

June 4, 2023

Sermon Manuscript

Genesis 1:1-2:3 (NRSV)

¹ In the beginning when God created[^] the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' ⁷ So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸ God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' ²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good.[^] ²² God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

²⁷ So God created[^] humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created[^] them;
male and female he created[^] them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' ²⁹ God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall

have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. ³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{2:1} Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ² And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation[^].

[^] Hebrew word bara

Genesis 2:4-24 (NRSV)

⁴ These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created[^].

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; ⁶ but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— ⁷ then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. ⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; ¹² and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' ¹⁹ So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹ So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said,

'This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.'

²⁴ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

On Adam & Eve & Evolution

Well, for some of you the Athanasian Creed may have felt like enough thinking about the Trinity for one day, the good news for you is that I'm not really going to be preaching about the Trinity. Although, the other news - I won't call it bad news, but the other news - is that my sermon today may nonetheless ask quite a bit of us mentally.

On Trinity Sunday, the scriptures appointed for us to read tend to be proof texts for the Trinity.¹ Our gospel, for example, it features Jesus' mention of the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. So, the reason Genesis 1 was appointed for us to read today is because the Church has historically viewed it as the including the first mention of the Trinity, in verse 26, where God doesn't say "Let *me* make humans in *my* image," but "Let us make humans in our image," as I underlined in the text. But I wanted to take this opportunity to talk about early Genesis, so I had us read Genesis chapter 2, as well.

The early chapters of Genesis have become a lightning rod over the last 200 years, and the impact of this controversy on Western society cannot be overstated. And within the Church, this first chapters of the Bible have become a source of confusion for some, of debate for many, and for some Christians a source of angst or even embarrassment.

For centuries, even millenia, these scriptures had been understood to teach that the world and the entire cosmos was spoken into existence by God over a period of a week just six thousand years ago² and that God spoke *humankind* into existence on the sixth of those days. And there was really little reason to doubt this interpretation until about 200 years ago.³ That's when fossils were discovered that were identified as dinosaurs for the first time.⁴ And this was one of many indications that began to emerge around that time that the world was not thousands of years old, but millions of years old.⁵ Then, in the second half of that century, the work of Charles Darwin was published, which indicated humankind actually came about through the process of evolution and shared a common ancestor with apes, millions of years in the past.

Well, in the century that followed, many Christians struggled mightily to square all of this with what they had understood these early chapters of Genesis to be revealing. For many, these scientific findings undermined the Bible, and led them to give up on the faith altogether or to lose confidence in the authority of scripture. For example, in the late 1800s would've been when the Episcopal Church began its gradual decline toward a modernist theology where many questioned tenets of the Creeds; this all stemmed from the apparent contradiction between science and scripture. So, as I outlined in my Lenten class six years ago, titled "Adam & Eve & Evolution," that many of you were present for, by the early 1900s, a narrative began to dominate that faith & science are opposed and that one must choose one or the other.⁶ And this false dichotomy has been broadly accepted, and actually perpetuated by many Churches, such that many intellectuals and those in scientific fields no longer feel comfortable even considering a life of faith in Christ. Meanwhile many fundamentalist and evangelical Christians have been taught they must dig in on the traditional interpretation early Genesis lest they fall down a slippery slope into denying the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus. On the other hand, many Christians in more

¹ The word Trinity itself never appears in the Bible; rather it is a doctrine agreed upon by the early Church as the central (wc) truth that the Bible reveals about God: that God eternally exists as three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – who are each fully God. And yet, they are all the same God; there is only one God!

² The date set forth in 1654 by James Ussher, the Anglican archbishop of Ireland, became the most widely accepted. Based on his research of Hebrew genealogy, as well as other ancient texts, and astronomical occurrences, Ussher calculated that the date of the Creation was nightfall on 22 October 4004 B.C. (That's pretty specific!) And beginning in 1701, Ussher's date began to be published in the King James Bible, in the margins right at the beginning of Genesis. In those days, the King James Bible was often printed with editor's notes in the margins and Ussher's date remained in the margins of the King James Bible until 1885!

³ Not that it wasn't doubted at all, mind you. The discovery of other humans in the Americas by the Europeans certainly gave some pause, although early Genesis gave many a rationale to conclude the Native Americans were not actually human (couldn't have descended from Adam & Eve) and therefore were justifiably treated inhumanly. :(

⁴ Dinosaur fossils had been discovered centuries before, but only in the 1820s were they understood to be the bones of dinosaurs, when Iguanodon and Megalosaurus fossils were discovered and recognized as such.

⁵ In 1796, astronomer Simon LaPlace published his Nebular Hypothesis, which stated that the planets were created from the atmosphere of the sun. It proposed that the sun's atmosphere had at one time been MUCH larger (like, as large as our solar system is now), but as its atmosphere condensed and got smaller over time it left a trail of atmospheric rings that eventually formed into the various planets we know today. This hypothesis remains the scientific consensus to this day.

⁶ This was particularly the case in the United States where the matter had become politically polarized. See the Scopes Monkey Trial of the 1920s and the battles over school curriculum that followed in the decades after.

mainline denominations - who accept an old earth and human evolution - have assigned early Genesis to the genre of religious myth.⁷ But this seemingly easy solution is actually a problematic one, because if there was no historical Adam & Eve who made a *choice* to sin, then that would mean God created humankind sinful, which would be unjust for Him to hold us accountable for.⁸

So, all of us are living in a period of history where the Church is still sorta trying to figure out what it means to be faithful to the authority of scripture and also be intellectually honest about an absolute mountain of scientific evidence...

- That the universe is about 13.8 billion years old⁹
- The earth is about 4.5 billion years old¹⁰
- That life on earth began about 3.6 billion years ago¹¹
- That dinosaurs went extinct about 65 million years ago¹²
- That our human genus of hominins distinguished itself about 2 million years ago
- Our species of homo sapiens about 200,000 years ago and gained the ability for abstract thinking and language about 100,000 years ago¹³

The evidence for all of this has only gotten stronger with 21st century scientific advances in astronomy and genetics, as I explained in my class. And it's understandable that many have felt threatened by all of this or found it confusing or just preferred to not think about it too much. To many Christians, modern science feels like an enemy to be either battled or dismissed. But this morning I want to contend that modern science doesn't have to be viewed as an obstacle to faith in God, and share the good news that science may even provide a gift that can push the Church to understand the story of scripture even more glorious than we've known before.

You see, in the past few decades, some Christian scholars who are committed to the authority of scripture, but also believe that faith & science can't be in conflict, have taken on the task re-examining the early chapters of Genesis *in light* of the scientific discoveries and questioning whether the so-called *traditional* understanding these texts is really what the original author was seeking to communicate. After

⁷ For example, this perspective is held by Denis Lamoureux, who believes God created the universe, including humans, through the natural process of evolution. But he views Genesis 1-11 as a unique type of literature that communicates life changing, spiritual truths, but is not historical. Thus, Lamoureux does not consider Adam and Eve to be historical. He explains that the genealogies which name Adam as an ancestor reflect an ancient understanding of origins. He argues that God's intention was that Genesis would communicate inerrant spiritual truths not inerrant historical fact. For Lamoureux, these truths include, first, that only humans are created in the Image of God, and secondly, that only humans have fallen into sin and that our Creator judges us for our sinfulness. Lamoureux concedes that the details of how either of these realities came to be are a mystery. In other words, he doesn't think the Fall historically happened with fruit and a snake, but he also doesn't propose an alternative. While many of his critics disagree, Lamoureux minimizes the significance of how sin first appears and says the point is that it's here. He writes (quote), "I think Christians can all agree that knowing how the Image of God and human sin are first manifested, whether individually as a person or collectively as our species, pales in comparison to knowing that we have these spiritual realities."

⁸ In the 2017 book, *Evolution and the Fall* (edited by James K.A. Smith and William T. Cavanaugh, Smith acknowledges that many theologians have concluded that the (Augustinian) doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin are incompatible with the scientific understanding of human origins that has emerged in the last century and a half. But Smith cautions against the temptation many have been seduced by to resolve this apparent conflict between faith and science by interpreting the Fall as merely symbolic (like Denis Lamoureux does). That is, to view it as only a story that describes our created human nature. Smith says this is a bit of a ruse, since there's really no Fall at all from this picture. Taking into account both scripture and the historic confessions of the Church, Smith concludes that Original Sin and the Fall are core to the story of God's gracious interaction with humanity.

⁹ To learn more about the scientific evidence related to the origin of the universe from Fr John's 2017 course "Adam & Eve & Evolution", visit www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/2023aee and click on "Class 2 Manuscript (PDF)" or click [here](#) to read pages 20-25.

¹⁰ To learn more, see previous footnote.

¹¹ To learn more about the scientific evidence related to the origin of life on earth from Fr John's 2017 course "Adam & Eve & Evolution", visit www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/2023aee and click on "Class 3 Manuscript (PDF)" or click [here](#) to read pages 2-13.

¹² To learn more about the scientific evidence for the dating and extinction of dinosaurs from Fr John's 2017 course "Adam & Eve & Evolution", visit www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/2023aee and click on "Class 4 Manuscript (PDF)" or click [here](#) to read pages 2.5-7.

¹³ For an overview of the scientific and archaeological findings related to the evolutionary emergence of homo sapiens from Fr John's 2017 course "Adam & Eve & Evolution", visit www.saintmatthiasoakdale.com/2023aee and click on "Class 5, Part 1 Manuscript (PDF)" or click [here](#).

all, the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1 & 2 actually has no shortage of plot holes and discrepancies, anyway, as people were pointing out centuries *before* the scientific revolution. Such as...

- In Genesis 1, how were light and darkness - not to mention days - created before the sun and moon showed up on day four?
- In Genesis 2, what is the actual purpose of the Tree of Life in the garden?
- And later on, in Genesis 4,¹⁴ one of Adam & Eve's sons, Cain, takes a wife. Where did she come from?¹⁵ And Cain then goes to build a city;¹⁶ a city for whom?

So, with the rest of my time today, I want to summarize a perspective on early Genesis that has emerged from some of the scholars who've been working on this - including John Walton, Joshua Swamidass, and Jon Garvey - some of it has even emerged during the six years since I taught my class. But I submit it to you only for consideration, not to impose it upon anyone; we are not dogmatic here about what people believe about a secondary issue like how we understand early Genesis. Like I said last week, what unites us is our common relationship to the Holy Spirit (of Christ), not being in lockstep about every secondary belief. However, I do want to explain how this position - or something like it - might provide the Church with an understanding of scripture's overarching story that (believe it or not) is even more glorious than the scope of the gospel that has been dominant for more than a millennium.

So, the first significant insight that has emerged has been about the Hebrew word for *create*; I've noted for you where it is used seven times in Genesis 1 & 2. While traditionally this word has been understood to refer to God creating things materially - bringing them into being - some scholars have noticed the other instances of *bara* in the Old Testament reveal that it can often refer to things God brings about by assigning a divine purpose to something that already exists.¹⁷ This, along with many parallel elements scholars have detected between Genesis 1 and the Jewish tabernacle & temple later on in scripture, have led many to begin understanding Genesis 1 as being about God designating the world as a temple, as a sacred space for creatures to worship and glorify Him.¹⁸ Now, this may not seem immediately obvious to us, who have spent our whole live reading the passage in another way, and I don't have space here to get into how more specific elements - like what happens on each day - would be understood.¹⁹ But this is one of a pair of propositions of this perspective I'm sharing: that Genesis 1

¹⁴ Genesis 4:17 (NRSV) - "Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch."

¹⁵ Walton: "The option that he has married his sister has never been an attractive one, though many have embraced it as seemingly the only possibility" Garvey notes that this theory is deeply inconsistent with what will come later in the pentateuch, reminding us that "the Law of Moses detests incest."

¹⁶ Walton: "We ...find that Cain fears that "whoever finds me will kill me" (Gen 4:14) when he is driven from the LORD's presence. Who he is he afraid of? If he is driven away from the LORD's presence, then he is also being driven away from his family. This suggests that there are people other than his family in the land. Finally, we note that Cain builds a city (Gen 4:17). The term city would not be appropriate unless it was a settlement of some size for many people. We would conclude then that the text actually implies that there are other people."

Garvey agrees: "The bigger problem is that Cain is said, in a matter of fact manner, to have built a city and named it after his son Enoch...Now we know a lot about the building of cities in the ANE, and archaeologists have excavated many examples. The oldest true city, according to both archaeology and Mesopotamian tradition, was Eridu, founded around 5,400 BCE...Cities were, from the first, built to maintain large populations (and to manage regional economic resources). A city for one family is called a "house."

¹⁷ Walton has analyzed all of these instances of the Hebrew word *bara* and found that in a large percentage of them the context requires a functional (not material) understanding of *bārā*'. And in each of those instances that could be referring to material creation, it is ambiguous. His conclusion is summarized as follows: "The nuanced meaning of *bara* that best suits the data is that it means 'to bring something into (functional) existence.'"

Garvey gives an example: "Isaiah uses the word create (*bārā*) of the nation of Israel (Isaiah 43:1-17). There he describes the passage through the Red Sea as an act of creation, so does that make the exodus a story of election, or creation? Surely, like Genesis 2, it is both, but predominantly one of gracious calling."

¹⁸ And some, like Jon Garvey, suggest that the humans referred to in verses 26-27 would refer to the population who came about through evolution.

¹⁹ Walton's "functional" approach views day one, for example, as God acknowledging the goodness and importance of time, and then in day four He is acknowledging the place of the sun and moon to be functionaries in the passage of time (in the form of days).

Garvey is less convinced of the specificity of Walton's "functional approach" as necessary for understanding Genesis 1 as God establishing the earth as a temple for revealing Himself to humankind.

should be understood as God ratifying the world as a suitable setting for Him to share His life with someone beyond His Triune self, to enter into relationship with humankind. #

And this leads to the other proposition of this perspective, which is that there were other people outside of the Garden of Eden, in other words: human beings other than Adam & Eve who arose as a population through evolution.²⁰ A close reading of the passage reveals that there is nothing that rules this out. And there are a few implications that follow from this.

First, this would of course mean that biological death - which is necessary for evolution - would have preceded the episode in Eden. Christian philosopher Jamie Smith observes that God designating creation as “good” multiple times in Genesis 1 has traditionally been understood to rule this out, but that this is not a necessary conclusion, since ‘good’ does not have to mean ‘perfect’.

But then Genesis 2 would be interpreted - not as a re-telling of day 6 as some have assumed, but - as God designating Adam & Eve for the task of bringing humankind into an intimate relationship with God. Many scholars have pointed out that the words for tending the garden used in Genesis 2 share Hebrew roots with the language of priestly duties later used in the temple, pointing to this priestly role for this couple.²¹ And so, under this understanding, Adam & Eve are not understood as the first human beings, but are instead God’s chosen priests for bringing all of humankind²² - the people outside of the garden - into eternal relationship with Him.²³ You see, if there was death before Eden, meaning humans were mortal, it finally gives meaning to the tree of life, which would’ve been eaten from as a sacrament of immortality.

Then, as to how Adam & Eve came to be, God certainly could have specially created them, as has been traditionally believed, but He would have created them as human beings biologically compatible

²⁰ What about humankind being created in the “image of God” in Genesis 1? Garvey argues for understanding that image to be a kind of species-wide spiritual awareness. Furthermore, he says that “There is every reason to believe that humankind was created in the image and likeness of God before the call of Adam, whose main distinctive was his covenant relationship, not his essential nature. We are therefore able to recognize and accept, without difficulty, any level of cultural achievement, and even spirituality, in those ‘outside the garden.’”

Finally, he adds that, consistent with the Genesis 1 temple motif, “In more recent understandings, ‘image’ has been interpreted as ‘temple image,’ given the cosmic temple picture of Genesis 1, or as the related concept of royal images set up by ancient kings in distant provinces to represent their presence. This view I favor myself. In a pagan temple, the image is not necessarily seen as an accurate representation of the god. It could be a meteorite, as the sacred image of Artemis at Ephesus was said to be... (C.S. Lewis) captures an important fact about such potent images. What mattered was not their resemblance, but that they were designated as the locus for the god’s worship and communion. One of the glories of Genesis 1 is that it takes the pagan idea of a world created by and for the gods, who are to be served and fed by a human race created as slaves and worshipped in temples containing sacred images, and transforms it into a cosmos created by Yahweh as his temple in its entirety, with the earth created for the benefit of mankind as his temple image and vice-regent, operating as it were in the outer court of the cosmic temple. On this understanding the *imago dei* is a question of divine designation more than of particular endowments—yet that designation is part and parcel of humanity’s creation, as we have seen.

²¹ John Walton: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). These words - work and keep - are traditionally interpreted as pertaining to manual labor in the garden (agricultural work such as landscaping, pruning, and harvesting). When we look a little closer at the Hebrew, we see that this fits the first word “abad- work” but it’s not an exact fit for the second word “samar- keep” “Samar- to keep” is typically used to refer to the Levites, who are the priestly tribe in the ancient Jewish world... so “Samar- to keep” typically refers to the Levites duty to guard sacred space. And even the first word, “abad- to work” when used with “samsar- to keep” refers to priestly work in a sacred space. When you add to this the fact that scholars have long recognized that much of the imagery and décor that God appointed for the Jewish temple when it was constructed a thousand years later is garden imagery, that God designs the temple as a “virtual garden of Eden,” Walton suggests that it becomes clear that Adam has been chosen for a priestly role, selected by God to represent all of humanity before God.

²² Garvey explains that the notion of Adam being an appointee of God (albeit, a failed one) for something beyond Genesis 1 is not novel, but can actually be traced to the Church Father, Irenaeus. He writes, “The thought of Adam as not simply the man who blights creation soon after its completion, but as the failed appointee of something beyond the Genesis 1 creation, is not entirely novel. In fact it may be found in the work of the first great post-apostolic theologian, Irenaeus, who lived in the second century (c 120–200). He has always been an important early source because he learned his Christianity from Papias, who learned it in turn from the apostle John. Irenaeus certainly did not believe in an old earth, or in humans not descended from Adam living outside the garden, for both of which I argue in this book. Yet he does draw an important distinction between what we may recognize as “old creation” and “new creation” events in humanity’s story.”

²³ Garvey has a chapter on what religion might’ve been like in the time period (however long) between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, and suggests it would be comparable to the religion of extremely isolated tribes discovered in recent centuries, who believe in the one God based on the general revelation of creation (and, arguably, a sense of god-consciousness that all humans share as divine image-bearers), but do not know this God intimately or by the name of Yahweh or Jesus.

with the other humans outside the Garden. Or some²⁴ suggest God chose Adam & Eve from out of that existing population, contending that the imagery of Adam's creation from dust and Eve's creation from Adam's rib is better understood as describing a symbolic vision God gives to Adam rather than His creation from nothing.²⁵ But certainly God *could have* miraculously created them, just as Jesus was miraculously conceived in Mary's womb.

So, according to this perspective, in Eden God was *already* giving humankind the potential to become *new creations*, not only immortal and in relationship with Him, but able to learn how to live according to His wisdom and goodness. But, of course, Adam & Eve failed at this. Instead of living up to the task, they exercised their choice to grasp for wisdom apart from God, eating of the tree of knowledge of good & evil. It's not that God never wanted humankind to have knowledge of good and evil, but that He wanted us to grow them into a stature of being able to maturely deal with it, according to His timing and plan. And so, rather than bringing humankind into the blessing of becoming new creations, Adam & Eve's choice brought sin into the world. Before them, before they had intimate knowledge of God and His commands, what we now call sin wouldn't have been sin. As St Paul would explain in Romans 4, actions only become sin when you know God and his command not to do it. So, before Adam & Eve, what we now recognize as sin might have occurred, but as Paul says, "where there is no law" - or knowledge of the law - "there is no transgression." #

And so, by Adam & Eve's transgression they not only failed to bring humankind into the immortality and goodness of eternal life with God, but after being barred from Eden they would share knowledge of God with humankind,²⁶ and his law, but no capacity to keep it. So they brought sin into the world and this left God then with the *added task* of overcoming human sin in order to bring us into a relationship of wisdom and immortality with Him. And so, He set about to do this with the calling of Abraham, from whom the nation of Israel would come. And Israel would fail just like Adam & Eve did, but through Israel God would also send His Son, in the fullness of time, to be a 'second Adam' as St Paul calls him.²⁷ So now, through His death and resurrection, Christ has redeemed us from the effects of Adam's sin, but also done what Adam failed to do: bringing us into relationship with the Triune God and bringing us victory over death, as we will not only be raised as Jesus was, but if you look at the passage from Revelation 21:1-2, 22:1-2, 14, at the end of the Bible promises that in the new heavens and the new earth we will be given access to the tree of life once again.²⁸ #

So what I've shared of this alternative reading of Early Genesis that has emerged is surely a lot to process. As a review, I've said that one proposition (of this view) is that Genesis 1 is not a play-by-play of the material creation of the universe, but God designating the world as the sacred space where He will

²⁴ like Walton & Garvey

²⁵ Garvey: "Adam's creation, therefore, is also at least as much the creation of his relationship with God as that of his body or mind. This means that the making of "humanity" in the full biblical sense has elements both of making, and of appointment or election...In Genesis 2, by contrast, the emphasis is on calling more than creation. The garden narrative is not a creation account as such, but a dramatic episode within creation. That is probably why the Hebrew word *bārā*, "create," does not occur in it at all, appearing only in the summary linking it to the next section and so integrating it with Genesis 1 (5:1). Yes, it speaks of God's forming Adam from the dust of the ground and breathing his breath into him so that he becomes (note!) a living soul, but this idiom is widely used in Scripture and elsewhere in the ANE to show simply that our origin is from the earth and from God's hand: we are all but dust [Psalm 103:14] and God formed each of us.[Psalm 139:13-16]

²⁶ Genesis 4:26b - "At that time people began to call on[a] the name of the Lord."

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:45-47 - ⁴⁵ So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven."

²⁸ From the book of Revelation:

21: ¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

22: ¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.... ¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.

enter into relationship with human beings. Then the other proposition is that there were people outside of the Garden of Eden, who arose through evolution, but God created or chose Adam & Eve as priests to bring all of humankind into eternal life in relationship with Him - humans fashioned (as new creations) in God's immortality & wisdom - but their failure instead brought sin upon us all. And yet, the gospel is that God in Christ has not only overcome the effects of Adam's sin upon all of us, but brought us into the eternal life with God that Adam failed to.²⁹

Now, there is much more that could be said. I haven't even gotten into how recent discoveries in genealogical science have shown that it is entirely possible for Adam & Eve to have lived just thousand of years ago, and yet be ancestors of all human beings alive today and in the time of Christ;³⁰ you'll have to grab my sermon manuscript and look at the footnotes for that. Nor have I explain how all of this might solve the curious question of how our sinful condition has been passed down from one generation to the next; perhaps that can be addressed in another sermon. #

But please understand, I'm not suggesting that anyone *has* to view early Genesis in this way; not at all.

- If you want to hold to the traditional position that the earth is 6,000 years old,³¹ or some modification that maintains Adam & Eve as the first ever human beings, but allows for an

²⁹ Garvey stresses that "had Adam never sinned, it would still have been through Christ that it would have come about." And Garvey notably highlights that the person of the trinity whom Genesis 3:8 describes as making a sound while "walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze" is best understood as the second person of the Trinity (the Son), who is the only person of the trinity who is embodied. As Garvey states it: "in the garden the economy of the Trinity requires that it was as the Son that Yahweh had communion with Adam and Eve, perhaps as a theophany."

³⁰ This solution comes to us from S. Joshua Swamidass, who is a computational biologist and a tenured professor at a secular university, but also a Christian. His 2019 book, *The Genealogical Adam & Eve*, Swamidass observes that everyone seems convinced that evolutionary science has unsettled the traditional understanding of Adam and Eve, but he finds no evidence that this is in conflict with the biblical teaching that a single couple, Adam & Eve, were our ancestors. And he explains that the reason for this dominant, but mistaken, view is that we tend to read modern genetics back into scripture, when scripture is making a genealogical claim, not a genetic one.

Swamidass reminds us that the Biblical writers knew nothing of genetic ancestry, which traces the history of DNA, and is only concerned with Genealogical ancestry, which is concerned with the connections in family trees and genealogies. And I'm sure any of us who have read much of the Bible have noticed that the Bible includes quite a few genealogies. For example, eleven of Genesis' fifty chapters include long lists of ancestors begetting descendants. And Luke chapter 3 actually features a genealogy showing how Jesus is connected by ancestry to Adam (!). However, "genealogical ancestry is not genetic ancestry."

But the science of genealogical ancestry and the ways that it differs from genetic ancestry can be difficult to get our brains around, as it is extremely non-intuitive, (although science often is). So in order to build our intuition about the differences between genetic and genealogical ancestry, Swamidass asks us to

- "Consider a child's father and grandfather. They both are fully the child's genealogical ancestors. However, they are only partially the child's genetic ancestors, approximately 1/2 and 1/4, respectively. Genetic ancestry continues to dilute each generation: 1/8, 1/16, 1/32 to a number so small it is unlikely (that anyone) has any genetic material from most of their ancestors."
- But genealogically, if we go "back each generation, we have two parents, then four grandparents, then eight great-grandparents; the number of ancestors appears to increase exponentially as we go back." Ten generations back, every single one of us mathematically has a thousand ancestors, twenty generations back we each have more than a million ancestors. And if we went back fifty generations - which is only about 1,250 years ago - we would each have a quadrillion ancestors from that time, if only there had been that many people, this means that most of those ancestors must've been our ancestors many times over.

So from a simple mathematic standpoint - and not taking into account any migration patterns or other obstacle - for a population of one million people, we would only need to go back twenty generations - about 500 years - to begin finding universal ancestors - that is, individuals who are ancestors of every human alive. And for a population one thousand times larger, of one billion people, we would only need to go back thirty generations - about 750 years - to begin finding universal ancestors. And so, thinking of all the people alive in the world today, even taking into account migration patterns and fluctuations in population size, the most recent universal genealogical ancestor (MRUGA) of all living humans could have lived as recently as three thousand years ago(!).

So Swamidass' genealogical hypothesis asserts that Adam & Eve could have been specially created (*de novo*) by God recently - so between six thousand & ten thousand years ago - and be genealogical ancestors to everyone living at the year 1 A.D. (so, by the time of Christ). All that would be required is that there were people outside of the Garden of Eden, which scripture does not rule out and may even include indications of. In fact, one wouldn't even have to maintain that God specially created Adam & Eve - if, like John Walton, one believes a better reading of scripture is that God chosen them from the pre-existing population. Either way, the larger population "outside the garden" would have been created by God created through the process of common descent described by evolutionary science. But, eventually, the lineage of Adam mixes with those outside the Garden, thereby becoming ancestors of us all.

³¹ This position is known as "Young Earth Creationism".

older earth,³² I understand. Or, if you want to maintain that the universe is billions of years old and Adam & Eve were not historical, and live with the theological quandaries that poses, that's fine, too. What a wonderful opportunity for us to learn to live in charity toward one another's different viewpoints, knowing that we are still united in the Holy Spirit.

- In fact, if you'd like to discuss any of this more or ask questions, I'll park myself on the couch during fellowship hour today in case anyone wants to come chat about it.
- But perhaps others of you just don't care a lot about this sorta stuff and feel like you have your hands full enough trying to rely on Jesus to help you love God and neighbor in the present! That's totally understandable, too; it's *not* important to everybody.
- However, for those who have felt unsettled about how to reconcile scripture and science, or if you've felt uncomfortable with how other Church contexts have made you feel the need to choose between faith and science, I want you to be encouraged.

Earlier I mentioned that such an understanding of early Genesis might provide the Church with an understanding of scripture's overarching story that is *even more* glorious than the understanding that has dominated for more than a millennium. This is one of the points Jon Garvey makes; and let me explain before I close. You see, when one holds to the traditional view of early Genesis, the overarching story of the Bible is essentially about sin and redemption. According to that view, God created everything that is, including Adam & Eve as the first human beings, and almost instantly they screwed it up for all of us.³³ So the whole Bible - including Jesus' death and resurrection - is sort of a "cleanup on aisle four" sorta scenario; seemingly everything about God's dealings with humankind is about cleaning up our mess. But, in contrast to this, according to the view I've put forth, this isn't the case at all. It suggests that God started creation more than 13 billion years ago - with the Big Bang, which led to the creation of our galaxy and solar system and planets, including our earth, where eventually life emerged and exploded into the evolution of millions of species - until humankind finally emerged. So with both a setting and a species suitable for relationship, as Genesis 1 describes, with a setting that is "good" and a species that is "very good", the Lord deigned to make us into new creations - capable of not just biological life, but a spiritual life - eternal life - with Him. And so He came down from heaven into the Holy of Holies of the Garden of Eden. This view leaves science to tell the story of old creation and makes the Bible all about new creation, for which sin is only a speedbump. And so, rather than the Bible being about the bad news of human sin and the good news of Jesus' redemption, the Bible would be about the good news of new creation and the better news of the lengths God went to in Christ to bring it about!

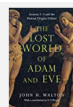
The good news is that modern science doesn't have to be viewed as an obstacle to faith in God, and may even provide a gift that can push the Church to understand the story of scripture even more glorious than we've known before.

In the name of the Father, & the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Sources used or referenced:



The Generations of Heaven and Earth: Adam, the Ancient World, and Biblical Theology
By: Jon Garvey



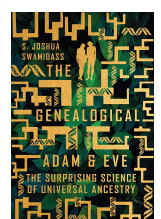
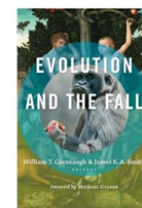
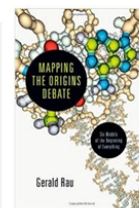
The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate (The Lost World Series Book 1)
By: John H. Walton and N. T. Wright



Four Views on the Historical Adam (Counterpoints: Bible and Theology)
By: Denis Lamoureux, John H. Walton, C. John Collins, William D. Barrick, Gregory A. Boyd, Philip G. Ryken, Ardel B. Caneday, Matthew Barrett, and Stanley N. Gundry



The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate (The Lost World Series Book 2)
By: John H. Walton



³² This position is known as "Old Earth Creationism".

³³ Garvey: "God's world is "good," and his Sabbath reign lasts, for only as long as Adam remains sinless, which in the understanding of Church Fathers like Irenaeus, was only until the evening of the day he was created. That would appear to be a very unsuccessful creation.