

Was Adam a Real Person? (part 1)

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[0:00] Well, we are taking then a two-week break from Pastor Jason's study on encouragement. And I'm going to be considering with you this question.

! Was Adam a real historical person? If I asked you to answer that out loud, I would imagine that all of you would say yes.

Why are we wasting two weeks on this issue? Well, not everyone is saying yes. Not everyone in the Reformed camp is saying yes.

Not everyone in the Evangelical camp is saying yes. And others are saying it really doesn't matter after all, at the end of the day, whether he was a real historical person anyway.

So, this is an area of our faith that is under attack, and I want you to be aware of it. And so we'll look at how it's coming under attack, and then we'll look at the Scriptures.

[1:06] When you read about Adam in the Bible, how are you to take that story? Is it historical narrative? Was he really the first man that God created?

Or is he just a mythical figure that represents the whole human race? After all, Adam in the Hebrew means humanity, mankind, the whole human race.

So, some are suggesting that Genesis 1 to 3 is not really the history of any real man, but is rather just a poetical way of speaking of what happened to the whole human race.

So, was Adam a real historical person? And the follow-up question is, does it really matter whether Adam was a real historical person? And we'll see just what is at stake in this current debated point. Now, I ran across a very helpful address on this topic by Pastor David Murray of Grand Rapids, entitled, A Quest for the Historical Adam. This past August, many of our young people worshipped in Holland, Michigan, for their Midsummer Lord's Day.

[2:20] And the preacher for the day was this same Pastor David Murray. He is Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids.

And so, this is an article that he wrote, a message that he presented, and I'll be quoting substantially from his address in this Sunday School lesson.

So, put on your thinking caps. He breaks the question down into three points. First, the evidence for Adam denial. Then, secondly, the evidence for a historical Adam.

And thirdly, the theological importance. So what? What's the importance here? So, we look first at the evidence for Adam denial. Is anyone denying that Adam was a real man?

And increasing numbers of evangelicals and even Reformed scholars are saying that Adam was not a real historical man. Or at least that the question is open for discussion.

[3:23] Now, Karl Barth, 1886 to 1968, was perhaps the modern forerunner of the Adam deniers. He taught that Genesis 3 was a non-historical saga and that Adam was just a symbol for every man.

And so, he denied the historical person of Adam, the historical fall of the person of Adam. And so, Barth taught that mankind was always guilty before God, always sinful, always going astray.

Trummer Longman III was a previous professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

And he says that Genesis 1 to 4 does not require us to believe that Adam was a real historical individual. Like, say, Jesus was. But rather says that Adam's historicity is an open question for him. And I quote him, A lot of people believe that Genesis 1 and 2 insist on the idea that there is one literal historical Adam. And they might go on and say, And that little historical Adam was created by a special act of God and not the result of, say, an evolutionary process.

[4:43] There are a lot of difficult questions associated with it. But I think you could only insist on the idea that there is one historical Adam if you read Genesis 1 in a very highly literalistic way,

rather than understanding that it is using ancient Near Eastern concepts to express how God did create the first human beings.

I just personally don't think that Genesis 1 and 2 prohibits the idea that there is an evolutionary process. And whether there is sort of one moment when in that evolutionary process, God says, This is the first human being.

And it is one individual. Or whether you know Adam stands for mankind. After all, the Hebrew word Adam does mean mankind. So, again, I'm quoting to show you that these are men who have taught in Reformed seminaries.

Alistair McGrath, as well, from Oxford, professor of theology, religion, and culture at King's College London, continues the question-raising about Adam.

Certainly one of the most important questions concerning the origins of life is, what are the status of Adam and Eve? Are they real historical figures who lived, say, 6,000 years ago?

[6:11] Or are they metaphorical representations? We can say something like this. There are those who will say that Adam and Eve, in some way, designate specific historical figures.

I can understand why you will say that. I think it makes quite a lot of sense. But for me, it makes even more sense that, in some way, Adam and Eve are stereotypical figures.

That, in some way, they encapsulate the human race as a whole with its enormous potential as created by God, but also with this capacity for going wrong. And in many ways, the story of Adam and Eve is all about us.

Now, we need to pause and say, yes, it can be both, can't it? There can be a real Adam and Eve, and we can learn things about us by studying our original parents, and especially in their fallenness. We can say, yes, I received the same fallen nature as what Adam and Eve had after they fell. So it's not an either-or. It's not you either have a historical Adam and Eve, or you have a non-historical Adam and Eve, and we have lessons about sin and life from them.

[7:27] No, Adam and Eve, we can believe were historical figures, and still we can learn and do, in the New Testament, learn things about life from them. But the questions are being raised, and Peter ends as another one who said, he argues that the Adam story could be viewed symbolically as a story of Israel, the nation of Israel, rather than so much a story of humanity.

And different interpretations are being given then to the story of Adam in Genesis 1 through 3. Another view that's being raised is what's the big deal? It really doesn't matter whether he was historical or not. He says, this Nick Norelli says, I think your point about the theological importance of the New Testament author's use of Adam actually works in favor of my position rather than against it, because it's the theology that is connected with the character Adam that's important, not the historical character himself.

Now that will be an important drum that we will hear beat upon. It's the truths that are taught from the story of Adam that's important, not whether or not Adam really lived.

All right? Men will say the same thing we'll see next week about Jesus Christ, believe it or not. That what's important is not whether or not he ever really lived and died and rose again, but the truths that we have from him.

[9:16] So that's the line that's being used. What's the big deal? It doesn't really matter whether he's historical or not. It's the truth about Adam that comes home to us.

And so they will point to people in the, to parables, in other words. Parables are not real people, are they? The good Samaritan, we don't believe, was a real historical figure.

It was a person in the story that Jesus told as he told that story. And yet we have important lessons about, for our life, from that man, that good Samaritan.

Well, they're saying the same thing's true of Adam. Whether or not he's real or not, all that's important is that we learn the important lessons about him. So goes their thinking.

So just that to whet your appetite, you can go online and read many of these arguments for yourself and see where this is a real issue of the day, questioning whether Adam was really a historical figure or not.

[10:30] We turn to the second part of the study, and that is evidence for the historical Adam. If I would have polled you, I think you all would have said, we believe Adam is a real individual.

Now we're coming to, why do you believe that? Could you defend that position? What scriptures would you use to say, this is why I believe Adam was a real man, just as I am.

Eve was a real woman, as some of you. Well, evidence. We're going to look first at the Old Testament, and then the New Testament. And our author here draws on James Anderson of Reformed Theological Seminary for the work done on building this evidence.

So to the Old Testament, first of all. And you might just turn to Genesis chapter 1 through 4, is the first set of Old Testament texts.

And our author says, if Genesis 1 to 4 was written as poetry, or presented in apocalyptic language, then it might be more conceivable that Adam was mythical or symbolic.

[11:43] However, the author is clearly presenting Adam as a real person, in a real place, at a real time. And so what we're reading as we read Genesis 1 through 4, indeed through 11, is not a poetical saga, a story, a myth, but it's history.

That's the way it reads. If you picked up a Bible and started reading, you would not think, I'm reading myth. You would rather say, I see historical places, historical times.

I see a real person. That's the way Genesis 1 to 4 reads, historical narrative. Turn to chapter 5. And we don't have time to read all of these passages, but you're familiar, I trust, with chapters 1, 2, and 3, and the account of Adam's creation and fall.

But here in Genesis 5, let me just read the first five verses, and you tell me what this has to say about whether Adam was a historical figure or not. This is the written account of Adam's line.

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them, and when they were created, he called them Adam, man.

[13:13] When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image, and he named him Seth.

After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died. And then it goes on with Seth and how long he lived and the sons that he had, and right on through this genealogy.

Now, what do you see here that would be hints to us as to whether Adam is a historical figure or not? He died. What does that imply?

He lived. He lived. Okay. And if this is the whole human race, metaphorically, then are we supposed to understand that the whole human race died after how many years was it he lived?

Yeah, 930 years, then the whole human race died? No, he's talking about an individual who lived those years and then died. Jim? I often say that you know, the city lived in early years.

[14:26] I think it's specific on the number of years that he had his son. And then it's the very clear part of the specific amount of time. Okay, good. It's pinpointing points of time in this man's life and what happened in his life.

Anything else from this passage? Judd? He had a individual son. That's right. If it's humanity, why would you say that he had a son and they named him Seth? There would be lots of names to the son of mankind, right?

But here it's one son's name to this one historical figure. Anything else from this passage? What is this that we're reading in this whole chapter?

What do we call that? Genealogy. Genealogy. Does Peter Pan have a genealogy? No. Mythical figures don't have genealogies. People rooted in history, people who were born, lived, died on this earth have genealogies.

And that's a huge argument for the historical Adam. He had a genealogy and we're going to see that traced all the way through into the New Testament.

[15:39] You can't get more specific than what we have here. 930 years old was not humanity, but was this one man named Adam.

So, who's the last man listed in this genealogy? Pardon? Noah?

Was he mythical? Was the flood mythical? You see, some would go the whole distance and say, yeah, Noah's mythical. The flood's mythical.

There was never a real flood that covered the earth. And so, but the problem is that this is a genealogy and it ends with Noah. And further genealogies start with Noah and keep right on going. And where do they end? Jesus Christ. That's right. And we'll see that when we come to the New Testament. So, it's seamless in that you've got Adam and all these others and Noah and then Abraham and David and Jesus, the son of Abraham and son of David.

[16:48] So, there's going to be problems if you say this Adam was not a historical figure but only stands for the human race.

So, chapters 11 and 12 have further genealogies again that just point that out that these individuals are connected to Adam by way of genealogy.

These are the generations of and that's a historical statement. And it appears first in Genesis 2, 4 and then 10 times throughout the book of Genesis showing this historical unity that has come from Adam.

1 Chronicles chapter 1 is our next text. What's a chronology?

You word wizards. what's a chronology? Pardon? Kind of a timeline?

[18:02] Okay. A historical timeline, isn't it? And that's what we have in Chronicles. It's talking about time. It's a historical matter.

And 1 Chronicles 1-1 Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, the sons of Noah, Shem.

And on it goes. This is the chronology of the human race with individuals who lived on the earth. So, we see this chronology continuing.

There's no hint that some parts of it are historical while other parts are figurative. No, it presents it all as historical. Any questions on the Old Testament evidence that we've seen so far?

We're going to go to the New Testament. Any questions or comments as to the historical reality of Adam from the way that the Old Testament presents it?

[19:10] Well, only the Lord knows the difference. Isn't that true?

Many of them would sign... That's right. But many of them would sign on to the Westminster Confession of Faith and say, I fully ascribe to this document and yet I believe that this was a mythical figure.

This is a genre in which the inspired Bible is written. It would be what... Yes, I take the Bible as authoritative word of God but as you know, not all of it is historical narrative.

There's poetry in the Bible and they're saying, we believe this is poetry. So, it's not... It's a slippery issue. These men claim to be evangelical, claim to be...

Well, it shows just how truths... Any truth begins to be eroded and we see the difficulty of it.

[20:16] Ed? Did this teaching ever exist prior to Darwin's evolution? Well, that's a good question. The starting point of this study was with BART and that would have been post-Darwin.

So, we'll come to that at the end. I think even this morning, if we get there, that there is a definite connection between this view of Adam and the whole onslaught of evolution that's hit us.

I think that connection is hard to deny, actually, when we get to that. That if you believe that God used evolution, well, it's pretty hard then to talk about God just forming out of the dust a man and breathing into him the breath of life and there's the first man.

No, you started with whatever the gas, hydrogen gas and it got up to dirt and got up to lower life and apes and then finally to mankind and there was Adam, there was humanity.

So, we'll see that connection but that's perceptive, Ed, you're getting there. that's often, I'm afraid, what drives such questions. Any other comments before we turn to the New Testament?

[21:37] Karen? Karen? If there are denying the people that are asked, then at what point are they saying the poetic evictions of the Genesis ends in the historical Genesis?

Because with those beginnings, a lot of foundations being made and you talked last little and at what point is there a historical part to Genesis or in marriage that all those foundations being made, is that all poetic or how it really wrote the whole basis of Genesis and the Bible It's like a sweater that's been knit together with one piece of yarn and you start pulling that sweater at any one point and the whole thing comes unraveled and so that's what you're saying and you're absolutely right and I can't answer for all these men many of them would say the flood was historical Noah was historical this earth really was once covered with water others would say no it's 1 through 11 that's poetic and then we begin the history when we start with the life of Abraham but again

I say well why why draw the line there because Abraham's connected in the chronology and in the genealogies with these who've gone before and they weren't mythical why should we believe Abraham's any different from them so you're right it's a difficult it could erode and does erode many key doctrines we'll see that when we come to the implications so what on this is it important all right can we go to the new testament let's let's do it what we're what we're doing here then is really just examining the old testament again only now from the new testament perspective we have the blessing of of of hearing what Jesus and his apostles thought of these old testament scriptures when they read about Adam when they read Genesis 1 through 11 how did they interpret that as if it were

myth or a historical narrative we start then in

Matthew 19 19 Jesus is given a question on divorce and is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason and he answers in verse 4 haven't you read he replied that at the beginning the creator made them male and female and said for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh so they are no longer two but one therefore what God has joined together let man not separate and so Jesus in treating the account in Genesis 2 doesn't speak of it as something mythical but is something that actually happened and something that that God did in bringing the two together into one uh Luke chapter 3 is the next passage just the genealogy of Jesus and as you remember at the beginning of the book of Acts also written by Luke and even at the beginning of Luke uh Luke presents himself as a as an accurate incredible historian he makes a point of that I've looked into these things these things are true we have eyewitnesses of them and so that's the way he comes at these this evidence and he's seeking to show that Jesus is the savior both of Jews and Gentiles it's thought that Jews emphasis is more to show the inclusion of the Gentiles well if that's true one line of argument that Luke presents is that Christ's genealogy can be traced back not just to Adam the the father of the Jewish line but that Jesus Christ can be traced back to Adam the father of the whole human race and that's what he does for us here in Luke chapter three you'll notice that the last verse of the chapter ends with the son of Seth the son of Adam the son of God so he traces our Lord Jesus chronology and genealogy right back to Adam it would completely undermine Luke's argument if he was using a mythic if Adam was just a mythical figure that Jesus Christ is the savior not only of the Jews but also of the Gentiles those not of the race of Abraham now Romans 5 is a critical passage in this whole debate and it's going to come up again in our implications when we come to the so what and I think it's it's worth reading because of the critical nature of this passage in the argument so let me just read Romans 5 verse 12 to 21 therefore just as sin entered the world and we're asking the question does does the apostle Paul treat Adam as a mythical figure or a historical figure therefore just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin and in this way death came to all men because all sin for before the law was given sin was in the world but sin is not taken into account when there is no law nevertheless death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as did Adam who was a pattern of the one to come let me just pause there and ask you what do you see in the passage so far that would tell us Adam was a historical figure Roger exactly and I can't I think it's maybe 10 to 12 times I had it written down later but that that phrase is used the one man so we've got a problem if we're viewing Adam as the human race when Paul says yes Adam is the name for the human race but it's also the name for the first man of the human race and that's why the whole human race is called Adam because they've all come from

[29:04] Adam yes Dave good good all right you see that from the time of Adam to the time of Moses there was this period when death reigned so that's his argument both are real people what's he telling us here he's giving us an origin on how the origin of how sin came into the world how did it get into the world because God didn't create it with sin God created this world without sin so how did it get in that's that's what he's telling us well sin and death entered through the one man do you remember anything about that what's he referring to remember in

Genesis 1 to 3 he he said to the one man Adam in the day you eat of it you will surely die he's referring back to that historical reality and he's speaking of it as such here and that's the reason why all men sin because we all sinned in our representative Adam all right let's go on verse 15 but the gift is not like the trespass for if the many died by the trespass of the one man how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ overflow to the many again the gift of God is not like the result of the one man sin the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification for if by the trespass of the one man death reigned through that one man how much more will those who receive

God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ consequently just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men for justice through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous the law was added so that the trespass might increase but where sin increased grace increased all the more so that justice sin reigned in death so also

grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord all right what do we see here that would tell us Adam really lived he not only was compared to Moses from the time of Adam to Moses now he's compared to who to Jesus all right the one man Adam the one man Jesus so again are you going to tell me that one's mythical and one's literal his whole argument falls to the ground if you take it that way Paul clearly believes that there is there had been a single pair whose male Adam had been given a commandment and had broken it Paul we may be sure was aware of what we might call symbolism that Adam was a pattern of one to come yes there's there's there's symbols in Adam he is a pattern of the one to come so he's a pattern of Jesus in that his one act affected the many that's in that way he's a pattern of Jesus we see that word pattern used at the end of verse four but just because he's a pattern doesn't mean he's a mythical pattern he's a historical pattern a *tupos* a type and that word type is always used of a historical person action or event that God appointed to be a foreshadowing a pointer to some fulfillment yet to come in the future in Christ so to speak of a type is to speak in terms of true historical figures and events a type is not a mere allegory but a historical reality that prefigures a later historical reality we've seen that in Isaiah haven't we the judgments!

[34:08] that we see upon the nations are used as prefigurements of a later judgment that's coming upon the whole earth the judgments upon Assyria and Babylon were historical events the destruction of the whole earth when Jesus comes is a historical event so the one can be a pattern of the other a type of the other and yet if it's a type of the other the Bible only uses historical persons actions and events to make that comparison any other insights questions from this passage we'll draw the ramifications of it later when we say the so what but any other observation here Raj yeah good alright there's a similar passage in 1st

Corinthians 15 if you will look at verse 20 1st Corinthians 15 Paul says but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep for since death came through a man the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man well who was that first a man what for as in Adam all die so in Christ all will be made alive but each in his own turn and so on so we have again this pattern this parallel one man Adam the second man the last man Christ verse 45 so so it is written the first man Adam became a living being the last Adam a life giving spirit now hold your place there and turn back to

Genesis 2 7 because he's referring back to the time when God breathed into the first man the breath of life and he became a living being chapter 2 and verse 7 it says the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being okay the man became a living being because the Lord breathed into him the breath of life now in verse 45 of 1st Corinthians so it is written the first man Adam became a living being you see how Paul understands that language he's not understanding as if as if well all it's saying is Adam the living race the whole human race was created by God and then God breathed life into the whole human race how do we know he didn't view that way because he says in quoting that passage the first man Adam became a living being he doesn't just say

Adam humanity but the first man Adam so he's identifying there was a historical first to the human race and his name was Adam and if Adam is mythical well then yes perhaps Jesus is too that is exactly the danger of this position turn to first Timothy 2 another passage from Paul and verses 12 and 13 back up to verse 11 a woman should learn in quietness and full submission I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man she must be silent for Adam was formed first then Eve and Adam was not the one deceived it was the woman who was deceived and became the sinner and so on but do you notice verse 13 for Adam was formed first then

Eve what happens if we say that Adam means the human race let's read it that way for the human race was formed first then Eve you've got confusion don't you because she's part of the human race isn't she she would be included there be no!

[38:48] reason to make that statement and then Eve the human race was formed first well she's part of that so he's saying no there were two firsts there was the first man and woman and Adam was made first then Eve so this too is this is how the inspired apostle referred to Adam and thought of him and then in Jude 14 the last verse and we must break with this we'll have to save the rest for later but Jude and verse 14 describes Enoch you remember Stuart Elliott preached on this man Enoch notice how he is identified for us who is this Enoch that Jude is suddenly talking about Enoch the seventh from Adam prophesied about these men see the Lord is coming and so on who is Enoch well he's the seventh from Adam he refers to the genealogy and he's referring to it as

historical realities

Enoch was a real person who prophesied and preached and he was the seventh from a real person Adam who was the first so he's letting us know in the timeline when this man lived the seventh generation from Adam so both are real historical figures so we've seen something of the denial of a real Adam and the evidence then from the Old and New Testament concerning why we believe Adam was a real individual and next week Lord willing then we'll come back and we'll discuss the theological importance what is the so what why is this such a big issue and we've already begun to see it but there are other things that we haven't spoken of yet and we must speak of and we'll conclude then with those practical applications!

You're dismissed.