Synopsis by David Matthew of

The Evolution of Adam:

What the Bible does and doesn't say about human origins

By Peter Enns (Brazos Press, 2012)

[It will be helpful to have first read Peter Enns's other book: *Inspiration And Incarnation*]

Introduction

Why this book?

Evolutionary theory is very prominent in people's thinking today. This is due partly to the atheistic writings of men like Richard Dawkins and well publicised developments like the Human Genome Project (2003).

Many Christians—more so in the USA than elsewhere—see evolutionary theory as incompatible with the Bible's story of human origins. This book is for Christians who take their Bible seriously and who also want to look seriously at evolution. It aims to help them find a workable synthesis between the two.

Readers who have read my previous book, *Inspiration And Incarnation,* will know the basic position I am coming from in approaching God's Word in general. The current title, *The Evolution of Adam,* means not that Adam evolved, but that our *understanding* of Adam has evolved and must continue to do so in the light of (1) the scientific evidence supporting evolution, and (2) literary evidence from the Bible that helps us see better what kind of book it is.

'Science and Faith' or 'Evolution and Christianity'?

The Bible writers assumed the earth was flat, that it was made about 4000 years before Christ looking much as it does now, and that it is fixed, with the sun going round it. Most Christians can live with this and with science—they accept that the Bible does not always describe physical reality accurately.

Evolution, however, is a bigger challenge because, if we accept it, we cannot also accept as 'historical' the instantaneous and special creation of humans described in Genesis. Some try to join the two by positing Adam and Eve as two hominids who, at a certain point in their development, had God's image (which they see as 'soul') stamped on them.

But this hybrid view doesn't sit comfortably, and doesn't square with what Genesis actually says. Unless we reject scientific evidence we are required to make at least some adjustment—calling it 'symbol' or 'metaphor'—to our interpretation of the Genesis account.

The problem is heightened by Paul's references to Adam in Romans 5 and 1 Cor 15. He draws an analogy between Adam and Jesus, the first being a 'pattern' (Rom 5:14) for the second. It seems that, for the analogy to hold up, both need to be historical figures.

Four options are open to us:

1. Accept evolution and reject Christianity.
2. Accept Paul's view of Adam as binding and reject evolution.
3. Reconcile evolution and Christianity by positing a first human pair at some point in the evolutionary process.
4. Rethink Genesis and Paul—i.e. re-evaluate what we have the *right to expect* from both.

The latter is the way forward.

Overview of the Book

It is in two parts, the first dealing with Genesis, the second with Paul.

When was Genesis written and why? The 19th c brought breakthroughs in archaeology and in understanding the background to the Pentateuch—which, it is now agreed, was Israel's statement of self-definition in the wake of the Babylonian captivity. Genesis certainly doesn't offer scientific information. The more we understand this, the less likely we will feel the need to reject Genesis in view of evolution, or vice versa.

As for Paul, his treatment of Adam isn't as straightforward as some maintain. To understand it, we need to see how Paul uses the OT in general. But his use of the Adam story cannot and should not determine whether Bible-believing Christians can accept evolution.

Part 1: GENESIS—an Ancient Story of Israelite Self-Definition

Chapter 1: Genesis and the Challenges of the Nineteenth Century: SCIENCE, BIBLICAL CRITICISM AND BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

The above three forces made themselves felt in the 19th c.

Natural science made great advances. Since the 18th c geology and the fossil record had indicated that the earth was in fact of millions of years old. Then Darwin's work brought the evolutionary theory of human origins.

Biblical criticism also made a big impact. It is the academic study of the Bible marked mainly by historical investigation into the date and authorship of biblical books. The date and authorship of Genesis was a major focus. It questioned the traditional view that one man, Moses, in the middle of the second millennium BC, more or less produced the whole Pentateuch. Instead, they saw it as formed *in response to Israel's return from exile in Babylon* starting in 539 BC. On this basis, the creation stories were not written to speak about human origins but to say something about God, and about Israel's place in the world as his chosen people.

Biblical archaeology. This unearthed texts and artefacts from the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) world that shed light on the biblical texts, especially re the intellectual and cultural background against which the Bible was written. The discoveries included Babylonian texts with creation and flood stories similar to those in Genesis. Such discoveries complemented the findings of biblical criticism in affirming that the OT was written largely as *Israel's self-defining document*, adapting ANE stories for the purpose.

Conservatives assumed (wrongly) that inspiration and historical and scientific accuracy are inseparable, and read all the above as an attack on the Bible's status as God's Word. Both Darwinism and biblical studies have moved on since the 19th c but the fundamentals remain the same.

Chapter 2: When was Genesis Written?

The Problem of the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch itself raises questions as to who wrote it and when. E.g…

- In Gen 1 how can there be Days 1-3 if sun and moon are not created until Day 4.
- Why does God say, 'Let *us* make humankind'?
- What does it mean to be made in God's image and likeness?
- Are Adam and Eve created perfect and immortal?
- Is Adam's sin somehow hereditary?

Such questions were being asked some 200 years before Christ. A long tradition of Jewish interpretation had tried to answer them. They were joined by Christian interpreters during the early centuries AD, including Augustine (d. 430 AD), whose work *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* pointed out the foolishness of treating the early chapters literally. More recent scholars have asked, 'How did such an ambiguous and inconsistent text come to be written in the first place?'

Among other questions, many perceived anachronisms have been noted in Genesis. E.g…

- Why are there two different creation stories, with marked differences?
- Why is sacrifice mentioned so early, long before the law?
- Why is the flood story so choppy, repetitive and internally inconsistent?
- Who is Melchizedek? How can he be priest of 'God Most High' back in Abraham's day?

- How can Abraham be called a law-keeper long before the law was given?
- How can Israelite kingship be mentioned long before Israel even existed as a nation?

Two Early Examples

…of how the Pentateuch's authorship issue is not a modern one.

Deuteronomy: *tradition* says Moses wrote it. The opening verses say it is *about* him. They also indicate that it was written *about* him in the *past tense* by somebody who had made it into Canaan (unlike Moses). Also, the report of Moses' death in ch 34 suggests that it was written a good time after Moses died. Note 'to this day' (v6) and 'never since' (v10). Certainly Moses couldn't write about his own death!

Scholars as far back as Jerome (d.420 AD) suggested it was written at the time of Ezra, after Judah's return from exile.

Another scholar who faced up to the problem was rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (12th c AD). He listed all the points of evidence against the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. He favoured a time of writing beginning around the period of David and Solomon.

In the early 17th c the Jewish philosopher Benedict Spinoza advocated Ezra again.

These represent a growing conviction that the Pentateuch was put together *a long after the time of Moses*.

God has Two Names

From the 18th c people began to ask why God has two names in Genesis: Elohim and Yahweh. Frenchman Jean Astruc led the way in proposing answers. He asked why Gen 2 introduces the name Yahweh, if this name was only introduced to Moses later, in Exodus 3. He looked at the two names in the whole of Genesis and posited the view that there had originally been two independent documents that he called A (Elohim) and B (Yahweh). These, he said, came into Moses' possession and he arranged them into Genesis. So Moses came to be seen as an editor, not an author.

Later scholars came to see that this approach could be applied to the whole Pentateuch.

Wellhausen and a Postexilic Pentateuch

Scholar Julius Wellhausen became a major player in this field. Two basic conclusions from his research remain central tenets of biblical research today:

- Parts of the Pentateuch were composed over several centuries.
- The Pentateuch as a whole was not completed until after the Israelites returned from exile.

He also noted various patterns of vocabulary (especially the names of God) and theological viewpoint. In his Documentary Hypothesis he proposed four original documents put together by an editor living after the return from exile. He identified the four as:

1. **J** = *Jahwist* (Astruc's 'B'). 10th c BC by an author from Judah who used the name Yahweh for God.
2. **E** = *Elohist*, a 9th c work from the northern kingdom of Ephraim, using Elohim for God. Most of Genesis is either J or E.
3. **D** = *Deuteronomist*, 7th to 6th c BC, near the time when Judah went into exile. This is Deuteronomy and other sections of the Pentateuch with similar theological themes.
4. **P** = *Priestly* (Astruc's 'A'). Like E, this author preferred Elohim for God, and was responsible for the sections to do with priestly matters: tabernacle, Levitical regulations etc.

Wellhausen claimed that the P material, which the Bible says was given to Moses at Sinai, was in fact written last, about a millennium after Moses, but that the postexilic editor, wishing to lend support to priestly authority, placed the law at the very beginning of Israel's history. This proposal generated a lot of controversy.

Many of Wellhausen's views are now discarded or rejected, but he remains the pioneer of the idea, still firmly held, that a second-millennium Moses did not produce the Pentateuch, but that it is the end product of a complex literary process not completed until the postexilic period. Supporting that view are the following:

- The entire Pentateuch is written in the 3rd person and in the past tense, describing figures and events presented as in the distant past.
- There is no claim in the Pentateuch itself that Moses is its author.
- It contains many explanatory comments that reflect a time well beyond that of Moses.
- It assumes that conditions present at the time of writing were in existence in ancient times, when we know they in fact weren't.
- There are often two versions of the same story, suggesting a complex literary (perhaps oral) history.
- These twin accounts are not easily harmonised but present significantly different viewpoints.
- The language of the Pentateuch reflects the state of Hebrew in the first millennium BC.

Accepting a postexilic date for the Pentateuch will help us understand the broad *purpose* for which it was compiled, and that will, in turn, help us in dealing with the Adam question.

The OT, the Exile, and Israel's Self-Definition

Many of the items in our OT were doubtless in existence centuries before the exile, though probably were not seen as sacred Scripture at that stage. It was the national crisis of the exile that caused Israel's Scriptures to be compiled in their present form. The people brought their glorious past into their miserable present by means of an official collection of writings—under the Holy Spirit's direction.

They were asking, 'Has God deserted us? Are we still his people? Are we still connected to previous generations of Israelites?' To answer, they told their story from the beginning (creation) and from their postexilic point of view. This meant editing older works and creating some new ones. So the creation of the Hebrew Bible was *an exercise in national self-definition in response to the Babylonian exile.*

Chronicles is the last section of the Hebrew OT (unlike in our Christian order). While dependent in many way on Samuel-Kings, it rewrites the story in the light of the post-exilic circumstances.

There is solid evidence for believing that the OT *as a whole* is fundamentally a postexilic document.

The Creation Story and the Church's Self-Definition

'The crisis of the exile prompted Israel to put down in writing once and for all an official declaration: "This is who we are, and this is the God we worship".' The creation stories must be understood within that framework. We err if we look there for scientific content. We should look instead for answers to the type of questions the Israelites asked—'What do these texts say to us about being God's people *today?*'—rather than the questions *we* like to ask.

The NT authors asked that question, too. They saw everything changed by Christ and looked back to the OT and saw how it led up to him. All their quotations and allusions to it, therefore, must be seen primarily in that light. The OT—including Genesis—is the church's *theological* self-defining document recast in the light of Christ's first coming.

Chapter 3: Stories of Origins from Israel's Neighbours

Genre Calibration

The 19th c archaeologists unearthed a body of evidence from the cultures and religions contemporary to and older than Israel, placing Israelite religion for the first time in a wider context. By 'genre calibration' we mean putting Genesis side by side with those other primordial tales to help decide what we might expect from reading it. To think that Genesis and modern scientific investigation into human origins overlap is an error in genre discernment.

'Genesis is an ancient text designed to address ancient issues *within the scope of ancient ways of understanding origins.'*

In particular, the Genesis stories of creation and the flood have striking parallels in the documents of other civilisations…

Genesis 1 and *Enuma Elish*

From 1847 archaeologists discovered many tablets in Akkadian from the library of King Ashurbanipal of Nineveh. The language is a distant relative of Hebrew and the main language of the Babylonians and Assyrians.

The religious text include a Babylonian story of origins called *Enuma Elish*—sometime called the 'Babylonian Genesis'. It is on seven tablets dating to the 7th c BC (just before Israel's exile), though the original story is doubtless centuries older, most likely the 2nd millennium BC. Thus this story is older than Israel's creation s tory—and far older than Israel itself. So Genesis 1 is not the prototype but presumes and interacts with the far older Babylonian theology of the dominant culture.

The striking similarities between it and Genesis 1 prompted the 'Bible and Babel' debate ('Babel' being a synonym for Babylon). Which of the two may have depended on which is hard to assess; the important thing is that both have a *conceptual* similarity.

But there are also some notable differences between the two. By depicting God's creation work so differently, while drawing on a set of similar themes to Enuma Elish, Genesis *argues that Israel's God is superior to the gods of the surrounding nations.* 'In a world full of stories about gods' creating through violence, the Israelites bucked the trend by ascribing to their one God a complete and utterly effortless act of ordering creation.' It has nothing to contribute to debates on human origins, scientifically observed.

Genesis 1 and Monolatry

The creation account 'bucks the trend' by presenting God as one; the other nations were polytheistic. Rather than being consistently *monotheistic* (believing only one God exists), the Israelites were *monolatrous* (worshipping one God), at least through portions of their history.

Yahweh himself, prior to the Passover, declared that he was about to execute judgment 'on all the gods of Egypt' (Ex 12:12). The essence of the exodus story is not the humanitarian liberation of slaves but Yahweh's claim on his own people, that they might worship and serve him rather than Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt. The plagues were direct attacks on prominent Egyptian deities.

The first two of the Ten Commandments also reflect a monolatrous theology. 'No other gods…' is at their heart. Many of the Psalms, too, take a similar line, e.g. 'You are exalted far *above all gods'* (97:9). Genesis 1 fits in here as well; it is saying that no other gods can compare with Yahweh. Even the sun, moon and stars—deities in the ancient world—are impersonal object fixed by God in the heavens, but not until Day 4. This approach was not to say that those gods had any real existence, but it addressed a society in which it was commonly believed that they did.

In line with other creation-story documents, Genesis does not have God creating out of nothing—that was not an active issue in ancient times. Instead, he tames a pre-existing chaos, and does it alone, a radical approach that set Israel apart theologically.

The Flood, *Gilgamesh* and *Atrahasis*

The flood story is conceptually tied to the creation account in Genesis: it is the story of the second creation of the cosmos, and so is important in understanding Israel's creation theology.

The Mesopotamian *Gilgamesh Epic* and *Atrahasis Epic* both include narratives of a cataclysmic flood. They have much in common with the Genesis flood story. Whatever the connection between the three, it is clear that Genesis was not the original because it was written in a dialect of Hebrew that did not exist when the other documents were written.

The Genesis flood story, like its creation account, has a polemical value in setting out the nature of Israel's God, and that polemic requires an established and well-known flood ideology against which the Israelite version can make its theological point. God sends the flood-judgement because of human sin, whereas in Atrahasis one of the gods sent it because people were making so much noise that the gods couldn't sleep!

The flood in Genesis represents a return to the original chaos, the unleashing of the waters that God held back in Gen 1:6-8.

There was probably a historical event behind the many flood stories, possibly the great deluge in Mesopotamia around 3000 BC. The stories would then be attempts to explain what had gone wrong between the gods and humans to cause it to happen. The biblical writer, believing the earth to be small and flat, presumed that what was a local flood covered the whole earth.

Israel's flood story is one of self-definition. They were asking, 'Why did this flood happen to us?' The answer it gives is different because it presumes a different idea of who God is as creator.

Israel's Second Creation Story

This is the Adam story in Genesis 2. It differs significantly from the earlier one (Gen 1), notably in the order of creation, and we should not attempt to 'harmonise' the two (note also two different genealogies of Adam's line, and two differing genealogies of the post-flood repopulation of the earth; the author of Genesis seems comfortable with such differing accounts).

Gen 1 tells the story of creation as a whole by the one sovereign God; Gen 2 focuses early and specifically on *Israel's* story.

Adam and *Atrahasis*

The general storyline of Atrahasis is similar to Genesis 2-8 as a whole: creation, population growth, flood. They share a common way of describing the primordial world and have no contribution to make to today's scientific debates about human origins.

Since the 19th c many more documents have come to light that share common ground with both.

Reorienting Expectations of Genesis and Human Origins

'The early chapters of Genesis are not a literal or scientific description of historical events but a theological statement in an ancient idiom, a statement about Israel's God and Israel's place in the world as God's people.'

Reading Genesis as literal historical and scientific truth is a hermeneutical decision stemming from the belief that God's Word *requires* a literal reading—a mistaken notion. Genesis simply does not speak to scientific matters. We cannot say that Genesis is historically and scientifically true but at the same time deny the historicity and scientific truth of the very similar ANE documents like Atrahasis.

Progress in the evolution-Christianity debate must start with a *reorientation of expectations about the kind of literature Genesis is* and what we can therefore expect to glean from it.

Chapter 4: Israel and Primordial Time

Ancient peoples sought answers to the big questions about life and death in the activities of the gods in primordial time. Stories of the deep past gave stability and coherence to life.

ANE religions believed that these formative primordial divine actions did not just stay in the past but intersected with the events of history and everyday life. E.g. the annual 'birth and death' of the crops and seasons was often seen to be connected to some divine prototype of a dying-and-rising god. Ancient worship celebrated that intersection. Israel's creation stories were not just accounts of 'how it all began' but statements about the continuing presence of the God who acted back then.

Israel and the Cosmic Battle

Turning to Exodus and the conquest accounts in Joshua: these should not be seen as detailed accounts of actual events—though there was probably some historical 'trigger' behind them. The narratives embellished the events to present them as Israel's declaration that the God of the primordial past was active also in their own formation as a nation.

Note, for example, how the Israelites presented their deliverance from Egypt in terms of primordial cosmic battle scenes seen in ANE stories and reflected in Genesis 1. (Many examples given)

The God who was responsible for the created order was still acting in the present to save his people.

Adam and Israel

The Adam story is another example of the intersection of primordial time and present time in Israel. Some elements of it suggest it is not primarily about universal human origins but *Israel's* origin. This idea has pre-Christian roots in Ecclesiasticus and in the book of *Jubilees* (both 2nd c BC), where Adam is presented as an Israelite ancestor.

The parallels between Adam's story and that of Israel are evident:

- Adam created from dust; Israel created at the exodus.
- Command to Adam (the tree); commandments to Israel (law of Moses).
- Garden paradise; land of Canaan.
- Adam's disobedience leads to exile/death; Israel's disobedience leads to exile/death.

Adam is thus proto-Israel, playing out in primordial times Israel's national life. Israel is thereby claiming that it has been God's special people all along, from the very beginning.

Genesis 4 assumes the existence of other people at the time of Adam—the ones Cain fears will retaliate for his murder of Abel, and from whom he picks a wife. If Adam is the first human this is hard to explain, but if Adam is understood as proto-Israel, the presence of other people is not a problem. It seems probable that the editors of the Pentateuch subsumed the Adam story under that of the creation of the cosmos, so that Gen 2 became the story of Israel's creation against the universal backdrop.

The Hebrew word *Adam* is the linking mechanism, meaning both humanity as a whole (as in 1:26-27) and the one man of that name (ch 2). The editor, in putting the two creation stories sequentially, may well be signalling that the individual *man* Adam in ch2 is a subset of the *humanity* Adam in ch 1. In other words, the individual Adam is that part of the universal *Adam* that God is primarily interested in. There is *Adam* in general outside of Eden, but inside God's garden only the one Adam.

If this is true, the Adam story is removed entirely from the field of enquiry into human origins, and much of the tension between Genesis and evolution is removed.

Creation and Sanctuary

Presenting creation as a six-day affair reflects Israel's later liturgical life. By placing their Sabbath week at the dawn of time they were expressing their belief that they were uniquely connected to the God of creation.

Medieval rabbis noted that creation in Genesis 1 is the primordial preview of Israel's sanctuaries: the tabernacle and, later, the temple. So when Israelites worshipped in the sanctuary on the Sabbath they were showing that the God who put the cosmos in order and then rested in primordial time was with them here and now.

Re the tabernacle: six times we read, 'The Lord said to Moses…', paralleling the six creative words of Genesis 1, 'And God said…' The seventh 'The Lord said to Moses', in Exodus 31:12, introduces the Sabbath command. There are many other parallels between the creation of the cosmos and the building of the tabernacle, with the number seven being prominent. God's true temple was the heavens and the earth, and the tabernacle/temple was an instantiation of it, a mini-creation (e.g. Ps 78:69).

Scholars believe the pattern of seven is another example of how Israel transformed ANE traditions for its own theological purposes. The seven-day pattern is known from the Sumerian King Gudea (22nd c BC), whose temple dedication took seven days. Other ancient examples exist alongside this.

The lampstand in the sanctuary represents a tree, with seven branches, a picture of the tree of life in Gen 2-3. The temple had flowers and trees in its posts and latticework, so that walking into it was like stepping into creation itself. The bronze 'sea' is to show that the sea, which always represents chaos, is fully tamed, a trophy of the victorious God, for all to see.

'The seven-day pattern of creation in Gen 1 is not the source of the rhythm of Israel's liturgical week. Rather, as with Adam, Israel's seven-day pattern is brought into primordial time.'

The Gospel and Primordial Time

The NT describes the final intersection of primordial time and history—in Revelation: God's reign is about to break into this world and set it right. There is a new heaven and new earth (a re-creation), and there is no more sea (no

chaos left to tame). There is a new Jerusalem: God's immediacy with this creation, the final intersection of the divine and human planes.

The new creation includes a new garden: paradise restored. And a life-giving river, as in Eden, with the tree of life standing on its banks at either side, for 'the healing of the nations'. The great lights are no longer needed, since God himself will give light. God's goal all along, it becomes clear, has been to bring humanity and all of creation back to the paradisiacal state of Genesis. What was lost has been regained through Christ's resurrection, God's final act of chaos-taming: dealing once for all with sin and death.

In the NT, Jesus is the final and unsurpassed intersection of primordial time in history. John's Gospel starts with, 'In the beginning…', echoing Genesis 1. Jesus brings a new beginning, a new creation, and those who believe in him partake in it, being 'born of God' and 'born from above'. Through his resurrection Jesus has become 'the beginning, the firstborn from the dead' (Col 1:18).

Jesus is also God's sanctuary: he 'tabernacled' among us (Jn 1:14). And he is himself the temple (Jn 2:19-21), the place where the creator of primordial time takes up residence in earthly time.

So, 'in the OT, Israel transformed the traditions common to the ANE into vehicles for expressing who their God is and who they are as a people bound to him. Likewise, the NT transforms Israel's own traditions to address the climactic turn of events in the gospel.' So we will not look for scientific information in the Genesis creation stories; we will look at them as the NT writers did, seeing the gospel as the culmination of the ancient message.

Paul, more than any NT writer, takes up this theme: 'If anyone is in Christ, there is a *new creation'* (2 Cor 5:17). Jesus is, in his resurrection, Adam revisited—though new and much improved, born not from dust but 'from heaven'. This is the subject of Part 2.

Part 2: UNDERSTANDING PAUL'S ADAM

Chapter 5: Paul's Adam and the Old Testament

Doesn't Paul Settle the Matter?

The Genesis-and-evolution question is complicated for some by the fact that Paul writes at length about Adam in Rom 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:20-58, seeming to view him as the first human being and ancestor of everyone who ever lived. In the Romans passage, in particular, he sees Adam's disobedience as the cause of universal sin and death, put right by Christ.

Paul's treatment of Adam, however, is not as straightforward as many think. We need to look at what he actually says, and why he says it. Certainly his is not a 'straight' reading of Genesis or the OT. And we need to note how, as a man of his times, Paul thought about the world, including the issue of cosmic and human origins. He is definitely influenced by the interpretive conventions of Second Temple Judaism, as well as by his encounter with the risen Christ.

Romans, all scholars now agree, is not a primer of systematic theology but a treatise about how believing Jews and Gentiles together make up one people of God. The role Paul assigns to Adam in ch 5 is largely unique to him in the ancient world and moves well beyond what Genesis and the OT say about it.

Paul moves from Christ back to Adam. 'The reality of the risen Christ drives Paul to mine Scripture for ways of explicating the wholly unexpected in-breaking of the age to come in the crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God.' Attributing the cause of universal sin and death to a historical Adam is not necessary for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be a fully historical solution to that problem.

Not Paul's Adam

Many are surprised at how little Adam actually figures in the OT. Certainly there is no indication there that his disobedience is the cause of universal sin, death and condemnation. After the mention of his death age 930 in Gen

5:3, he is mentioned only once in the rest of the OT: in 1 Chron 1:1 as the first name in a postexilic genealogy that strives to connect the returnees from exile with Israel's primordial beginnings.

The OT portrays humanity, and Israel in particular, as out of harmony with God, but nowhere does it lay the root cause of this at Adam's feet. The curse brings painful toil in working the earth for food, and introduces death, but nothing is said about subsequent generations being born into a state of sinfulness from which self-extraction is impossible. Did Cain kill Abel because he inherited sin from his father, or was his sin his own decision, with no reference to that? Gen 4:7 suggests the latter: he can either master his anger or follow in his parents' footsteps. All the emphasis is on *what* Cain did, not at all on the *why.*

The flood story: the deluge is caused by the intermarriage of divine beings and human women, and the general 'wickedness' marking all of humanity. But Noah escapes it. He is 'a righteous man, blameless in his generation'. How can this be if all alike are sinners as Adam's descendants? (And this would have been the ideal place to re-emphasise the connection).

The OT as a whole shows no interest in the causal question: *why* people do what they do. If it did, it is hard to see why it doesn't bring up the Adam connection time and again, given Israel's proneness to sin. Its focus instead is on the choice Israel had whether or not to obey God's law: the same choice as had been given to Adam and Cain.

Some would say that Paul gives us the proper understanding of the Eden episode, regardless of what the OT itself says. Certainly Paul is reading Genesis in the light of God's final authoritative act in Christ. But that's the point: Paul's reading of Genesis is driven by factors external to Genesis.

Adam and Wisdom

Augustine (354-430 AD) has had a huge influence on Western thinking about Adam's role. He taught that humanity was transformed for the worse by the sin in Eden, in that their sinful nature was passed on through sexual union to the rest of humanity. There is even a sense, he taught, in which all of humanity was present in Adam's sin, and so they all share in his guilt. Most Protestants accept this without question.

Other church fathers came at it from a different angle, one that the Orthodox Church continues to hold. Eden for them is a story of *naivety and immaturity* on the part of Adam and Eve, the loss of childlike innocence in an illicit move to grasp at a good thing: *wisdom*, represented by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Such knowledge is a good thing—that's what Israel's 'wisdom literature' is all about, especially Proverbs. The command not to eat of the tree was not a random test of faith, as Augustine maintained, but a step of learning *how* that wisdom is to be obtained. That is by listening to God. But the serpent tricked Eve into trying to get it another way: quickly, prematurely, impatiently.

Following the path of wisdom leads to life: wisdom is 'a tree of life to those who lay hold on her' (Prov 3:18). That is why Adam and Eve, having taken their own path towards wisdom, were barred from eating from the tree of life. Notice how, in Prov 9:1-18, Wisdom's words parallel the snake's enticement of Eve to eat.

Seeing the story of Adam and Eve as a wisdom story (following Israel's *wisdom* tradition) complements reading it as a story of Israel's exile (following its *narrative* tradition). Both are Israel-centred rather than universal.

Cain continued his parents' unwise pattern, choosing to follow the path of foolishness in spite of God's warning. In line with this, the first warning the son receives in Proverbs is not 'to lie in wait for [someone's] blood' (1:11).

To take this approach to Adam, Eve and Cain is not, as some say, to advocate a form of Pelagianism—the view that Adam was responsible only for his own sin, and was just a bad example that people can choose to follow or not, so that it is theoretically possible to live a sinless life. If the garden story is not a universal one but a proto-Israel story, this is irrelevant. The fact is that no human being has taken the perfect path of wisdom except Jesus, 'who became for us wisdom from God' (1 Cor 1:30).

Chapter 6: Paul as an Ancient Interpreter of the Old Testament

Paul as an Ancient Man

Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit in the formulation and proclamation of his gospel, but guided not as an empty vessel but as a first-century Jew.

He believed the cosmos to be made up of three levels: heaven above, the earth, and beneath the earth (Phil 2:10-11). This echoes many instances in the OT. We know they are not accurate descriptions of physical reality, but they reflect ancient ways of thinking. His world did not include the Western hemisphere or the poles; reproductive barrenness was always the woman's fault; the world was created by discrete acts of God in recent history, including the creation of humanity. Why should his take on Adam be in a different category? Why should that one factor be marked by scientific accuracy? In any case, the gospel is not at stake in the question of what Paul assumed about Adam as the progenitor of humanity.

As a first-century Jew, Paul's approach to biblical interpretation reflects the assumptions and conventions held by other Jewish interpreters at that time.

Interpreting the Bible after the Exile

The Israelites after the exile were living in their own land under foreign dominion. Judaism was the new form of their faith as it came to terms with the situation, and as they asked how they could still be connected to their past and still be God's people. Synagogues took the place of centralised temple worship. Israel's Scripture was then formed as a marker of their national identity—and with it the beginnings of the *interpretation* of that text by a learned class of teachers and scribes. It had been going on for several centuries by the time of Jesus.

The *Dead Sea Scrolls*, discovered in 1947, contained interpretations of the OT by the Qumran sect, and their approach has much in common with the NT writers.

Also important are the *major translations of the OT*, the Aramaic translations or *targumim* being first among them. Explanations of problematic passages were inserted right in the text itself. There was also the translation of the OT into Greek, the Septuagint (LXX). This showed how the translators struggled to render Hebrew words and concepts in a language of a totally different kind.

Then there are the *Pseudepigrapha,* written mostly in the inter-testamental period and usually attributed to some famous biblical or divine figure. They include creative retellings of biblical episodes (following the example of Chronicles).

And the *Apocrypha,* written during the same period as the Pseudepigrapha. The authors laboured to bring the Israelite tradition, as recorded in the OT, to bear on their current circumstances, so there are many insights into how they viewed the OT.

In the midst of this interpretive culture the NT was produced, naturally reflecting some of the common interpretive conventions. That culture affected how Paul wrote—and how he dealt with the Adam story.

Others, of course, had tackled that story before Paul.

Various Adams of Jewish Interpreters

- The *Wisdom of Solomon:* Adam was 'delivered from his transgressions'. He was more a victim than a transgressor. Death entered the world through the devil's envy', not through Adam's sin.
- *Ecclesiasticus* mentions Adam, but mentions no fall or the transmission of a sinful nature to his offspring. Instead, Eve is blamed for death (a bit like 1 Tim 2:14).
- In *Jubilees,* Adam is a priestly figure who offers sacrifices for his own transgression.

These authors looked at the realities of their own situation, and at where they saw things going, then adapted the Adam story to help explain things.

- *Philo* saw Adam as made perfect and immortal. There is no fall, but the further in time generations move away from Adam, the less of God's perfect image they bear. Eve was to blame for pulling him down and causing him to lose his immortality in his search for pleasure. Cain's sins are his own, and nothing to do with Adam's sin.

None of the above blame Adam for subsequent human sinfulness. But others come closer to Paul's view:

- *2 Esdras:* the Jews are subject to the Romans, with their temple in ruins, because of Adam. His sin affected the whole of humanity by introducing death, though people are responsible for their own moral path. Israel is God's chosen vessel to undo what Adam brought about. But it is only death that Adam hands down, not a sinful state.
- *2 Baruch* was written to make sense of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Again, Adam is the cause of everyone's death, but not the cause of anyone else's sin.

Paul's Adam is, like the above, a creative handling of the story, driven by the reality of Christ.

Let's consider some other examples of how Paul uses the OT as bearing witness to Christ.

Paul and his Bible

Paul quotes the OT a lot, but clearly does not feel bound by the original meaning of the passage he quotes, especially when making a vital theological point about the gospel. In this he uses a typical Second Temple interpretive approach.

He presents the gospel simultaneously as the expected completion of Israel's story and as an unexpected transformation of that story.

2 Corinthians 6:2 and Isaiah 49:8

Paul quotes Isaiah to back up his warning about receiving God's grace in vain, as his ambassadors. In Isaiah the context is Israel's future deliverance from Babylon—nothing about being reconciled to God.

Paul, knowing Jesus as he did, sees that his coming had introduced the *eschaton*, and the *'now* is the day of salvation' meant an eschatological 'now', not a personal one as often applied by evangelists. A greater deliverance than Israel's from Babylon was now a reality.

Abraham's 'Seed' in Galatians 3:16, 29

Paul makes a big point of 'seed'—meaning Abraham's 'offspring'—being singular and thus referring to Christ. The Heb *zera,* 'seed', is a collective noun, as in English, but a look at the relevant Genesis promises shows that it is clearly meant there in a plural sense. And Paul takes it, not in the context of many people inheriting the land of Israel, but as indicating the means by which one is reconciled to God. Whatever meaning the OT had now has a deeper meaning in the light of Christ's coming.

We tend to consider such tinkering with the finer points of Hebrew words unhelpful, but clearly neither Paul nor his readers took any issue with it. It was the kind of interpretive approach the were familiar with.

Galatians 3:11 and Habakkuk 2:4

This concerns Paul's battles with the 'circumcision party', who insisted that Gentile converts needed to be circumcised. He quotes Habakkuk to make the case that righteousness is by faith, not by keeping the law.

But Habakkuk is clearly saying something rather different: that 'the (one who is) righteous will live by/through faith'—in the sense of 'faithfulness' to God's required standards of behaviour. The unrighteous Babylonians may be coming to wreck the nation, but the individual righteous Jew's faith will see him through the crisis.

Hab 2:4 in fact commends as righteous those who keep the law, but Paul uses it to take law-keeping out of the equation entirely! And he gives 'righteous' a quite different meaning.

Romans 11:26-27 and Isaiah 59:20

In his 'all Israel will be saved' passage Paul quotes Isaiah that 'The deliverer will come *from* Zion.' But Paul adjusts Isaiah's wording to reflect his theological goal. Isaiah has the redeemer coming *'to* Zion'.

Maybe Paul uses 'from' to indicate Jesus' human origin as a Jew, or it may refer to the heavenly Jerusalem. But, either way, Paul has no problem with changing the preposition to suit what he has to say about proclaiming the gospel, and his doing so would not have raised an eyebrow in his day.

Romans 4 and Genesis 15:6

Paul, talking about Abraham, makes much of 'he believed the Lord, and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.' Again, this does not arise naturally from the context of Genesis, but doesn't stop Paul using it to create a significant reinterpretation of Abraham.

Abraham's equivalent of an act of saving faith was his leaving Haran, whereas the phrase in question comes later, in connection with the promise of children. If it were not for Paul, most readers would pass the verse by, reading it as what it originally meant, i.e. God saying, 'In this act of trust (in believing my promise of children) you have *done well* (you are righteous).' Shortly after this, in connection this time with the promise of the land, Abraham shows a distinct lack of faith!

But Paul was very conscious of what he was doing, re-reading Genesis to support his convictions re the death and resurrection of Jesus, and their spiritual significance, reworking the past to speak to the present—the approach that contemporary Jews and interpreters would have approved. 'It is the very act of *altering* the past to address present circumstances that ensures its *continuation* as the active and abiding Word of God, not a relic of a bygone era.'

'Paul's use of the OT is a creative, Christ-driven exercise. Likewise, we can expect from Paul a similar Christ-driven creativity in his handling of the Adam story.'

Paul and his Interpreted Bible

How Paul understood the OT was also shaped by interpretive traditions that were older than Paul but that shaped his thinking more subtly (just as most of us today have a view of the nativity events that owes more to tradition than to Scripture).

Examples of this appear here and there in Paul's writing: e.g. Jannes and Jambres as the magicians in Pharaoh's court; the law of Moses put into effect through angels; and the rock that followed the Israelites through the desert.

We should expect similar subtle influences to mark his treatment of the Adam story in Genesis.

Chapter 7: Paul's Adam

Paul's Adam: The Historical First Man, Responsible for Universal Sin and Death

Paul's meaning is not in doubt: he presents Adam as *the first human*, and as *responsible for the universal problem of sin and death* that Jesus came to eradicate. This comes out in Rom 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:21-22, 44-49. The most pressing interpretive issues are in the Romans passage.

Paul sees Adam as *more* than a literal figure—he is theologically significant as a 'type' of Christ, for example—but as a literal figure nonetheless. We can't argue that Paul's Adam is a symbol of certain hominids somewhere along the evolutionary spectrum. That is not what Paul is even suggesting.

But we have seen that an appeal to the 'plain meaning' of Paul's words is short-sighted. We must take into account:

- The assumptions about human origins mediated to Paul via his Jewish cultural heritage.
- The way his Jewish contemporaries interpreted the Bible in general and Adam in particular.
- Paul's own creative handling of the OT.

There are further complicating factors:

- His works are letters, so we only have one end of the conversation.
- There are grammatical challenges in his writing, with his meaning sometimes hinging on tiny subtleties of the Greek language.
- Paul is not the clinical thinker and writer some have alleged; his thoughts sometimes come in such a flurry that his pen can hardly keep up with his head and his heart.

And Paul certainly wasn't consciously addressing 21st-century readers!

Paul's Adam stands out as *more* than the character we see in Genesis. He is the one whose primordial act of disobedience brought all subsequent humans into enslavement to the power of death and sin—which Jesus came to undo. However, 'the uncompromising reality of who Jesus is and what he did to conquer the objectively true realities of sin and death do not *depend* on Paul's understanding of Adam as a historical person.'

'As I see it, the scientific evidence we have for human origins and the literary evidence we have for the nature of ancient stories of origins are so overwhelmingly persuasive that belief in a first human, such as Paul understood him, is not a viable option.'

Sin and Death without Adam?

Every culture has grappled with the question of why everyone and everything dies. As a child of Israel's traditions, Paul uses the theological vocabulary available to him and so names the root *cause* of that universal dilemma as Adam and his disobedience. If we reject Adam as the first literal human, we have to explain in some other way the cause of sin and death. But if we do, three core elements of the gospel remain firmly in Paul's theology:

- The universal and self-evident problem of death.
- The universal and self-evident problem of sin.
- The historical event of the death and resurrection of Christ.

'What is lost is Paul's *culturally assumed* explanation for what a *primordial* man had to do with *causing* the reign of sin and death in the world.'

Death's universality is evident to all. And so is the universality of sin. But Lutheran theologian George L. Murphy helpfully distinguishes between 'original sin' and 'sin of origin'. The first, bequeathed to us by Augustine, requires a historical Adam as the first human. The latter means the inevitability of sin that affects every human being from *their* beginnings—from birth.

Murphy counsels remaining 'open on the ultimate origins of *why* all humans are born in sin (original sin) while resting content in the observation *that* all human are born in sin (sin of origin).' Certainly the notion of 'original sin' does not find clear—if any—biblical witness, whereas 'sin of origin' is everywhere in Scripture.

The fact that Paul draws an analogy between Adam and Christ does not require us to consider them as characters of equal historical standing. Jesus came, died and rose in Paul's own lifetime; there could be no doubting his reality. But Adam was a primordial, pre-historical man known only through many centuries of cultural transmission. The two are not in the same historical category, even if Paul's Adam represents an unquestioned historical reality *for him.*

If Adam is not the cause of sin and death for us all, *why* do we all sin and die? Scripture does not seem prepared to answer that question. Maybe the future will bring light on the matter, but in the meantime we can still point to Christ as the one who existed from the beginning and who came in history to sort the problem out.

The one people of God

One of Paul's major themes is the unity of the body of Christ, made up of Jew and Gentile alike. He wants to show that they are both caught up in sin and death, and so both need the redemption offered to Jew and Gentile alike in Christ. Paul's Adam serves that goal.

The New Perspective on Paul (NPP), which has been growing in influence since the 1970s, has recovered Paul's theology from its base in the thought-world of 1st c Palestinian Judaism, arguing that it has for too long been held captive by the medieval theological debates that broke at the time of the Reformation. Luther's own experience led to a focus on the individual's sinful state and the need for a 'personal decision' for Christ to bring relief from it. This was projected backwards onto Paul, who was portrayed as a 'works-driven' Jew who came to faith in Christ and then dedicated himself to sharing the liberating message with others.

The NPP, reading Paul in the light of his own background, has shifted the emphasis, while in no way questioning the basics of the Christian gospel. The Jews were not, in fact, works-driven, but saw God's dealings with them as always by grace. The function of the law is not to 'get in' and *become* God's people but is about 'staying in' for those in the covenant *already.* This approach is named by E.P. Sanders 'covenantal nomism'. The law was given at Sinai to a people already chosen.

This also applies to the Judaism of Paul's day. Neither for him nor for the Jews of his time was the law seen as the means of entry to God's covenant. For both Christians and Jews entry was by God's grace. Christians saw that grace in the cross and resurrection of Jesus; Jews saw it in their election in Abraham and subsequent ethnic and national identity—with circumcision the sign of that identity. Paul's struggle in Galatia, where there were both Jewish and Gentile believers in the churches, was not because the Jewish ones were advocating salvation by works, as opposed to grace, but because they were telling the Gentile ones that they had to take the mark of Judaism, circumcision, to maintain access to Christ.

Paul insists that Gentiles can now be part of the family of God *as Gentiles*—which for Jews meant turning the OT on its head, such was the radical nature of Paul's gospel. He would not allow the old distinctions to remain. Here is where Paul's Adam begins to come into the picture, especially in Romans. Paul insists that the death and resurrection of Jesus put Jew and Gentile on an equal footing as one people of God, as they are both saved from the same plight of sin and death by the same solution. The middle wall of partition has been broken down.

The solution reveals the plight

Paul's point of departure in his teaching is the reality of Christ's resurrection. That was the focal point of history, around which his own Scriptures were now to be interpreted. For God to have provided a 'solution' of such earth-shattering significance, there must have been a corresponding 'problem' it was designed to address: the fact that sin and death are universal, affecting Jew and Gentile alike. So Paul began a re-understanding of Israel's national story in the light of this unexpected universal ending—accounting for much of how Paul interpreted the OT.

Thus Paul brought Adam to the fore in a way that had not been done before. Paul declares that the cause of death can be traced to the trespass of Adam, understood as the first man. 'Paul pressed Adam into new service in view of the reality of the empty tomb.' Starting in ch 1 of Romans he builds his case gradually, stating that *'all* have sinned…', meaning Jew and Gentile alike, and all can become the children of Abraham by faith, thanks to the death and resurrection of Jesus. When Paul comes to ch 5 he roots humanity's common predicament in Adam, through whom, he says, sin and death came into the world. In doing so he lays much more at Adam's feet than a straightforward reading of Genesis dictates.

'Paul's Adam as first human, who introduced universal sin and death, supports his contention that Jew and Gentile are on the same footing and in need of the same Saviour.'

For Paul to say, as he does, that the law is neither the real problem nor the solution is to say that Israel's national story is not God's sole focus. The main drama began with the first Adam and ended with the last Adam, which is why Jewishness and Gentileness don't really matter anymore; all that matters is being 'in Christ'.

So Christians who take seriously Paul's *theology* are not also bound to accept Paul's view of Adam *historically.*

Conclusion

The author outlines in nine theses the core issues we have examined.

1. *Literalism is not an option.* Genesis is not to be read literally as a description of historical or scientific reality. Though designed to protect the Bible, literalism ends up discrediting it. It puts people off being open to Christ.
2. *Scientific and biblical models of human origins are, strictly speaking, incompatible because they speak a different' language'. They cannot be reconciled, and there is no 'Adam' to be found in an evolutionary scheme.* Adam is a key theological figure, but not a historical one. We lose the vital lessons of Genesis if we try to read it as real history.
3. *The Adam story in Genesis reflects its ancient Near Eastern setting and should be read that way.* It is an ancient story that addresses ancient Israelite questions in ancient ways.
4. *There are two creation stories in Genesis; the Adam story is probably the older and was subsumed under Genesis 1 after the exile in order to tell Israel's story.* Whether it was ever seen as a story of universal origins is doubtful; more likely it is the story of Israel's origins.

5. *The Israel-centred focus of the Adam story can also be seen in its similarity to Proverbs: the story of Adam is about failure to fear God and attain wise maturity.* It can be helpfully read as a 'wisdom story', applicable to all who have to choose which path to take.

6. *God's solution through the resurrection of Christ reveals the deep, foundational plight of the human condition, and Paul expresses that fact in the biblical idiom available to him.* God's radical solution in Christ showed not only the depth of God's love for his creation but also the extent to which that creation was in need of deliverance. The Adam story served Paul's purpose in explaining this.

7. *A proper view of inspiration will embrace the fact that God speaks by means of the cultural idiom of the authors—whether it be the author of Genesis in describing origins or how Paul would later come to understand Genesis. Both reflect the settings and limitations of the cultural moment.* Even the expression of deep and ultimate truth does not escape the limitations of the cultures in which that truth is expressed. 'When we see Paul rereading the Adam story from the vantage point of his Second Temple and post-resurrection setting, thereby engaging the text creatively and not being bound to the original authors' intentions, we do not conclude that this "ignominy" is somehow unworthy of God. Quite the opposite: incarnation is God's business.'

8. *The root of the conflict for many Christians is not scientific or even theological, but group identity and fear of losing what it offers.* People are shaken when principles basic to their group's identity are questioned. They close ranks. For many Protestants, *sola Scriptura* is such a principle. But that principle, some feel, does not leave much room for reinterpreting the Bible in view of extrabiblical information, be it science or Mesopotamian creation texts. And when most of one's life has been bound up with a group holding certain views, the cost of challenging those views becomes for some too much to pay.

9. *A true rapprochement between evolution and Christianity requires a synthesis, not simply adding evolution to existing theological formulations.* Evolution challenges how Christians have traditionally understood at least three central issues of the faith: the origin of humanity, of sin, and of death. If Adam's sin is not the origin, we have to seek answers elsewhere. Evolution turns on its head the very issue of what sin is and why people die. But we must follow the hard evidence wherever it leads, believing it to be God's truth, and perhaps adjust some of our attitudes to the Bible accordingly. This will not be easy, but we are determined to trust God on a daily basis come what may.