



DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WHY ADAM WAS REAL— AND WHY IT MATTERS

DR. MARK L. BAILEY



**WHY ADAM
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AND WHY IT
MATTERS**

**OUR PRESIDENT'S POWERFUL
AFFIRMATION OF A TRUTH
OF SCRIPTURE THAT
IMPACTS US TODAY.**

DR. MARK L. BAILEY

In the pages that follow, we present excerpts from a message that Dallas Theological Seminary's president, Dr. Mark Bailey, delivered to a group of Seminary supporters on the importance of the historicity of Adam. It is crucial for our faith in Jesus Christ, and for the truthfulness of God's Word, that we accept the Bible's teachings in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis as historic fact. We are sharing this message with you for your confidence in the faith and as further evidence of our school's unswerving commitment to teach God's holy, inerrant Word to our students and to you. We hope Dr. Bailey's message will also encourage you in your study and ministry of the Word.

Does it matter if Adam was a real person or just a part of the “poetic myth” of the first eleven chapters of Genesis as many liberal Bible scholars contend?

The answer to this question is vital because of the implications that it has for the rest of Scripture. You may be wondering why the historicity of Adam is even a problem today among Christians who accept the truth and authority of Scripture. But it is a major issue because even some reputable Christian colleges, whose names you would probably know, are basically saying that they are no longer going to teach that Adam was a historical person.

This latest denial of the Bible’s teaching has, I believe, two basic sources—one new and old. The new is the Human Genome project, which overzealous advocates say proves the human race did not spring from two people, as Genesis teaches. We will leave that argument for another time.

The old source of denial for the historical Adam and the historicity of Genesis 1–11 comes from liberal scholars who point to the “creation narratives” of other religions in the ancient Middle East. They ask the question, “Why does Genesis have to be true when we have these other accounts as well?” These scholars are, sadly, ready to bow to Egyptian, Sumerian, and other myths that are so fanciful and absurd with stories of procreation among gods. They summarily dismiss out of hand the biblical text in loyalty to these others.

This denial is also built on the idea of Genesis 1–11 being “poetic myth.” The problem with this view is that these chapters are not written in Hebrew poetry with its very distinctive style of meter and parallelism. These chapters also are not written in the mythical style that was prominent in the ancient Near East. Genesis 1–11, and therefore the account of Adam, are written as historical narrative and meant to be read as such as evidenced by the way the

rest of the Scriptures reference the early events such as creation, the fall, and the flood.

A BIBLICALLY ESTABLISHED TRUTH

At Dallas Theological Seminary we've put a stake in the ground in our belief in the historical Adam, who is mentioned 23 times in nine different books of the Bible. What's interesting is that nine of these references are in the New Testament.

That's significant because if the New Testament writers had any doubt about Adam's historicity and wanted to ditch such old, outmoded teaching, they certainly missed the opportunity! Instead, they linked key doctrines of Christianity to his reality. We are going to look at just some of these references in God's Word and see that they hinge on the fact that Adam was a historical person whose account is important to us as God's people.

Adam's creation "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27), the *Imago Dei*, is a truth that is affirmed in texts such as 1 Corinthians 11:7 and James 3:9, which refer to us as being made in God's image. But there is no *Imago Dei* in the human race if we take Adam and Eve off the page of Scripture.

A powerful argument for Adam's historicity also comes from the fact that he is included in three biblical genealogies. In Genesis 5:1 he is the head of the human race: "This is the book of the generations of Adam." In 1 Chronicles 1:1 Adam is the first of a group of people who are traced all the way to David in the Messianic line, as the genuine history of Israel. And in the Gospel of Luke, Adam is the human climax of Jesus's genealogy back through, we believe, the ancestral line of His mother Mary (Luke 3:38).

Would the chronicler, arguing for the continuity of God's creation of the Hebrew race out of whom the Messiah would come, put a mythological character at the very head of that genealogy? Not if he intended his argument to be taken seriously. And what about Luke? Would he trace Jesus's lineage all the way back to a mythical character to argue for the historicity of Jesus's humanity? That makes no sense at all.

FURTHER EVIDENCE FOR A REAL ADAM

Another, often overlooked, area of biblical proof for the historicity of Adam is that the Old Testament patriarchs, psalmists, and prophets mentioned Adam either directly or by allusion in their writings. Let me give you a few examples of the way various authors treated Adam.

In Job 31:33 the patriarch says, "Have I covered my transgressions like Adam, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom," with the implication that he had not done as Adam did. So Job not only assigns historicity to Adam, but even refers to Adam's attempt to hide from God in the Garden of Eden as a historical event. The question is, was this account viewed by Job, the most righteous man of his time, as a historical event and character that he ought not to emulate? The answer is yes.

The prophet Isaiah said to the people of his day, "Your first forefather sinned" (43:27). If you were a prophet wanting to have a hearing in a land of divided kingdoms like Israel and Judah, if you wanted to make a case to be believed as a prophet of God, and if you used a mythological character to explain the people's sinfulness, you would be laughed off the stage. It wouldn't be an explanation at all.

The historicity of Adam is also demanded in the Lord's statement

about the people of Israel during the time of the prophet Hosea. Hosea quotes God as saying, “But like Adam, they have transgressed the covenant; they have dealt treacherously against me” (Hosea 6:7). There would be no argument with that statement in the northern kingdom in Hosea’s day.

Likewise, when we come to the New Testament, we see that Jesus believed in the creation of the original couple and the purpose for their marriage. When asked about marriage and divorce, Jesus went back to Adam: “Have you not read,” he replied, “that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matt. 19:4–6).

Jesus quoted not only Genesis 1:27, but also the passage on marriage in Genesis 2:24. But His argument doesn’t work if there was not an original couple whom God made as male and female and united in marriage. Rather than take Jesus’s word for it, however, there are Christian schools across the land where they are saying that Jesus was simply accommodating Himself to His culture and simply repeated what people believed erroneously. This would mean that Jesus was willing to deceive others rather than tell them the truth, because He knew there was no real “in the beginning.” I don’t know about other people, but I am going to choose to stand with Jesus on this issue in spite of the critics of the Bible who would not.

Paul also had no problem with a historical Adam. In Acts 17 we find his great message to the philosophers and others in the erudite city of Athens. If there was ever a time when Paul, one of the most educated men of his day, could have decided to make Christianity palatable to a sophisticated audience, this was the time. He knew he

was speaking to skeptics and unbelievers, so where did he begin his argument for the reality of the true God? “He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26). His answer was the Bible’s answer—from one man—Adam!

But it is in Romans 5:12-21 that we can really see the absolute importance of a historical Adam. There Paul explained the doctrine of justification by the comparison of the first Adam and the second Adam, Jesus Christ. Paul’s point in this major doctrinal section is that just as sin entered the world through “one man,” Adam (v. 12), so righteousness entered through “one man,” Jesus Christ (v. 19). You can see even in this very brief synopsis that Paul’s argument depends on the reality of what both men did. If Adam was not real and was not responsible for sin entering the world, then Paul’s theological basis for Jesus and His atoning work falls short as well.

ADAM AND OUR RESURRECTION HOPE

Another important argument supporting the need of a historical Adam is Paul’s explanation of the reality of death and the possibility of resurrection with this contrast: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). Just as the apostle used Adam as the explanation for the entrance of sin into the human race, so he cited Adam to explain the entrance of death into the race. There would be no way to account for human death without a historical Adam. By linking Adam and Christ so closely in terms of the contrast in the results of their lives, Paul grounded the hope of resurrection on the fact that Jesus reversed the sin-and-death curse Adam inflicted on humanity.

But Paul is not finished with Adam yet. Later in 1 Corinthians 15 he argues (and this is worth quoting at length), “[The human body] is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural

body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written: “The first man Adam became a living soul; the last Adam, became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly” (vv. 44–49).

This entire passage is meaningless if Adam was a character in a “poetic myth.” And here yet again we can ask the troubling question, If the first Adam was mythology, what argument do we have against the charge that the second Adam was mythological? Paul intentionally linked Adam’s existence, sin, and death in building the vital doctrines of justification by Christ and the resurrection hope we have in Christ.

ADAM’S PLACE IN OUR FAITH

I could give you additional examples, but I think these are enough to answer the question of why our belief about Adam is one very important illustration of why it is crucial that we believe in the historical revelation of God’s Word.

Just by way of a quick review, think of all the areas of life where Adam’s reality impacts life. It relates to your salvation and mine, to marriage, to the nature of our bodies and the hope of the resurrection, and to what’s true about the final judgment and eternity. All of what was begun in Genesis has implications for the latter part of God’s revelation and all of eternity. It all holds together and stands together, or it all falls together, and right in the middle of that construction is the reality and role of the historical Adam.

Thus we believe in a historical individual called Adam, who committed a real sin bringing real death. Otherwise, why believe in a real historical Jesus who brought justification from sin? Without these historical facts, the gospel itself has no foundation.



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Published by
Dallas Theological Seminary
3909 Swiss Ave. Dallas, TX 75204
800-387-9673
www.dts.edu

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