

Review of Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012.

Elaine A. Phillips, Gordon College

Because evolution is a topic that will increasingly challenge evangelicals, Peter Enns has chosen to chart one possible course through the data, both biblical and scientific. I gave an abbreviated response to his presentation in a forum at Gordon College on 4 May 2012. What follows here is an expanded version of that, preceded by a synopsis of the book.

Brief Summary of *The Evolution of Adam*

Enns deals with Genesis in Part One of the book. The first chapter is a sweeping survey of the challenges from science, biblical criticism, and the Ancient Near East (ANE) archaeological finds that confronted the evangelical church in the 19th century. He indicates that the purpose of Genesis is not to speak to physical origins, a position espoused by John Walton as well (*The Lost World of Genesis One*). Likewise, Enns stresses the importance of archaeology to give context and, in the course of doing so, articulates the similarities between the biblical narratives and ANE myths. He introduces additional issues, including the questions that are raised in regard to Genesis and the claims for Mosaic authorship. I will have more to say about these matters later.

In Chapter Two, Enns focuses on the higher critical reasons to affirm late post-exilic period authorship of the Pentateuch. As part of this survey, he also presents a stunningly sweeping overview of his suggested dates for the Old Testament books, all of which are significantly late. Once the post-exilic date for the Pentateuch is established, then Enns can say two things. First, the purpose of the early Genesis narratives has nothing to do with a description of God's physical creation. Instead, its purpose was self-definition in the face of the trauma of the exile. Second, if the text is that late, then we have every reason to question its value as a repository of historical information. Later compilations of early records were not thought to be sacred Scripture. Just as the Old Testament is a theological re-engagement of Israel's past, so the Church is equally in the process of re-engaging that theologically, this time in light of the resurrection.

Enns surveys other origins stories in the third chapter, deploying the expression "genre calibration" to claim that Genesis is not intended to accomplish anything beyond what other cultural narratives/myths did. A proper understanding of Genesis helps us understand its theology. The events of Genesis 1-11 involve primordial time; these narratives are different from those in chapters 12-50 and they share a conceptual world with outside, clearly ahistorical sources.

Chapter Four closes the first part of the book with an exploration of Israel's understanding of primordial time. Because Israel's creation stories were rooted in Israel's *present* experiences, the Exodus, for example, did not necessarily occur as recorded; instead, deliverance from Egypt was presented with cosmic battle themes that echo the cosmic crisis at creation. Likewise, Adam's story is both universal but also Israel's story of disobedience. Exile from the garden is the death sentence (Genesis 2:17 – "in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die...") just as exile from the land was Israel's death sentence.

So also, Israel's Sabbath and Sanctuary, known to us from exilic and post-exilic texts, reflect the cosmic order of creation woven into a lately created narrative; everything was borrowed from the wider ANE cultural context and transformed into vehicles that expressed who God is. The garden looked forward to renewed creation (cf. Rev 22). Jesus is the final intersection of primordial time with history as we see the intertextual linkages of John 1 with Genesis 1.

Part Two turns to Paul's creative and Christ-centered engagement with Scripture. Foundational to the point that he will develop, Enns first claims that the Old Testament nowhere develops the "adam theme," specifically that universal sinfulness is caused by Adam's transgression. Thus, the garden curses do not include the prospect of inborn sinfulness and the whole story does not have the purpose of explaining the sinful nature of humankind. Likewise, the Cain story is simply illustrative of the choices that Cain (like Adam and like later Israel) faced. In this regard, Enns additionally raises the possibility of seeing the Adam narrative as a wisdom story, representing loss of innocence as Adam and Eve acquire something good by ill means. Making parallels with Proverbs, Enns emphasizes the power of obedience and gaining wisdom by the proper means. Access to tree of life will be a source of wisdom.

In Enns' model, Paul's Christology drove him to read the Adam story as a universal introduction to sin even though that specific theological purpose was not intended in the original narrative. Instead, "Paul's reading of Genesis is driven by factors external to Genesis" (p. 87). Because Enns sees Romans as Paul's case that both Jews and Gentiles make up the people of God, he claims that Paul used the Adam figure to demonstrate that Christ's crucifixion and resurrection put Jews and Gentiles on an equal footing. In other words, we all need a savior to deliver us, but that knowledge is not dependent on a historical Adam.

Chapter Six is devoted to demonstrating that Paul was a product of his time and world view. Just as, for example, Paul reflected the current thinking on levels of heaven (2 Cor 12:1-4), so also with regard to the person of Adam. Enns engages at this point in a survey of intertestamental period hermeneutical attempts to engage the past in order to make sense of their present. These include examples from the Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea texts, and the Targums, all of which engage the written Word and many of which addressed the Adam story.

He claims that Paul's handling of this narrative is not hermeneutically different from any of the others, but Paul got it "right" because he read the story Christologically.

Enns bolsters his point about Paul's creative hermeneutics with other examples that serve to demonstrate that this is characteristic of Pauline use of Old Testament material. In other words, Paul's Christological convictions drove his exegesis. Paul's claims do not rise naturally from the OT contexts; instead, he re-worked the past traditions to speak to the present.

Chapter Seven expands on just what was involved in this re-working. For Paul, Adam was both historically and theologically significant. As the first person created by God, Adam is representative of all of humanity (1 Cor 15:44-49). Although Enns does not address 1 Corinthians 15 at length, I will return to it later. Paul's understanding of Adam is shaped by Jesus, but the reality of who Jesus is does not "*depend* on Paul's understanding of Adam as a historical person" (p. 122, author's italics). Enns intentionally distinguishes between the historical event of the resurrection (which occurred in Paul's time) and a primordial Adam about whom Paul makes a cultural assumption in order to draw his theological conclusion. "Adam as disobedient primordial first man and Christ as obedient and raised-from-the-dead historical last man are not of the same historical category" (p. 126).

Enns claims that the primary focus of Romans addresses the radical effect of the resurrection in bringing together Jew and Gentile, even though this seemed to go against all of the Old Testament. Furthermore, the resurrection of the Son of God was so overwhelming a "solution" that it made the "problem" of human sin much clearer than it was before. It was this truth of the resurrection that made Paul put Adam in the place of responsibility for the universal problem. If God's solution was Christ's dying and rising, the problem was death and Adam was the responsible person. The reality of the empty tomb made Paul see sin and death in universal terms.

In conclusion, Enns proposes nine theses as summaries of the preceding chapters:

- 1) literalism is not an option;
- 2) the scientific and biblical models of human origins are incompatible and there is no place for Adam in evolutionary schemes;
- 3) the Adam story reflects the ANE setting and must be read that way; there is no secret science hidden in the story;
- 4) of the two creation stories, Genesis 2 is earlier but it was put after Genesis 1 in the post-exilic period to give definition to Israel's identity;

5) the Adam story is similar to Proverbs; its main point addresses the failure to fear God and attain to wise maturity;

6) God's solution through the resurrection revealed the plight of humans and Paul's point in using this narrative was to show that being in the human family transcends the Jew / Gentile distinction;

7) there is a parallel between Scripture and Christ – both becoming thoroughly human, with all of the accompanying limitations, in order to exalt God's power (the point of his earlier book, *Inspiration and Incarnation; Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*);

8) the root of conflict is not solely scientific or theological but also a matter of group identity, in this case Protestant evangelical in which context conformity to certain views is expected;

9) synthesis is required between evolution and Christianity – at stake is the necessity to re-think the biblical material on the origins of humanity, sin and death.

Some Equally Brief Responses

First of all, I am appreciative of the pastoral concern evident in this book, especially for the target audience of evangelicals who struggle to find common ground between good science and the truths of Scripture and do not want to jettison either. I also am grateful for the strong emphasis on the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the powerful, absolutely transforming nature of that historical event. And finally, it is evident that Enns wants to maintain an understanding of Scripture as the Word of God. This last point serves to launch us into the issues on which I will be (hopefully) cordially critical.

Enns is very gifted in making complex issues accessible, but this gift has worked against him in this brief book. There is a pervasive tendency toward reductionism, choosing one singular explanation, over-simplifying, and avoiding other viable possibilities, when the reality might well be much more complex and rich – as it usually is. This impacts a number of the arguments; I will simply note several representative examples here before getting to what I think is at the heart of the discussion.

Enns presumes that the Genesis text is cut from entirely the same cloth as parallel ANE texts. He puts the question this way: how can the Bible be culturally conditioned and yet be unique? I agree that there are similarities between Mesopotamian myths (which span a long time range) and Genesis but we must not over-state the similarities or lose the profound impact of the distinct differences. These differences serve to emphasize the unique nature of God's relationship with his people as articulated in Genesis. In God's astonishing grace, He has indeed

revealed His word in media that made sense to the people of the periods in which God spoke. But God also infused those narrative forms with life-transforming meaning.

One more example: For Enns, the "image of God" has nothing to do with our nature reflecting God's nature. He asserts that the purpose of Genesis is not to speak to physical origins of the universe at large and particularly the creation of an Adam. Thus, he understands the concept of "image" solely in terms of its use in the wider cultural context. Just as images served to represent the king in his absence, so this image (Adam) would serve as God's representative or regent. In other words, the "likeness and image" are representational and functional in the narrative purpose (more on that later); they do not deal with the creation of a human being. But why not both – or more? Limiting the purpose of the image of God seems to be imposing a reductionist read on a remarkable text and excludes the equally powerful implications regarding who we are as human beings. By way of a possible analogy: This diminished view of the image of God (i.e., only as a functional regent) might be the same as saying that *logos* in the New Testament can only mean what we see it meaning in the first century Hellenistic Jewish writings of Philo – "reason" as a significant aspect of the divine Being. Yet, John's reference to Jesus as *logos* gives that word a whole new level of meaning. The *logos* becoming flesh and tenting among humans (John 1:14) would have shocked Philo.

With that, let me turn to the major issue as I see it. If there is no historical veracity in the Adam and Eve narrative, we are left with no explanation as to how humankind emerged with such remarkable capabilities, on the one hand, and horrifying impulses, on the other. And yet, of all texts, we would expect the Word from God, with its array of God-revealing and life-transforming purposes, to address that fundamental issue. It is only the biblical narrative as historical narrative that makes sense of both our extraordinary nature and gifts as well as the wretched state within which we find ourselves. The question for us is: How do we best treat the biblical narrative as well as the scientific data with integrity? Enns does acknowledge that his approach is incapable of addressing this nagging question as to what makes us "deeply flawed humans marching inexorably toward death." Nevertheless, "...seeking an answer for 'why' in the Adam story may be off the mark to begin with" (p. 126).

Genesis 2 first depicts God's shaping Adam and breathing into him God's breath. Francis Collins (*The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*) acknowledges that humans are unique in ways that defy evolutionary explanation and point to our spiritual nature, including the Moral Law and search for God that characterize all cultures. Something happened in that remarkable moment when intellectual, emotional and spiritual capacities that characterize the Person of God were given into the trusteeship of the finite human being called Adam.

Subsequently, the disobedience of Adam and Eve as they chose to reject the word of God did indeed result in the death of which God warned in Genesis 2 – "in the *yom* that you eat of it,

you will surely die..." implying that *yom* can mean a very long time, a conclusion we already reach after reading Genesis 1:1-2:4. The curses pronounced in Genesis 3 make that death sentence eminently clear – "to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). At the end of Genesis 3, they were prevented from eating of the tree of life lest they live forever. The vignettes in the succeeding chapters make it unmistakably evident that the murderous and corrupting sinful human impulses find their point of origin in the preceding narrative. It is reductionist to claim that because the Garden curses in Genesis 3 do not explicitly include the matter of inborn sinfulness, the story did not have the purpose of explaining the sinful nature of humankind. Enns claims that the Genesis narrative and, for that matter the OT, is missing "any indication that Adam's disobedience is the cause of universal sin, death, and condemnation, as Paul seems to argue" (p. 82). Nevertheless, if that narrative cannot bear that theological weight, what basis do we have for constructing it at any point further down the line? It seems to me that this scheme leaves Enns without the foundational understanding for the rest of the Old Testament, significant parts of which he does indeed weave back into this text, including Israel's story of disobedience and Israel's construction of its identity in the face of the horror of the exile and the apparent failure of God's promises.

Of course, how we interpret Paul's references to Adam is vital. Paul affirms Adam as a physical being, echoing the Genesis narrative in 1 Corinthians 15:45-47 as he addresses the nature of Jesus Christ – "So it is written, The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam a life-giving spirit...The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven." Enns avoids more than a passing reference to 1 Corinthians 15, perhaps because it specifically does address the physical nature of Adam. Instead, he focuses on Paul's theological declaration in Romans 5 that Adam was the one responsible for the introduction of sin and death into the realm of human existence. As noted above, Enns acknowledges that Paul treats Adam as a historical figure but claims that this was the result of the hermeneutical climate of his own time, not because it was really so.

In other words, while Paul's Christology drove him to read the Adam story as an introduction to universal sin, that was not intended in the original narrative. Paul was powerfully convinced that the resurrection of Christ was (and is) the solution for the problem of humankind and in order to make theological sense out of that event, Paul articulates the "problem" (disobedience of Adam and Eve) for which Christ is the solution. The true condition of humanity was only revealed by the act of God in Christ.

Given, however, the pervasive and horrifying nature of sin, I confess that I have trouble thinking that the profound nature of the problem was not "realized" until Paul's time. The Christ event and its purpose themselves are in danger of becoming ambiguous if we presume that there was not until that point a recognizable cause that could be articulated. If Paul addresses Adam as

the cause, is it not presumptuous of us to say we know better than Paul and will no longer try to speak in terms of cause? The overlay of the "new perspective on Paul" to which Enns resorts does not resolve this issue.

What is interesting to me is that Enns has cast his lot with the presumably failsafe evidence from science and archaeology and those disciplinary conclusions have trumped the biblical text. Basically, science becomes the infallible last word on the issue. It might be worth noting that scientific method can also, according to some, call into question the historicity of the resurrection. Enns affirms that he believes the latter on faith. So likewise, I would just as readily affirm, along with Jesus and Paul, that there was a historical Adam at some point. The Adam narrative is not necessarily as recently composed and unhistorical as Enns suggests.

In this regard, I appreciate his caution at the beginning of chapter two to the effect that theories are provisional. It would be prudent to exercise this same caution regarding the suggested implications of human evolution as well as to the documentary hypothesis that has shaped his presentation of the biblical books.

And to that we now turn, albeit briefly. All of this analysis, as Enns rightly states, is profoundly affected by when we date the relevant Old Testament texts and how we assess their purpose, two related matters. He asserts that consensus scholarship regarding the late composition of the Pentateuch has effectively ruled out the option of considering these narratives historical. It is another discussion altogether to work through this matter because it is much more complicated than it sounds in his book, especially in light of the sphere in which consensus scholarship reigns. While it is true that the current consensus of the academy regards post-exilic composition of the Pentateuch as a given, there is a significant corpus of data that support a second millennium milieu for the first five books of Moses. Likewise, there are credible and well-reasoned responses to the standard arguments for non-Mosaic authorship. These data should at least be acknowledged. The equally one-sided presentation regarding the dates of the rest of the Old Testament books is astonishing for its brevity and lack of nuance.

Enns does acknowledge, along with others, that there are older materials embedded in the text but these early records were not thought to be Scripture. That seems to be a bit presumptuous. And one might inquire as to how we are then to read Joshua 1 and Psalm 1, both of which enjoin meditation on Torah. Additionally, if the exile was traumatic because God's promises were perceived to have failed, we might legitimately ask on what basis these "promises" were to mean anything.

For now, it is important to note that Enns' treatment of these issues in biblical criticism does not give attention to alternative credible models. In fact, we need not presume that Genesis 1-3 are post-exilic and reflective of Israel's need for self-definition in that traumatic Babylonian

context (6th century BC). If these narratives were composed earlier, perhaps the purpose was not self-definition in the face of exile in which God's promises have apparently failed, but self-definition for the covenant community about to enter the culture of Canaan with its own array of competing gods. This covenant, revealed at Sinai in the second millennium BC, finds its best parallels in Hittite treaties, also from the second millennium BC. In addition, this would be a most powerful means of self-definition, as covenant has everything to do with restoring a fractured relationship, a matter that goes all the way back to Genesis!

Enns has drawn together a rich array of theological and intertextual connections as he explores the defining events in Israel's tradition. As he notes, Israel's stories (creation and redemption) are indeed interwoven. Nevertheless, that does not rule out the possibility of their historical basis. The Exodus event was unquestionably of cosmic proportions at the same time that it was geographically and temporally located. In fact, Exodus 12:12 indicates that a major purpose of this event was to bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. Thus, it is no surprise that subsequent poetic renditions of this would incorporate a cosmic world view, weaving in forces that appear in wider cosmic presentations of creation.

But let me close on a positive note. It is possible to reconcile Genesis 1-3 with our current understanding of the natural sciences. The verbs used in the poetic narrative suggest God's intimate involvement with the process ("made", "set", "created", "formed", "planted") *in conjunction with* the land and the water "bringing forth" - in other words, both intervention and natural processes. Furthermore, "living creature" (*nefesh ḥayah* - 1:20, 24; 2:7) and "breath" (*neshamah* - Gen 2:7 and 7:22) refer to both animals as well as humans even within the biblical text. Thus, it is not terribly surprising to find significant shared aspects of physical composition. As the culmination of the entire process, however, we have a first human pair who is neither imposed on nor foreign to the biblical account. At the same time, we ought not expect this human couple to be completely divorced from the array of creatures who apparently lived those hundreds of thousands of years ago. That is the beauty of the brief and compelling narrative; it does leave space.

Jesus also affirmed a reality that lay behind the Genesis creation account. In response to the query about divorce from some Pharisees, he said: "...at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matt 19:4-6). I would like to suggest that this is more than Jesus simply accommodating His language to the contemporary cultural beliefs.

As Enns affirms in his earlier book, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, there is a compelling parallel between Scripture and Christ - both becoming human in order to exalt God's power. But his

attempt to limit Scripture (both Genesis and Paul) to the "human" realm of solely ancient literatures breaks down because following the Incarnation, we do have the resurrection and post-resurrection appearances, both of which were unique and pressed the people of that day to readjust their view of the "Son of Man." The same is true of the inspired Word. It is significantly more than a culturally shaped artifact. The Word of God audaciously claims that it is living and active, doing major transformative works in our lives (Hebrews 4:12) no matter in which cultural framework we live.