
THE HISTORICAL ADAM

DS212—Doctrine of Humanity
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ADAM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

- In his foreword to J. P. Versteeg’s book *Adam in the New Testament*, the translator, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., summarizes his basic argument: “If it is not true that all human beings descend from Adam as the first human being, then the entire history of redemption documented in Scripture unravels.”¹
- The historical Adam has come under attack even within evangelical circles.
 - For example, Peter Enns wants to reconcile evangelical belief with the findings of modern science, which he believes make it untenable to hold the traditional teaching on Adam.
 - This requires reconfiguring the doctrine of Scripture and other theological categories.
 - Enns writes, “A true rapprochement between evolution and Christianity requires a synthesis, not simply adding evolution to existing theological formulations.”²
 - In his book *The Evolution of Adam*, Enns spends much time reconciling his doctrine of Scripture with a view of theistic evolution.
- Gaffin notes a major problem with this species of argumentation. “Concerning sin, then, Enns and others of like mind today make clear what is also true of those whom Versteeg dealt with in his day. Evolution excludes believing the Bible’s claim that sin entered human history at a point after its beginning. Evolution, in other words, precludes the fall as taught in Scripture. It replaces the historical before-and-after of creation and fall with their side-by-side inseparability. Sin is not a matter of human *fallenness* but of human *givenness*. Whatever else being human may mean, it entails being sinful, or at least being naturally and inalterably disposed to sin.”³
 - Enns substitutes the traditional category of “original sin” with the idea of a “sin of origin,” a distinction introduced by George L. Murphy.⁴
 - While he writes about the presence of this sin, he is silent about the *guilt* of sin or even of the fact that this “sin of origin” is rebellion against God. This view has massive cascading effects on his understanding of the gospel message.
- The covenant-historical background is foundational. Adam and Christ are two public people who summarize all of humanity (1 Cor 15:35–49; Rom 5:12–21). They represent, respectively, distinct ages.
 - Adam as a Type of Christ (Romans 5:14)

¹ Gaffin, foreword to J. P. Versteeg, *Adam in the New Testament*, 2nd ed. trans. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2012), x. Another noteworthy recent volume is William VanDoodewaard, *The Quest for the Historical Adam: Genesis, Hermeneutics, and Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015).

² Enns, *The Evolution of Adam*, 147 (emphasis original).

³ Gaffin, foreword to Versteeg, *Adam in the New Testament*, xiii.

⁴ Enns, 124; See 117n16 in Robert L Murphy, “Roads to Paradise and Perdition: Christ, Evolution and Original Sin” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 58:2 (June 2006) 109–18.

- Typology is anchored in history.⁵
- The connection between type and antitype is determined by God’s plan of redemption.
- The Old Testament type and its corresponding New Testament fact correspond to two different dispensations.
- The One
 - Throughout Romans 5:12–21, Paul uses the word “one” (ένός). The typological connection between Adam and Christ is focused on this word.
 - The two are not equals, however.
 - While there is a strong analogy between Adam and Christ, the redemption accomplished by the one Christ’s one act of obedience far surpasses the work of the one man Adam.
 - Remember, the free gift is not like the trespass (Rom 5:15).
 - Still, there is an important correspondence between Adam and Christ as “the one.”
 - Federal Representation
 - Verses 13 and 14 emphasize an important point of federal representation.
 - In the discreet time period from Adam to Moses, the people were not under an explicit command with a clear threat of punishment.
 - Adam had this in the garden.
 - The law given through Moses brought this once again.
 - Moses is the historical terminus of this time period. Adam is clearly the beginning.
 - Versteeg begins to build an important argument.
 - First, death is the punishment for sin (Rom 6:23).
 - Second, people die during the time period from Adam to Moses.
 - Third, there was no law from Adam to Moses.
 - Fourth, sins are not “counted” where there is no law.
 - *Conclusion:* People must have died as a punishment for the sin and guilt from another (the “one”), which was imputed to them. This conclusion corroborated the rest of our exegesis on the passage.
 - Any scenario with an ahistorical Adam cannot account for Paul’s language in Romans 5:12–21.
- This leads people to reevaluate even deeper concerns.

GENESIS: REVELATION, HISTORY, AND MYTH

- Mythical interpretations of Genesis have been around for quite a while.
 - We may be tempted to think that these interpretations of Genesis have been contained to liberal circles or those people “out there,” who also reject all manner of traditional

⁵ Versteeg makes use of several points from E. E. Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh-London, 1957), 127

doctrine. However, interpretations of Genesis as myth have influenced even conservative evangelical circles.

- In addition to those already mentioned, Paul King Jewett, who taught at Fuller Seminary, proffered such views in his 1975 book *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View*. Jewett concluded that the apostle Paul was flat out wrong in some of his statements.
- What we believe about creation has a great effect about what we will in turn believe about redemption and consummation. Let us allow Kline and Murray to orient us around these issues.
 - M. G. Kline
 - Kline treats the historical character of Genesis 1–3 in his book *Kingdom Prologue*. He views the book of Genesis as containing “foundational revelation.” Genesis, taken as a whole, is revelatory of the person, work, and purpose of the Creator-King. Tracing the history of God’s kingdom means tracing covenant-history.
 - It is *critical* to affirm the historicity of Genesis 1–3. Yet this is not a bare version of history. It is *revelation*-history and *covenant*-history.
 - John Murray
 - In *Principles of Conduct*, John Murray offers a Reformed conception of how story, history, and Genesis 1–3 relate to one another.
 - Some argue that “story” precludes something being historical. That is, it must be fictional. Murray sees this as a false dichotomy.⁶
 - Murray looks at all of Scripture and notes his highly historical character.
 - Consider the great acts of redemption. They are all firmly tethered to concrete historical events.
 - By removing the historical character from the revelation of Genesis 1–3, we start to pull the thread on the historicity of all of Scripture.⁷
- Defining Myth
 - John W. Rogerson outlined four basic approaches to understanding the nature of myth.⁸
 - Myth as Lack of Rationality
 - Myths are prescientific and defective explanatory paradigms.
 - The *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (history of religions school) is a good example of this position.
 - The Creation account, the Exodus, the resurrection of Jesus, etc. are all mythical accounts. Myths are primarily fables, designed to explain origins apart from scientific categories.
 - Myth as an Aspect of Creative Imagination

⁶ “That Genesis 2 and 3, for example, is story, but does not represent history, the present writer does not believe.” John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 9.

⁷ “It is surely apparent how far-reaching must be the reconstruction of the Bible’s representation respecting the history of revelation if we are to reject the historicity of the fall of Adam as the first man . . . a mythological interpretation is not compatible with the total perspective which the biblical witness furnishes.” Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 9.

⁸ John W. Rogerson, “Slippery Words V. Myth” *The Expository Times*, 90 no 1 Oct 1978, pp. 10–14. This was reprinted in *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*.

- Myth is “an expression of the deepest creative potentialities of man.”⁹
- This is the Romantic conception of myth according to a nineteenth century movement that prized emotion as an authentic source of the aesthetic experience.
- According to the Romantic outlook, myths are symbolic expressions of human creativity and potentiality. They shouldn’t be taken literally or interpreted scientifically.
- The Social Role of Myth
 - This is a positivistic view, which regards “myths as products of society, embodying common values and ideals, and expressing them in activities such as worship.”¹⁰
 - These common values or ideals are not ascribed to historical events, but the narratives are created by the community to convey the values and ideals. As a result, myth identifies a community and regulates that identity.
- Myth in Relation to History
 - This is a Barthian view of myth. People who ascribe to this view see myth as contributing to theological formulations even while myth does not require God to act in history for such theological formulations to be significant.
 - This view goes even further, however, to argue that myth is *required* to portray divine activity in history.
 - An eternal, transcendent God cannot be described in historical, scientific categories. Myth captures the essence of his activity in symbols, which are appropriated by the individual or religious community.
 - These symbols describe what the community *understands* or *considers* as an activity of God. Whether or not God actually acted doesn’t really matter—at least in terms of the theological significance of this symbolic appropriation.
 - Divine activity in history is never direct, and the religious community simply witnesses to what it believes to have been divine revelation.
- To summarize, myths are *human accounts* of what a person or community takes to be sacred when it comes to explaining either origins or supernatural religious phenomena. Myths are purely human products. This is incompatible with Scripture’s self-witness.

⁹ Rogerson, “Slippery Words,” 65.

¹⁰ Rogerson, 66–67.