

Was Adam for Real?

by Ray C. Stedman

We have now finished the great narrative of creation, found in the first chapter of Genesis and traced for us in seven mysterious segments which the Bible terms “days,” of which our common week is a perpetual reminder. We saw that this introductory chapter is a kind of Table of Contents to reveal the major themes of Scripture and of human life. We come now to Genesis 2, Verse 4, where we begin a new series to be entitled *Understanding Man*. In Chapter 1 the whole universe was in view. We were there looking at the stars in their multitude, the sun, the moon, the plants, the animals, and finally man. But here in Chapter 2 the record narrows its focus to the human family alone. Like a modern zoom lens the record focuses on the scenes in the Garden of Eden in Chapters 2 and 3. To introduce this section we shall read a few verses beginning with Chapter 2, Verse 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, 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 man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground – then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. {Gen 2:4-7 RSV}

It is no slight exaggeration to say that there are no chapters more important for the proper understanding of history than these two chapters of Genesis. Here is hidden the secret of man’s sinfulness, that terrible mystery of evil and darkness which continually confronts us in this modern

world. In this section is the key to the relationship of the sexes, the proper place of man and woman in marriage, and the solution to the problem of mounting divorce rates and other marital issues that abound in modern society. Here, also, is the explanation for the struggle of life, and here great light is thrown on the problems of work and of leisure. In this section is the first and most fundamental revelation of the meaning of divine redemption and grace, and here the essential groundwork is laid for the understanding of the cross of Jesus Christ. This whole section is simply unprecedented in importance in the Scriptures.

But, just because it is so important, it has been greatly under attack. These two chapters have often been rejected outright as simply repugnant to modern man:

- There are cults which reject them as being utterly inconsistent with what man wants to believe about himself.
- Sometimes the passage has been dismissed with contempt as merely a collection of ancient myths or legends with no significance for modern minds.
- And sometimes it has been treated as containing important truths, but needing to be – in the favorite word of many today in theological circles – “demythologized.” To quote one of the writers of this school:

“There is truth of great vitality and power in many passages of which the strictly historical accuracy may be questioned. It is our job therefore to find the truth that may be buried under some layers of legend.”

Before we go on in this series to explore the meaning of this passage, with its intensity of significance, we must take some time to dispose of these objections. I must ask you to be patient with me if I seem to be a bit pedantic, but there are many who are bothered by these problems. Lest we seem to ignore these, I want to deal with them somewhat now, and in subsequent messages we will come to the actual meaning of the passage. There are two general lines of attack upon this story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; one is an attempt to destroy the literary integrity of the text; the other attempts to deny the historical accuracy of these accounts:

1. The first approach is based upon the claim that this section of Genesis (and probably the whole of the first five books of the Bible) were not written by Moses, as the Bible claims, but that they were actually composed by an unknown editor (whom these scholars call a redactor), who lived long after David and Solomon, and who may have lived even as late as the Babylonian captivity, only some 500 years before Christ. The critics claim that the redactor was not writing down things that were revealed to him by any divine process, but was only recording certain tales of the women who gathered around the wells and talked over various legends of their past. They claim he collected the tales of travelers and others, and thus recorded for posterity these early legends of man.

The support for this idea arises out of certain changes of style in this passage, and the use of the divine name in a different form. If you look at your Bibles closely you will notice that in Verse 4 the name, "LORD God" appears for the first time. Previously in Genesis there has only been the name, "God," which is a translation of the Hebrew, *Elohim*. But here we have the "LORD God," or in Hebrew, *Jehovah Elohim*, and all through this section that name is used. It has been suggested therefore that this passage is written by another author who has simply collected together certain tales and that you can identify the various stories by the use of the divine names.

Now, fully developed, this has evolved into what is called today *the documentary theory of Genesis*: Some unknown editor has collected

from various sources certain documents which can be identified by certain marks within them, and has put them all together, using excerpts from here, and excerpts from there, and blending them together into the books that we now know as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses.

This whole idea has been supported by certain piecemeal evidence taken from the Scriptures. This is always the case with this type of study. Scholars go through the books and extract certain ideas or passages that seem to support their theory, but they ignore others that would contradict it. This documentary theory gained a wide support, and many of you have perhaps been exposed to it. It has long ago been fully answered by both Jewish and Christian writers. I am not going to dwell on it now, but if you are interested in it, there are books that will fully expose the total inadequacy of this theory. Remarkably enough it still persists, even though it is increasingly difficult to hold.

Forty years ago, Dr. Lyman Abbott spoke at the University of California at Berkeley. He was, at that time, a noted liberal scholar working in this field of the origin of scriptural books. He said something like this:

Young gentlemen, I feel that perhaps I am as qualified as anyone to speak in this field of the origins of the books of the Bible, and I want to warn you against going too far in basing your conclusions upon the so-called 'assured results of modern scholarship.' As one of these modern scholars, I know that these results are not always as 'assured' as they seem to be. My careful conclusion is that the first five books of the Bible were either written by Moses – or by someone else named Moses!

Perhaps that is about as far as we need to go in laying to rest the documentary theory of the Scriptures.

2. The second attack upon this section is more frequently pressed today. This is the idea that there are great truths about man here in these opening chapters of the Bible – his fears, his

evil, his hungers are all given to us in a remarkable way, and we can learn much about ourselves from these passages – but these truths are conveyed deliberately to us in the language of myth. Perhaps Moses did write this, they say, or some other unknown writers. But, at any rate, the authors were attempting to convey to us great and mighty truth, important truth, but doing it through the language of myth – adopting a kind of parabolic vehicle in order to convey these truths to us. There was, of course, no literal tree in a literal garden; there were no actual beings named Adam and Eve, and, of course, there was no talking serpent or forbidden fruit.

It is all somewhat like the myth of Santa Claus. Everyone today knows that there is no real Santa Claus, but the idea behind Santa Claus, cheerful jollity, a reward for good behavior and a universal kindness of spirit are all true. If we forget the myth of Santa Claus we still have left a core of truth which is conveyed to us by the story of Santa Claus. Thus we can treat these opening chapters of Genesis much in the same way. You can take the story of Adam and Eve, they say, and throw away the form by which it is conveyed and you still have a germ of truth about the human race.

But have you? What do we say to this kind of an approach?

We must say that we reject the whole approach as biblically untenable, scientifically unsound, and in the end totally destructive of truth and faith.

Let me give the reasons for this:

- A. First of all, this approach of myth violates the integrity of the book of Genesis. Where does myth end and history begin in this book? Where is the line of demarcation? If Adam and Eve is a myth then so is Cain and Abel. And if Cain and Abel is a myth, then so is Noah and the flood. Since the record moves right on without a break into the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; are we to assume that these, too, are myths? If so, where does history begin? How can you detect the place where myth, fantasy, and legend ends, and actual human history begins?

We have already seen in our first series that the first chapter of Genesis (which is likewise termed myth) is not a myth at all. It is in accord with the true discoveries of modern science, and, in fact, anticipates and corrects much of modern science. We have found that it is definitely not myth. When you begin this process of finding myth in these Old Testament stories you will find that it is impossible to draw the line anywhere except where you, for some emotional reason, may choose to draw it. Such a process carries right over into the New Testament and the story of the virgin birth becomes a myth, and even the story of the incarnation itself. The Christmas story which we are celebrating at this Advent season becomes nothing but a beautiful parable designed to express truth, but not true in history. Also the stories of the miracles of Jesus and the resurrection and the crucifixion.

Where do you stop? Well, the answer is that you do not stop. All these stories have actually been termed myth, and so support this contention that we make, that there is no stopping place when you interject this kind of a theory into the Biblical records. Of course, if you treat the Bible that way, then you must in all good conscience treat any other ancient document in the same way. If you carry this out to its logical conclusion we are left without any knowledge whatsoever of the ancient world, nothing that we can trust. The theory destroys too much, it teaches too much, to be acceptable.

There is myth in the Scripture. There are legends which are reported to us in various places in the Bible, but the significant thing is that they are identified as such. They are said to be myths, and are treated as myths and legends. You can find them both in the Old Testament and in the New Testaments, but the writers of the Scriptures were aware of the nature of them as myths and recorded them as such.

Another significant thing is that there are passages throughout both the Old and New Testaments which warn against believing in myths or taking them seriously. Peter warns against this, saying that the stories he and the other apostles told were not “cleverly designed myths” {cf, 2 Pet 1:16}, but were actual his-

toric occurrences. Paul writes to his son in the faith, Timothy, and warns him against being influenced by godless myths and “old wives’ fables” {1 Tim 4:7 KJV}. The apostles were aware of this kind of danger to faith and warned against it even in the early days of our Christianity.

- B. Second, this approach of myth contradicts the usage of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the apostles themselves. If you believe that the story of Adam and Eve is a myth then you immediately find yourself clashing with the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Matthew 19 it is recorded that our Lord, facing the questions of the Pharisees about divorce, said, “In the beginning God made them male and female,” {cf, Matt 19:4, Mark 10:6}. If you accept that as a statement from One who declared himself to be the truth, and who told only the truth, then you must accept this story of Adam and Eve as actual.

The Lord Jesus constantly referred to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, and said, again and again, that what Moses wrote he, himself, fulfilled. In that wonderful scene in Luke 24, he walks with two along the Emmaus road after the resurrection, and they do not recognize him. He asks them why they are so downcast and sorrowful, and they tell him of the strange events that have been occurring in Jerusalem, how One was crucified, a Jesus of Nazareth. Then we are told, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself,” {Luke 24:27 RSV}. Later on he appeared to them and rebuked them because they had not believed Moses and the prophets in the things written concerning him {Luke 24:44}.

Never once did our Lord suggest that anything in the Old Testament was to be questioned, as to its historical veracity. He refers to most of the miracles that are the source of problems to critics today, and speaks of them in such a way as to confirm and attest the fact that they were historical events, including Jonah and the fish, and other stories.

Remember that the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy that Adam was made first, and then Eve {1 Tim 2:13}, just as the story in Genesis tells us. He says further that Adam was not

deceived, but Eve was {1 Tim 2:14}, and thus Adam went into sin deliberately, but Eve was blinded.

In Second Corinthians, the eleventh chapter, the Apostle Paul refers to the serpent {2 Cor 11:3} and is afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve, so the thoughts of his readers would be led astray by Satan’s cunning.

In Romans and in First Corinthians he compares Adam and Jesus, and indicates they are both individual men, the heads of two separate races.

- “As by one man sin entered the world,” he said (by one man), “and thus passed upon all men” {cf, Rom 5:12 KJV}, so by one man redemption came. If Jesus was an individual, then Adam was an individual too.
- Again in First Corinthians 15 he draws a comparison between these two, pointing out that we were all born in Adam, and, if we are born again, we are all in Christ {1 Cor 15:22, 15:45}. He puts the two on an individual basis.

Therefore if we approach these early chapters of Genesis with the idea that these are myths, legends, not really historical events, we are thus holding that the Apostle Paul knew less than we know about such matters.

- C. Third, the whole idea of myth is ultimately destructive of the teaching of Scripture, of biblical theology. Why do men invent these suggestions of myth? If you investigate their reasons (though they may seldom admit this) it is obviously because they want to square these stories of Adam and Eve with the teachings of evolution. They do not want to admit that there was a couple named Adam and Eve that began the human race, but that there were, rather, a group of hominids who ascended from the animal kingdom and became men. In accordance with the theory of evolution you cannot trace the race back to but a single couple. But if evolution as the explanation of man’s origin is true then there never was a fall of man. Either man was created perfect – body, soul, and spirit – as Genesis tells us or he has been

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slowly developing from the animal kingdom, and was never perfect. It is either one or the other. Either man fell from perfection, or he never was perfect. And if he never has been perfect, then what is the point of redemption? If all we are doing is moving toward an ultimate goal of perfection, then what was the value of the work of Christ upon the cross? You see certain fundamental issues come in immediately, certain fundamental questions arise:

- Do we really need salvation?
- Are we not moving steadily toward a goal which will ultimately be reached, whether Christ died or not?
- What is the purpose, therefore, of his redeeming grace?

The minute you interject mythical ideas into the opening chapters of Genesis you come into an immediate clash with the doctrine of atonement and of the redemption of man.

D. Finally, this mythical interpretation denies the scientific evidence which does exist to support the historical truths of these events. It has been almost humorous to see, during the last 40 or 50 years, the many, many times the pompous claims of the higher critics have been completely demolished by the archaeologist's spade. Archeology has turned up again and again evidence which has proved that what the Bible says is true and what the critics claim has been false. In fact, there has not been one instance of the reverse, in which a Biblical event has been proved to be false by archeology – not one but scores of instances where the Bible has been substantiated.

- There is, for instance, considerable archaeological evidence that Nimrod, who is mentioned in the 4th chapter of Genesis, existed as an historical person. Further, Lamech, and Zillah, his wife, and Tubalcain, their son, are supported as historical characters by archeology. In fact, their names have passed into the language, de-

scribing some of the activities in which they were engaged.

- In the 4th chapter of Genesis there is a statement that Cain (this is the son of Adam, remember) went out and built a city and called the name of the city after his son, Enoch. Interestingly enough, in the ancient cuneiform writings there is reference to a city named Unuk, which is clearly related to this name, Enoch, and it is called every place simply, "the city," just as we refer to San Francisco as "the city." Further, this name Enoch later passed into the language as the word for *city*. Through a process of philological transliteration (with which any linguist is familiar), this was changed from *Enoch* to *wark*, and later to the word *perg*, and then to the word *burgh*, and it is still present in our language today in that form, such as, Pittsburgh.

Here, there is evidence that reaches clear back to the very beginning and suggests that these were all historical characters.

It is not unscientific to believe the opening chapters of Genesis: that Adam and Eve were actual human beings, individuals, that Cain and Abel were likewise historical personages, that there was a Garden of Eden, and a tree in the midst of it. There is nothing unscientific about these stories and no scientific evidence in any way gainsays them. To claim so is simply an attack upon this record to try to destroy the historical accuracy of these accounts, and thus to undermine the great and central teaching of the Scriptures concerning the redemption of man.

When you get through analyzing this you stand where Christians have always stood, face to face with a choice: whether to take the subjectivity of human wisdom, or the authority of the Son of God. It is one or the other. Was Jesus right, or were the critics right? It is either Christ or the critics. It always has been and always will be. I, for one, do not think there is any reason to even debate the matter. I believe the Lord Jesus Christ stands as authority in every realm in which he speaks. When we consider the extent and nature of his authority, his knowledge of the world in which we live and of the human race and the mind of man and contrast

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these with the puny, finite knowledge of struggling, sinful human beings who “see through a glass darkly” {1 Cor 13:12 KJV}, and who understand little of what they see, I find there is no real comparison at all. This is why we must take these passages literally as they are, and treat them as historic accounts which are given to us to open to our understanding the problems we are daily facing. When we do, we discover they unfold to us great and marvelous truths that help us to grasp and understand life, and to rise in victory over the problems that beset us, and the forces that oppose us.

May I therefore urge you, in reading these passages, to do as the Lord Jesus reminded us, to take the place of a little child who is simply listening, carefully, quietly, to what he is told, thoughtfully investigating these things, and not questioning whether they are right or wrong, whether they are historical or unhistorical. There are no minds capable of establishing that today and there is no evidence capable of disproving it. If we settle that, we can come to these accounts, read them carefully through, and open our minds to the teaching of the Holy Spirit so that we might grasp these great and hidden things, remembering that as we come to know the truth about ourselves and the world in which we live, that truth will increasingly set us free.

This is what is so glorious about Christmas, the truth of the coming of the Son of God. It is the truth of the babe in the manger of Bethlehem, the truth that here was God wrapped in flesh, incarnate Deity, God become flesh. What has this done to the world? What hope it has brought into despair, what light it has brought into the somberness of life, what joy and peace it has brought to the human heart as we have understood by that simple story that God loves us as a race, fallen as we are,

despicable as we are; God loves us and has come to be one with us that he might through the process of redemption, at great cost to himself, draw us back to himself to divest us of all our errors, our weakness, our folly, and our shame, and to clothe us anew in the proper garments of humanity and make us what he intended man to be in the very beginning. That is what truth does.

May God grant therefore that we will come to these stories, whether in the Old Testament or the New, understanding that here is truth that can set us free.

Prayer:

We thank you, our Holy Father, for these stories. We pray for a childlike mind which will trust and believe and be always ready to be instructed, which will quietly listen with an open responsive heart, ready to obey as truth becomes apparent and applicable to our situation. We thank you for the One who has come to speak the truth, who declared himself to be the truth, and who came to reveal One with whom there is no deceit, no lie, no variation, no changeability, through all the passing centuries. What a great foundation our faith rests upon in this Holy One. We pray that at this Christmas season, any who have never found him as an individual Savior, as a Lord, as a Redeemer, as the One who can buy them back and put them back into usefulness again, may allow him to enter their hearts and to disburse in that heart the love, warmth, grace and truth that is his alone to give. We ask in his name, Amen.

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