–111, 2016.
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- Suzuki relies on Wayne Grudem's idea that the Father's authority and the Son's submission are primary factors that distinguish them as persons (see e.g. Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, pp. 251–257, 2000). However, this is not how the church has historically distinguished the Father and the Son in the immanent Trinity. Rather, it has differentiated them through relations of personal origin; i.e. the Father is the Father because He begets the person (not the essence) of the Son, and the Son is the Son because He is begotten by the Father. This is commonly called *eternal generation*. Relations of authority and submission are ancillary and contingent matters that may be fitting outworkings of these relations of origin in creation and salvation, but do not define the distinction between the Father and the Son. For a helpful guide through this, see Sanders, F., 18 Theses on the Father and the Son, scriptoriumdaily.com/18-theses-on-the-father-and-the-son, 13 June 2016. Note also that Grudem has since retracted his side-lining of eternal generation, and has been convinced that relations of authority and submission between the Father and the Son are grounded in eternal generation: Grudem, W., Why a denial of the Son's eternal submission threatens both the Trinity and the Bible, waynegrudem.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ETS-Presentation-on-Trinity-11-15-16.pdf, 15 November 2016.
- Suzuki would disagree: "If indeed the male headship mirrors the role relationship within the Godhead, then it certainly is not based on the essence of the Persons within Trinity, because, as one being, the three persons' essence is the same" (p. 260). However, this confuses different uses of 'essence'. When we say the divine persons 'share the same essence', we mean they subsist in one 'what' like a chair is one 'what'. Still, there are ways to define 'Father' and 'Son' to distinguish them as persons. Those defining factors that distinguish Father and Son we can call 'essential' or 'intrinsic' to their distinct personhood. From this, we need to ask: does submission to the Father define divine Sonship? If so, submission defines the Son as a distinct divine person. If women are held to be analogous to the Son in this way, it seems to mandate that 'submission' is part of what defines 'womanhood'. This essentializes gender and seems to universalize the authority men should have over women, which Suzuki wants to avoid.
- Suzuki calls this argument "weak" because "It is inconceivable for me that we continue to retain the biological function no longer needed throughout eternity" (p. 258). This is just personal incredulity. All that says is that Suzuki hasn't grasped just how radical an affirmation of human sexuality Jesus' resurrection is. It shows that *the value of sexual distinction goes deeper than reproductive function*.