

# Finding humans origins from biblical theology #3

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At this point in the series, let's move on to consider the world outside Eden, and perhaps before Eden, by summarising what I've already concluded from adopting the "compositional strategy" of the Pentateuch or *Torah* proposed by John Sailhamer, and applied to the beginning of Genesis by Seth Postell. I put this overview in list form in the [previous post](#), so please refresh your memory there if you need to.

*If* the writer of Genesis did indeed represent Adam as the archetype of Israel receiving, and breaking, a covenant of faith with Yahweh...  
and *if*, consequently, it's that much more likely that he took for granted the existence of other humans alongside Adam outside the sacred space of the garden...  
and *if* that covenant was of an intimate kind not represented in the imagery of Genesis 1...  
and *if* the universalism of the Pentateuch's message (that Israel was called for the good of all mankind) is represented also in the introduction of Genesis...

...then Genesis 1 is significantly likely to be about the creation of the generality of mankind of which Adam was a chosen representative by grace, just as Israel was (Deut 7:7-8). This conclusion is not that of Sailhamer or Postell, who believe the chapter is only about the creation of Israel. Certainly I agree that the trajectory of the chapter is towards the creation of man – it is, in other words, an anthropocentric account.

But as I've suggested (not least because Sailhamer points it out), there is a winsome universalism underlying the narrative of the *Torah* that looks beyond the narrow interests of Israel, important though they are to its purpose, and towards the wider world. If Genesis 1 does *not* reflect this universalism in some way, then the subsequent chapters, which focus on the direct line of Seth, but include the spread of Adam's progeny across the world, seem to make "the nations" something of an afterthought to the story of Israel, rather than its ultimate purpose.

If I'm right about that, Gen 1 would be about the creation of the whole race, not just of Adam and Eve as the very first human couple. That couple would, as the text literally says, come later and for an additional purpose beyond the initial creation. In this regard, note the *toledot* ("generations") statement of 2:4, which is a heading about what the created world brought forth (its "generations"), not a reiteration of its creation in different words. I'll say a bit about the question of the special creation of man or of Adam in a separate post.

There are certainly parallels to that kind of double approach to the creation of mankind in the ANE literature, as John Walton points out in his books. Some Babylonian myths, notably *Enuma elish*, tended to talk about the creation of "men" in a generic sense, sometimes made from symbolically-charged materials like clay and/or blood, but created *en masse*, as a workforce for the gods. On the other hand, the creation of individual characters with special archetypal roles is also described. For example, of the sage Adapa it was written in *Adapa and the Food of Life* that "Ea had created him as chief among men".

The theological significance of the author of Genesis intending 1:26-28 to mean something like “the whole human race, from whom Adam will be a specially called member” is that it gives enormous dignity to the whole of mankind, and not just to the progenitor of Israel. It is sometimes forgotten that it is not Adam who is specifically said to be created in the image of God (at least until it is hinted when the two narratives are drawn together in Gen 5:1-3), but generic “man” in ch.1.

Genesis does not, as I’ve [discussed](#) in the past, define mankind biologically or in any other way, and there is some probable ambiguity given the conventions in early societies. But assuming what I have said about the authorial intent of the *Torah*, “man in God’s own image” in Genesis 1 ought to have a simple functional meaning of “the people of the nations whom Adam and later Israel would be called to bless”. The writer of Genesis, in other words, would regard the Cushites, the Amalekites and the dwellers in the land of Nod in Genesis 4 to be created “in the image of God”. In that sense, then, there is a simple correlation between Genesis 1 and Paul’s teaching on the applicability of the gospel to “all men” and our modern concept of “the brotherhood of man”. Any question about Adam’s role, genealogically or in any other way, are a separate issue.

Now this is significant, for it means that whether we equate “image” with “rational soul” as the Thomists do, or similarly with any set of human qualities we choose to name in which we resemble God, or as relating principally to the representative role to which mankind is appointed in God’s “cosmic temple”, the image is “ontological”. It is the very principle of our creation as a race, what we *are* by being human, and not some part of us, especially something superadded either by divine fiat (like an “immortal soul”) or by “natural” evolution... or by divine fiat *to* “natural evolution”, come to that. It could, perhaps, mean that we *are* immortal souls (though I argued in the last post that Scripture clearly says we are intrinsically mortal, and only gain eternal life by gift), but the point is that it is the human being in his or her entirety whose nature is said to be “*in the image and likeness of God*”. That, of course, says a lot about the dignity of mankind across the world, between the sexes, regardless of abilities and from conception to death.

And it completely excludes those forms of theistic evolution which have God simply approve whatever intelligent species arises fortuitously, or indeed any theory in which God is not the sole and deliberate author of the “form” of man. Self-portraits have nothing in common with *objets trouvés*.

This understanding also speaks to the oft-posed question of what happened to the image of God in man at the Fall. According to my thinking, since the image was conferred at the creation and not in the garden, it cannot have been lost there without our ceasing to be human altogether. A sick man is still a man. The conferring of the image – which is nothing but the conferring of humanness – preceded the grace of Eden then, and Adam bore God’s image before he was ever put in the garden, explaining why our author would want to assume that the rest of mankind had the dignity to be accorded Yahweh’s blessing via Adam’s line, despite the prominence of Israel’s unique holiness to the Lord in the *Torah*.

This scriptural link between the Genesis 1 creation and Adam also neutralises any “Yuk” factor in thinking of non-adamic man, especially in relation to bogeys like “men interbreeding with hominids”. The “man” of Genesis 1 equates to ordinary mortal men and women as the writer would have experienced them, or as a chalcolithic Adam would have encountered them: culturally, intellectually and spiritually equivalent to themselves. The

difference between Adam's line and others would be more subtle, and primarily in the realm of revelation, not creation. There is, indeed, a profound difference between an Israelite and a Canaanite, but it is to do with covenant holiness and separation, not biology: the two could and did intermarry. Likewise there is a profound difference between a "new creation in Christ" and a "vessel of God's wrath", so that Paul tells the former not to be "unequally yoked" to the latter. But yet they can scarcely be told apart in most situations.

At this point I want to remind you of the way that Genesis 1 paints creation. Although I disagree with Sailhamer that the chapter is about the creation of Israel, I agree with him that it is not intended as a material cosmology. It does, indeed, deal with the literal components of the world we experience, in a [phenomenological](#) rather than theoretical way, and as already mentioned it is focused on mankind and his role in God's plan. But the imagery is primarily that of the Hebrew tabernacle or temple, and I've argued in a [previous post](#) that this reflects the kind of separation-in-worship of God found in the defective "fix" of the Mosaic covenant, rather than the intimacy of Eden or what God had originally intended for Israel on Mt Sinai. The world created in Genesis 1 was not the garden.

Before I discuss that further, though, let me mention as an aside how such an apparently non-literal understanding of the creation account is not a cop-out to faith in God's power, but a powerful literary tool equivalent to those in use today to enhance understanding. Even before I started *The Hump*, I did an [essay](#) exploring the use of this "mythological" approach even in modern science. There really is no compelling reason to map Genesis 1 to modern scientific cosmology, though it ought to (and, properly understood, does) map to the real world.

If man was created in a world in which God's dwelling, heaven, was separated from mankind's earth by natural elements typological of the gradations of holiness in the temple (as opposed to the intimate immanence of God in the garden), then what can be concluded about the spiritual situation of mankind then? They had received "creation ordinances" from God in 1:26-30, but remember these are uttered as part of God's creative words of power – what God made us to be is not necessarily what we *know* we are. We can say with some confidence that God did not reveal himself in covenant relationship as Yahweh to the bulk of mankind, for that is the substance of the story of Adam in the garden. In any case, there is no historical evidence for such a universal monotheistic religion in the distant past.

Yet when all is said and done, what God creates *is* a temple, and mankind is his image in it. Given this it would be as odd for early man to be, by created nature, atheistic as for him to be Methodist. And of course, historically speaking even palaeolithic man is being increasingly understood to be incorrigibly religious, in some form, way back into the deep past.

Beyond that I'm afraid to go, since Scripture doesn't reveal it and neither does science, so why guess? Was there in the past a primitive religion which, though worshipping God "afar off", was acceptable to God at that time, like the sky-god religions of many primitive cultures now? Or on the other hand is Paul describing those times in Romans 1:18-23? I'd be cautious in going there, for it suggests sin before the first sin: although Paul says "*since the creation of the world*" that may simply be shorthand for "*since the early chapters of Genesis about creation*", just as Jesus bases his teaching on divorce from what happened "*in the beginning*", meaning Gen 2:24, not Gen. 1:1.

The question has little bearing on the truth of my argument, though – theology has always oscillated between the “noble savage” and “false religion” poles in considering those who haven’t heard the gospel, let alone those who might have lived before the Fall.

I’ll close by a brief thought on how this relates to the “genealogical Adam” hypothesis currently under discussion, not least by me. A little consideration will show that it *doesn’t* relate, as far as doing the maths for human origins in deep time is concerned. This study shows that being descended from Adam has nothing to do with being human in the sense of Genesis 1, which is the same every-day sense of counting as fully human any primitive tribe you encounter on the Amazon or in New Guinea, unless you’re an Enlightenment Man, of course, believing them to be subhuman species. This would be true even if science should turn up evidence for a polygenic origin of mankind – for Genesis 1 is about the creation of mankind-in-the-mass, and doesn’t necessarily teach a single couple, only humanity’s origin in a single act of creation. That’s sufficient for the “one blood” description of Acts 17:26. Even Dennis Venema has no reason to reject it.

Genealogical Adam, however, does become significant in terms of the spiritual fallout from the garden of Eden, and since the biblical evidence puts Adam in a relatively recent historical setting, then if we consider descent from Adam, as the first man to be in covenant with Yahweh, to be of significance (as I do, like Tim Keller), then the science appears to make that quite possible, though more dependent on divine providence the later Adam appears in history.

But there is no Scriptural reason to see “non-Adamic man” as hulking brutes with no spiritual awareness, but rather as fully functioning and socially advanced people. The difference lies in the relationship with Yahweh – or at most the *ability* to relate to him. The conservative believer need therefore have no fear of archaeological evidence of long-lasting, worldwide and highly-developed cultures in the past. It seems to be what Genesis 1 predicts.

<http://potiphar.jongarvey.co.uk/2017/11/06/finding-humans-origins-from-biblical-theology-3/>