

The multiple 'Adams' of Scripture

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Jesus is the Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). Many commentators also refer to Jesus as the 'second Adam', largely due to proximity between the titles 'second man' and 'Last Adam' in 1 Corinthians 15. However, we argue that this is an invalid interpolation into the text. The term 'second Adam' does not appear in the Bible. Moreover, it masks both the theological richness of 1 Corinthians 15 and the history of redemption. Jesus is not the only character besides Adam to have been given the commissions Adam was given in Genesis 1 and 2. Jesus is the last of *several* Adamic figures, and He ends the line because He succeeded where all the others failed. Moreover, God's replication of the Adamic vocation to multiple people throughout the history of redemption indicates these commissions and promises were anchored in a literal, historical Adam.

Jesus is the Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). But did any other 'Adams' come before him? At least one, of course: the first Adam. But were there others who filled the Adamic role laid out in Genesis 1–2? In 1 Corinthians 15:45–47, there is an important contrast. Drawing on Genesis 2:7, Paul calls Adam 'the first man Adam', but he refers to Jesus in two different ways: Jesus is 'the last Adam' (v. 45) and 'the second man' (v. 47). Some think, therefore, that 'second man' is a synonym for 'second Adam',^{1,2} since as a 'second Adam' Jesus is the firstborn of the new creation.³ However, we must respect Paul's precision—he calls Jesus 'the last Adam', not the 'second Adam'. The term 'second Adam' does not appear in the Bible. Moreover, a review of biblical figures central to the history of redemption shows that the first Adam was not the only person given the Adamic commissions before the last Adam. We find that Jesus was the last in a *series* of 'Adams' whom God commissioned in much the same way as He commissioned the first Adam.

Adam: God's first priest-king

Genesis 2:7 neither names Adam nor calls the 'man' God made from the dust the 'first' man. However, Paul makes that connection clear by adding the two words 'first' and 'Adam' to his quote of Genesis 2:7 in 1 Corinthians 15:45: "Thus it is written, 'The *first* man *Adam* became a living being [emphases added]'" (figure 1). Paul clearly believed that the 'man' made on Day 6 of Creation Week in Genesis 1:26–27 was the same man God made in Genesis 2:7. This is perfectly consistent with how Jesus, according to Mark 10:6–8, read Genesis 2 as an expansion of specific events on Day 6 of the Creation Week.⁴

Adam was a special man. He was the first ever human, and he is the father of us all: "And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).⁵ As such, he was given a special role. God gave him,

with Eve, dominion over the earth: "And 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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:28). Though this applied to Adam *and* Eve together, Adam was given the first task of exercising dominion over the earth by naming the animals (Genesis 2:19–20). Adam thus was given rule, and had a primacy of authority even among humans, since he is the one from whom all other humans have come. This all suggests Adam was the first king over creation.

The Garden of Eden was also special. God's special meeting place with Adam was like the later tabernacle and temple.⁶ The golden lampstand in the tabernacle and temple likely symbolized the Tree of Life.⁷ The eastern gate to the Garden was guarded by cherubim (Genesis 3:24) just as the tabernacle entrance faced East (Exodus 27:13–16, Numbers 3:38) and both the tabernacle and temple were guarded by cherubim (Exodus 25:18–22; 26:31; 1 Kings 6:23–29). Furthermore, Adam was commissioned to 'serve and obey' God (Genesis 2:15–16). The same sort of commission, using the same words, was given to the priests and Levites who served in the tabernacle and temple (Numbers 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 1 Chronicles 23:32; Ezekiel 44:14).^{8,9} These points indicate Adam met with God and served Him in the garden 'tabernacle'.¹⁰ They indicate Adam mediated God's presence and blessing in creation. This suggests that Adam was the first priest.

Thus, we suggest Adam was a priest-king: he ruled as a king over creation and served in God's garden in Eden as a priest served in the tabernacle and temple. But He failed in his role. He sinned by eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which God told him not to eat from. And so, sin, decay, and death came into the world and infected the human race (Romans 5:12).¹¹ And the whole world was subjected to futility (Romans 8:20–22).¹² Man had made

οὕτως καὶ γέγραπται, Ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος
ἄνθρωπος Ἀδὰμ εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν, ὁ
ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζῳοποιῶν.

Figure 1. The Greek Text of 1 Corinthians 15:45 (UBS) shows that Jesus is called the *last* Adam, not the second Adam

himself futile, so God made the world he was set over futile and thrust Adam from His special presence in the Garden.

Noah: A new Adam for a new beginning

After Adam, things only got worse as his corrupted ‘likeness’ (Genesis 5:3) spread. His first son murdered another son (Genesis 4). All but the best of his sons was beset with death (Genesis 5). And the earth eventually became full of violence and evil (Genesis 6:5, 11). So, God decided to destroy the earth with a Flood. “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8).

Judgment would come on the old world, but a new world would arise afterwards. God would start again with Noah as a new ‘Adam’ for a new world.¹³ So, as God brought the animals to Adam for him to name (Genesis 2:19–20), He brought them to Noah to save on the Ark (Genesis 6:19–20). And after the Flood, when Noah came out of the Ark, Noah took up a priestly role and offered up acceptable sacrifices to God (Genesis 8:20) (figure 2).

In response, God reiterated to Noah the blessings he gave to Adam (Genesis 9:1–7). God told Noah and his sons to “be fruitful and multiply”. God gave them the kingly role of dominion over the animals. Although this time they were not commanded to take dominion; they were *promised* dominion. And this time the animals were given to them to eat, as plants were in Genesis 1. And, in light of the violence that existed before the Flood, new commands were given: no eating blood, and no shedding the blood of man.

But a new promise was also given: God would never again send a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow reminds us of God’s promise. Indeed, this promise indicates that, whatever floods have happened since, none have been so severe as to “destroy all flesh”. And only a *global* flood could destroy all flesh. Thus, Noah’s Adamic role reminds us that the Flood must have been global. The promises God gave after the Flood show that it was a new beginning for all creation.

Indeed, there are many literary parallels between Noah and Adam that suggest that Noah is a ‘second Adam’:

- Each is a father from whom all mankind is descended.

- God’s bringing the animals to Noah for transport in the Ark (Genesis 6:19–20) is reminiscent of his bringing them to Adam for naming (Genesis 2:19–20).
- Once the animals were on board the Ark, Noah was responsible for their preservation, fulfilling an element of man’s covenantal sovereignty originally assigned to mankind through Adam (Genesis 1:26).
- God made a covenant with each of them—the Covenant of Creation¹⁴ with Adam and the New World Covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:9–17)—and each acted as a human mediator who represented all of mankind.
- Each was given an earth, devoid of humans, and a command and a blessing to multiply and fill it with inhabitants (Genesis 1.28; 9:1).
- Both had a relationship with the ground. Adam was created of the ground, and his name is derived from the Hebrew word for ‘ground’. In Noah’s case, the word ‘soil’ (Genesis 9:20 where he is called ‘a man of the soil’) is the same word translated elsewhere as ‘ground’ or ‘land’ (e.g. Genesis 6:7, 20).
- Both had duties related to tending plants from which they could consume the fruit (Genesis 2:15; 9:20). Adam tended the garden that God had planted (Genesis 2:8) and Noah planted a vineyard (Genesis 9:20).
- Both committed sins related to consuming fruit. Adam ate the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 3:7). Noah became drunk consuming a by-product of the fruit of the vine (Genesis 9:21).
- The shame of nakedness was associated with their sins (Genesis 3:7, 10–11; 9:21).
- Their nakedness had to be covered by others (Genesis 3:21; 9:23).
- Both had to toil to maintain their livelihoods from the cursed ground.
- Both of their personal sins introduced conflict into their families—Cain murdered Abel (Genesis 4:8) and was banished from his brothers (Genesis 4:12), and Canaan (Noah’s grandson) became a slave to his brothers (Genesis 9:25–26).
- Both had sons (Cain and Ham) who committed sins, which became defining sins for their age.
- Both had immediate descendants who were cursed (Genesis 4:11; 9:25).
- Both lived for almost a millennium—Adam, 930 years; Noah, 950 years.
- The eventual death of each, as the result of the Curse (Genesis 2:17), is reported with similar words “all the days” (Genesis 5:5; 9:29).
- Despite their sin, both walked with God (implied in Genesis 3:8, and 6:9) and both believed God and took Him at His word (implied in Genesis 3:20 and 4:1, and 6:22).



Figure 2. *Noah's Sacrifice* by Daniel Maclise (1806–1870). Noah's sacrifice was a priestly act mirroring the priestly vocation of Adam.

- Both knew that God required shed blood and animal sacrifices as a type for the ultimate Atonement which man needs to cover sin (Genesis 4:4; 8:20).
- Both were blessed by God, with the same blessing (Genesis 1:28; 9:1).

Even though Noah is not called a 'second Adam', he acted in such a capacity. But, like Adam, Noah also failed. Noah planted a vineyard, and then got drunk and naked. His son Ham acted inappropriately with his father in his nakedness (the text does not specify clearly how).

Abraham: A new Adam for a new promise

Noah's descendants, however, became worse again. Instead of filling the earth as God told them to do, they stayed put, built a city, and began building a tower 'to make a name for themselves' (Genesis 11:4). So, God scattered them. He confused their languages, and so divided and humbled mankind. So, humanity spread, but we also splintered. We became divided, and different nations arose.

So, into a divided world, God again called another who might fill the Adamic role for a new beginning—Abraham. The commission of Genesis 1:28 was reiterated to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, as Beale explains:

"The commission of Genesis 1:28 involved the following elements:

1. 'God blessed them';
2. 'be fruitful and multiply';
3. 'fill the earth';
4. 'subdue' the 'earth';
5. 'rule over ... all the earth' (so Gen. 1:26, and reiterated in 1:28).

The commission is repeated, for example, to Abraham: (1) 'I will greatly *bless you*, and (2) I will greatly *multiply your seed* ... (3–5) and *your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies* [= 'subdue and rule']. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be *blessed* ...' (Gen. 22:17–18)."¹⁵

Moreover, kings would come from Abraham (Genesis 17:6, 16; 35:11). And this promise was universal in scope, involving "all nations of the earth". With Noah, some of these facets became implied promises of dominion, while others remained commands ("be fruitful and multiply"). But for Abraham they *all* proved to be promises. God would fulfil all of them.

Abram also took on a priestly role. He travelled to Canaan as commanded (Genesis 12:1), and while at the tree of Mamre in Shechem, "The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him" (Genesis 12:8).

However, Abraham was not the last Adam, either. Consider the enigmatic account of Melchizedek:

"After his [Abram's] return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) And he blessed him and said,

'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!'

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything" (Genesis 14:17–20).

As one biblical author pointed out: "It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior" (Hebrews 7:7). Abram, the new Adam, was blessed by Melchizedek, who interestingly was priest-king of Salem (i.e. Jerusalem; figure 3). So, we have a 'priest-king of Salem' who is *superior* to this 'new Adam'. This suggests that, while Abraham was a new Adam, a greater Adam than him was still to come.

So, it is fitting that for Abraham most of God's promises remained as promises (an exception is with the birth of Isaac—Genesis 17:19). He did not live to see their fulfilment. The promises were reiterated to Isaac and Jacob, but even they did not see their fruition (Hebrews 11:39–40). And Jacob eventually went down to Egypt.

Israel: A national ‘Adam’ in a new ‘Eden’

In some respects, Israel is not so much a *new* ‘Adam’ as it is the expansion of God’s Adamic commission of Abraham to a whole nation. God continued with Abraham’s line because, unlike Adam, Abraham trusted God (Genesis 15:6; though this was not without its issues—e.g. using a concubine to bear Ishmael). Thus, God would fulfil the Adamic commission through Abraham and his descendants, i.e. Isaac, Jacob, and the nation of Israel.

Israel began fulfilling the ‘be fruitful and multiply’ commission in Egypt: “the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7).

God saved them from slavery in Egypt and brought them to “the mountain of God” (Exodus 18:3) at Sinai. This is where God would first meet with his people. The first thing God did was declare his Adamic commission to Israel in Exodus 19:3–6:

“Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

As Adam was a priest-king, so the Israelites were to be a kingdom of priests. The commission to Israel in Exodus 19:3–6 has a similar combination of royal and priestly overtones for similar ends to the Adamic commission. In His closing words to Israel in Exodus 23:20–33, God promises to bring them to “the place that I have prepared” (v. 20). This parallels the language of how God ‘put’ Adam in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8, 15). And in this land, if they obey:

“... he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you. None shall miscarry or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you” (Exodus 23:25–27).

Thus, God would put his kingdom of priests in the blessed land He had prepared—reminiscent of the Garden of Eden (cf. Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 36:35; 47:12; and Joel 2:3 where the Promised Land is likened to the Garden of Eden).

But, like Adam, Israel fell; but not just once. Israel committed idolatry in the Golden Calf incident. The Exodus generation believed the bad report of the spies and did not trust God to go into the Promised Land. They also grumbled all along the way. When they got into the land, Israel made covenants with the Canaanites. And idolatry—so much idolatry! Joshua and especially Judges record the ever-descending



Figure 3. *Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek*, canvas by Dieric Bouts the Elder, c. 1464–1467. Melchizedek shows that Abraham, though a ‘new Adam’, was not the *last* Adam.

spiral of sin in the land. In the end: “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

David: a new Adam for a new line

Israel had lost the plot. They needed direction. They needed a leader to lead them in God’s ways. Israel needed a new Adam!

So, God gave them David. He turned Israel’s desire for a king ‘like the nations’ to his own purpose (1 Samuel 8:5–8). First, though, God gave them what they asked for: Saul. That was a disaster. But then God raised up David—a new Adam to lead the corporate Adam.

As the king, David also engaged in activities with clear priestly overtones, forging a link between the priestly and kingly roles. For example, he leads the procession of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, dancing and celebrating while dressed in a linen ephod, which is priestly garb (2 Samuel 6:14). He offers sacrifices, and then blesses the people with good food and sends ‘each to his own house’. The presence of God (in the Ark) has come to the centre of the Promised Land, and God has given His people rest.

And in response to David’s priest-king portrayal God gives him the grand promises of 2 Samuel 7. As Beale notes:

“Second Samuel 7 (= 1 Chr. 17) closely links the need to build a temple (7:2–13) with the following

aspects of Genesis 1:28: (1) ruling and subduing (7:9–16), and (2) a blessing on God’s kingly vice-regent (7:29). It may also not be unexpected, therefore, that 2 Samuel 7:9, ‘I will make you a great name’, would allude to Genesis 12:2, ‘I will . . . make your name great.’ Accordingly, it is natural that the overall purpose is linked to God giving ‘rest’ to Israel’s king from his enemies (7:1, 11).¹⁶

In response, David goes out ‘subduing and ruling’ in 2 Samuel 8–10. He extends his Adamic dominion over all the land God promised for Israel. But then Chapter 11 happens.

“In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

“It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, ‘Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?’ So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, ‘I am pregnant’” (2 Samuel 11:1–5).

It’s Genesis 3 all over again! David has his own fall. From there things just get worse. David has family troubles and dies, a shadow of his former glorious self. He does hand things off to Solomon, who completes the temple. But like David, Solomon starts well . . . and then messes it all up (1 Kings 11:1–8). And this pattern continues with the kings of Israel and Judah until God has had enough of their sin and exiles Israel from the Promised Land.

The Exile is another ‘removal from Eden’. The garden is gone. The nations curse Abraham’s line. David’s crown is in the dust.

Jesus: the Adam to end all Adams

At Noah’s birth, his father Lamech prophesied that Noah would bring rest and relief from the painful toil associated with the Curse (Genesis 5:29). However, though Noah filled a role as a second Adam, he was not sinless. As such, he failed to bring true and lasting rest. And the Flood, as destructive as it was, did not cleanse the hearts of mankind (Genesis 6:5, 8:21). Likewise, Abraham, the nation of Israel, and David were far from perfect and thus unable to provide the solution.

The true rest Lamech prophesied was to be found in the Last Adam, who is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:45). He was like us in every way, yet *without sin* (Hebrews 2:17, 4:15). As such, He succeeded where all the other Adams failed, and thus ended the need for any more Adams.¹⁷ He:

- is more than a ‘living creature’ from the dust (Genesis 2:7) because He is a ‘life giving spirit’ (1 Corinthians 15:45–47)
- is the spiritual father of all who believe (1 John 3:1–2)
- tends His garden to produce righteous fruit (Isaiah 5:1–7; Galatians 5:22–24)
- does not just name or protect animals, but names (Revelation 2:17; 3:12) and protects (John 10:28) every one of His people
- had to toil under the consequences of the Curse by humbling Himself (Isaiah 53:3; Philippians 2:7–8; Hebrews 12:2) so that He could abolish the Curse of toil for us (Romans 8:22–23; Revelation 22:3) and fulfill Lamech’s prophecy
- is the mediator of the better New Covenant in His blood (Luke 22:19–20; Hebrews 7:22)
- has been given ultimate authority over all creation (Matthew 28:18; John 17:2)
- will fill an empty new paradise with His people—the ones whom He came to the earth to die for and to save (Luke 23:43; Revelation 2:7; 7:9)
- resisted the temptation of wine, unlike Noah, when it was offered to dull His pain (Mark 15:23), and to taste forbidden ‘fruit’ (Matthew 4:1–11), unlike Adam
- became associated with the shame of sinful human nakedness when His tormentors stripped Him and cast lots for His clothing (Mark 15:24)
- had His nakedness covered by others, before being laid in a tomb (Matthew 27:59)
- as God, has sons who are also His holy brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:10)
- brings about family reconciliation among the saved, rather than discord (Colossians 1:20)
- gives His sons blessings, not curses (Psalm 2:12; Matthew 5:3–12; Luke 24:50)
- does not live for a little short of a millennium, but forever (Revelation 1:8), and gives His people eternal life (John 3:15–16)
- died voluntarily (John 15:13; Hebrews 2:9), so that He could conquer death through His Resurrection (Psalm 110:1; Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 1:18)
- walked with God in full obedience (Psalm 40:8) and fellowship (John 17:21)
- gave His own blood as the final perfect sacrificial lamb (John 1:29; Hebrews 7:27; 9:12)
- is blessed by God (Matthew 3:17; Luke 1:42)
- saves His family from everlasting fire (1 Peter 3:20–22), not just from the waters of a cataclysm
- is the true seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:16)
- is the faithful Israelite called out of Egypt (Matthew 2:15, Hosea 11:1)
- is a high priest (Hebrews 4:14) after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:10)
- He is the true son of David (Matthew 1:1).

But with every ending comes a new beginning. In His Resurrection, the Last Adam became the ‘second man’ (1 Corinthians 15:47). In 1 Corinthians 15:44, Paul says that the body is sown a *sōma psychikon* (perhaps best rendered ‘soul-ish body’) and raised a ‘spiritual body’ (*sōma pneumatikon*). In v. 45, Paul quotes Genesis 2:7 to justify the sown body as *psychikos* (‘soul-ish’) since Adam was made a *psychēn zōsan* (‘living soul’). He then contrasts Jesus to Adam by saying that Jesus “became a *life-giving spirit*” (*pneuma zōopoion*). Verse 46 then says that the ‘soul-ish’ (*psychikos*) must come first, *and then* the ‘spiritual’ (*pneumatikos*). So, Adam was the ‘first man’ because he was the first with a ‘soul-ish body’, and Jesus was the ‘second man’ because He was the first with a ‘spiritual body’, with which He was raised with. Thus, Jesus became the ‘second man’ *at His Resurrection*.

Jesus is thus the beginning of a new mankind. He is the founder of a new everlasting spiritual race of mankind that is greater than the first natural race, which, through disobedience, would be subjected to death. This new race of mankind (Revelation 14:4) will live with Jesus forever in everlasting righteousness with spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15:44) designed to exist in the new heavens and earth.

However, there is a *twofold* contrast in 1 Corinthians 15:45. First, Adam became a ‘soul’ (*psychē*) at his creation and Jesus became a ‘spirit’ (*pneuma*) at His Resurrection (neither lacked a body, but had bodies governed by different life-principles).¹⁸ Second, Adam became ‘living’ whereas Jesus became ‘life-giving’. Through His Resurrection, Jesus is not just the first with a ‘spiritual body’; He actually *gives* life! But who is the one who gives life to the dead? Only God (Romans 4:17). Nonetheless, it is something He does through His Spirit (Romans 8:11), and the Son also gives life to whomever He wants (John 5:21). In other words, only God can give life to the dead, but Jesus participates in it. As with creation (Colossians 1:16–17; Hebrews 1:3), so with resurrection. After all, it is *new creation* (Galatians 6:15, 2 Corinthians 5:17). The second man is more than a mere man—He is the God-man.¹⁹ No wonder He can change the hearts of His people (John 3:7–8) and thus provide the true rest (Matthew 11:28–30) Lamech prophesied.

Conclusion

Jesus is the *last* Adam, not the second Adam. Moreover, this only makes sense if there *really were* other ‘Adams’—other people who were given the priest-king vocation of the first Adam to subdue and rule, and through whom the world would be blessed with God’s presence, such as Noah, Abraham, the nation of Israel, and David. Jesus was not just the fulfilment of myths; He was the fulfilment of what God made man to be, and always wanted him to be. Jesus is the climax of salvation *history*; a history that began with the creation of the first Adam.

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