

## Adam and Eve: Clarifying Again What Is at Stake

By [Dr. R. Albert Mohler](#)

Recent evangelical discussion concerning Adam and Eve has served at least one good purpose — it has helped to clarify what is theologically at stake in the debate. The recent report by National Public Radio [NPR] alerted the larger secular culture to the debate, but the debate is hardly new.

What is new, however, is the candid admission on the part of some that the denial of a historical Adam requires a new understanding of the Bible's basic story — and thus of the Gospel as well.

One of my recent articles, [“False Start? The Controversy Over Adam and Eve Heats Up,”](#) made this point clearly. As I argued there, the denial of a historical Adam means not only the rejection of a clear biblical teaching, but also the denial of the biblical doctrine of the Fall, leading to a very different way of telling the story of the Bible and the meaning of the Gospel.

By the way, those who try to deny that Genesis requires the affirmation of a historic Adam as a real and singular human individual (arguing, for example, that the Hebrew word translated “Adam” means only “the man”) must face the fact that the Genesis narrative clearly presents Adam as a singular individual who acts, speaks, marries, reproduces, and is listed even in the genealogy of Jesus. Hebrew vocabulary offers no escape hatch from historicity.

The main point of my “False Start” article, however, was that the denial of a historical Adam severs the essential point made by Paul in Romans 5:

*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*

*But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many*

*trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. [Romans 5:12-17]*

This is the Apostle Paul's way of telling the story of the Bible and the meaning of the Gospel. If Adam was not a historical figure, and thus if there was no Fall into sin and all humanity did not thus sin in Adam, then Paul's telling of the Gospel is wrong. Furthermore, Paul was simply mistaken to believe that Adam had been a real human being.

Thus, the denial of a historical Adam means that we would have to tell the Bible's story in a very different way than the church has told it for centuries as the Bible has been read, taught, preached, and believed. If there is no historical Adam, then the Bible's metanarrative is not Creation-Fall-Redemption-New Creation, but something very different.

To his credit, Brian McLaren affirms this very truth and agrees that the denial of Adam's historicity requires a new way of telling the biblical story. But — and this is the essential point — he thinks this would be a very good thing.

Responding to my article, he wrote this:

*I firmly agree (in an ironic sort of way) with the good Dr. Mohler. I think the conventional Constantinian "understanding of the gospel metanarrative and the Bible's storyline" is wrong, misguided, and dangerous. We do in fact need "an entirely new understanding" – new, that is, compared to the status quo, but actually more ancient and primary than the conventional approach. In the process we'd better learn what a metanarrative actually is and realize that it's not actually a great label to apply to the gospel ... "the Bible's storyline" is much better. That's what I've been writing and speaking about for the last decade, and hope to keep advocating for and contributing to for the next.*

Indeed, McLaren has been writing about and calling for just such a theological revolution. In his 2010 book, *A New Kind of Christianity*, McLaren explicitly denies that the Bible reveals Adam as a historical figure. He also denies that we should believe in a Fall into sin that leads to a divine verdict against sinful humanity.

In his words, speaking of the Genesis accounts:

*It is patently obvious to me that these stories aren't intended to be taken literally, although it didn't used to be so obvious, and I know it won't be so now for many of my readers. It is also powerfully clear to me that these nonliteral stories are still to be taken seriously and mimed for their rich*

*meaning, because they instill time-tested, multilayered wisdom — through deep mythic language — about how our world came to be what it has become.*

Writing about Genesis 3, he states:

*In this world, there is not one isolated moment of ontological shift from state to story: it's all story from beginning to end, and likely before and after as well. God doesn't respond to a loss of perfect status with a furious promise of eternal condemnation, damnation, and destruction. God doesn't pronounce the perfect state ruined and the planet destined for geocide. The experiment is not a failure.*

A similar point was made by the writer known as RJS at “Jesus Creed,” the blog of New Testament scholar Scot McKnight. RJS rejected my claim that a right understanding of Adam is necessary for a correct understanding of Christ and his atonement. “I reject categorically the notion that having the right view of Adam (or any specific view of Adam) is a requirement for having the right view of Christ and his redeeming work in the world,” she wrote.

She is certainly right to argue that our understanding of creation is inherently and irreducibly Christological — based in texts such as John 1 and Colossians 1. Nevertheless, this does not reduce in any way the importance of the Bible’s affirmation of Adam as a historical figure and the Fall as a historical event.

Yet, she also writes this:

*“Frankly, I don't think that the incarnation is a solution to a problem created by our original forefathers, whether two unique individuals created from the dust or a community who evolved into humans. I think that the incarnation was part of God's plan from the beginning.”*

This is just stunning. The Old Testament clearly promises the coming of the One who will save his people from their sins. The incarnation is impossible for us to understand in biblical terms without the central affirmation that Christ came to redeem His people from sin. As Paul writes in Galatians 4:4-5, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

In the context of God’s eternality, omniscience, and sovereignty, it is undeniable that “the incarnation was part of God’s plan from the beginning.” But it is also true that the creation of Adam and Eve and the Fall of humanity into sin were also parts of God’s plan from the beginning. This truth (set within the context of God’s eternality, omniscience, and sovereignty) has been affirmed, by the way, by both Calvinists and classical Arminians. Based upon the authority of the Scriptures,

this has been the faith of the church.

I do genuinely appreciate an honest debate on these issues of undeniable and incalculable theological importance. This debate has served to clarify, once again, what is at stake.

I can only end again where I ended the “False Start” article:

*“The denial of a historical Adam and Eve as the first parents of all humanity and the solitary first human pair severs the link between Adam and Christ which is so crucial to the Gospel.*

*If we do not know how the story of the Gospel begins, then we do not know what that story means. Make no mistake: a false start to the story produces a false grasp of the Gospel.”*

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