

# The importance of being Adam

***Adam, Where Are You? (And Why This Matters): A theological evaluation of the evolutionist hermeneutic***

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Willem Ouweneel states that “the essence of this book can be summarized very simply: if we believe human evolution, can we still retain the biblical message of Genesis 1–3? I (and many others) say: No” (p. xxv).

Ouweneel supports his unequivocal ‘no’ with an analysis of numerous deleterious theological consequences that result from attempting to harmonize Genesis 1–3 with general evolutionary theory. As Ouweneel puts it, “We read Genesis 1–3 either through Jesus’ and Paul’s glasses or through Darwin’s glasses” (p. 22), and if we “accept the assertion of certain so-called scientists and allow them to govern our interpretation of Genesis 1–3, ... the result will be that we will lose ... the gospel itself” (p. 32). In Ouweneel’s view, the choice is between either revelation or evolution (p. 32), and he spends the bulk of the book categorizing various exegetical and theological implications of jettisoning the historical Adam.

## Problems with the general theory of evolution

Ouweneel possesses an impressive array of academic credentials including doctorates in biology, philosophy and systematic theology. From a biological perspective, Ouweneel asserts that

“With the knowledge that we now have of biological processes and of

the fossil record, it is impossible for me to believe in general evolution (i.e. evolution from the first living cells to human beings)” (p. xxiii).

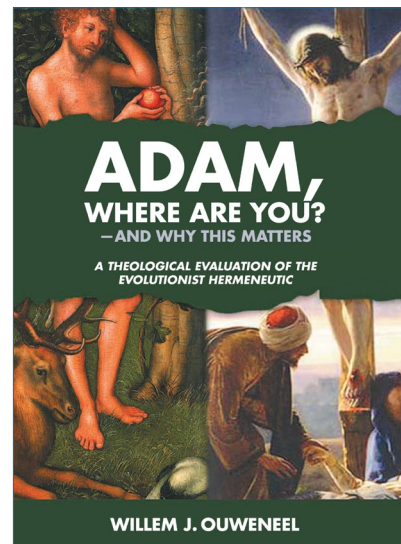
He then briefly touches upon several scientific problems with the general theory of evolution, a discussion that may provide a helpful summary for many readers. For instance, Ouweneel writes that

“The point is that millions of *variations* themselves do not, and cannot, produce *innovation*, the supposed mechanism of accumulation of irreparable, advantageous, inheritable, code-expanding mutations of the DNA [emphasis in original]” (p. 37).

Ouweneel notes that the natural processes supposedly responsible for abiogenesis (chemical evolution) “induced by putting simple substances into the radiation of the sun, or in the rain, wind, or lightning, are processes of decay” (p. 37), and that so-called ‘micro-evolution,’ which occurred perhaps most famously in the change of the beaks of Darwin’s finches, is “nothing other than biological *variation* [emphasis in original]” (p. 39), involving “the mechanism of gene regulation and the recombination of gene variants and selection” (p. 39). In addition, neither the fossil record nor modern genome biology supports the common ancestry of dogs and cats, and it should be a “problem to the evolutionists that everything seems to be changing in the evolutionary process” except the unchanging natural laws of uniformitarianism (p. 44). Ouweneel consistently defines his scientific and theological terminology throughout the book, a feature that helps to clarify arguments for his readers.

## Trust the science?

To those who assert that evolution has been incontrovertibly verified, Ouweneel notes that Karl Popper points out that science is undergirded by an inductive process which, by definition,



can never be conclusive. To my mind this is one of the most compelling logical reasons why ‘trust the science’ is not a foundational principle but is rather more akin to ‘shifting sands.’ I am currently writing from sunny California which remains under a public ‘pandemic’ policy of ‘trust the science’, resulting in myriad, contradictory and sometimes seemingly illogical changes. Inductive processes are innately susceptible to the next data point or perception which may throw the entire hypothesis into disarray. Nonetheless, many seem to view inductive science as an authoritative body of knowledge with which Scripture must be ‘harmonized’.

For instance, “BioLogos invites the church and the world to see the harmony between science and biblical faith as we present an evolutionary understanding of God’s creation” (p. 27), and has been quite cleverly depicted as “helping fundamentalists evolve” (p. 27). BioLogos was founded by Francis S. Collins, who incidentally has also been involved in shaping the ‘trust the science’ pandemic response in the United States. Several well-known theologians such as John Walton and Tremper Longman III are on BioLogos’ advisory board, and the group has been highly influential in shaping various evolutionary understandings of creation for the broader church.

### Scripture is authoritative over science

In contrast, Ouweneel writes that “if the historical Adam and the historical Fall (both in the biblical sense) are scientifically impossible, then so too are not only Joshua’s lengthened day but also the resurrection of Jesus” (p. 103). I think that this is a powerful argument for subordinating science to Scripture. The Resurrection of Jesus from the dead is essential to the Christian faith and the Christian Gospel and yet is a revivification that would likely be deemed absolutely impossible by the majority of scientists. Those who view Scripture as authoritative, then, should not fear if someone objects that the creation events described in Genesis are inconceivable from a scientific perspective.

Ouweneel asserts that “there is no middle path: the choice is evolution or revelation” (p. 32), a position echoing that of evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould, who asserted that “evolution substituted a naturalistic explanation of cold comfort for our former conviction that a benevolent deity fashioned us directly in his own image” (p. 71). Regarding the theological impact of reading the Genesis account of creation through a naturalistic lens, insight may come from a perhaps unlikely source. Atheist Richard Bozarth writes:

“... it becomes clear now that the whole justification of Jesus’ life and death is predicated on the existence of Adam and the fruit he and Eve ate. Without the original sin, who needs to be redeemed? Without Adam’s fall into a life of constant sin terminated by death, what purpose is there to Christianity? ... None. What all this means is that Christianity cannot lose the Genesis account of creation. ... the battle must be waged for Christianity is fighting for its very life” (p. 19).

Bozarth’s perspective is incisive (although Christianity manifests purposes, such as God’s glory, far beyond Adam’s fall into sin), and Ouweneel

concur that “If we lose the biblical Adam, we lose the biblical Christ” (p. 296). In other words, the historical facts about the first Adam axiomatically undergird the historical facts about the Second Adam.

### Evolutionary theology and the New Testament view of Genesis

Ouweneel organizes the analyses of the theological consequences of an evolutionary view of creation into several sections including biblical anthropology (who is man?), the trees and the serpent, the significance of the Fall, and original sin. He asserts, for instance, that if there is no actual serpent, the promise of Genesis 3:15 (a blessing amid the Curse which some have called the ‘protoevangelium’ or first Gospel promise) loses its sting. The upshot is that if we lose the details of Genesis 1–3 this inescapably erodes the theological architecture of the rest of Scripture. Ouweneel laments the “agonizing tension of the church’s double-commitment” (to modern science and to Christian teaching) (p. 273) and asserts that such cannot be supported by rigorous exegetical theology, noting that “this has been one of the besetting sins of theologians: they often overemphasize systematic theology at the expense of biblical exegesis” (p. 247).

Ouweneel devotes the final chapter of the book to “The New Testament on Genesis 1–3” and the exegesis in this chapter is so compelling that it by itself is worth more than the proverbial ‘price of admission’. Scholars who “struggle with the notion of the historical Adam” (p. 314) sometimes attempt to curvette around Paul’s view of Adam as a historical being by portraying Paul as an archaic theologian whose views were steeped in the opaque mists of antiquity, but Ouweneel points out that Jesus himself asserted that Adam, Cain, Abel, and Noah were historical people. Overall, as Greg Haslem notes,

“The NT endorses the accuracy of Genesis directly and indirectly over *200 times*, and cites Genesis 1–11 *107 times*. Jesus refers to

Genesis twenty-five times to reinforce important doctrines [emphases in original]” (p. 330).

These numbers are indeed compelling. Those scholars who wish to view Genesis 1–3 through an evolutionary lens must grapple—fruitlessly, in Ouweneel’s view—with the theological consequences that reverberate through the rest of Scripture including the exegesis of the words of Christ and an understanding of the eternal Gospel (Revelation 14:6).

### Conclusion

I have some theological differences with the book, but these are not central to Ouweneel’s overall analysis of the corrosive consequences of reading Scripture through an evolutionary lens. For instance, Ouweneel does not subscribe to “the Reformed idea that the ‘righteousness of Christ’, that is, his Torah-obedience, has supposedly been imputed (i.e. transferred to the account of) believers” (p. 290), and asserts that “nothing of what Adam committed is imputed” to people. I believe that ‘double-imputation’—righteousness to believers and sin to Christ (in both cases as a status and not ontology, for Jesus never actually becomes a sinner and believers never actually become perfectly righteous in this lifetime)—to be a foundational theological concept, but nonetheless these matters do not detract from Ouweneel’s insightful and comprehensive analysis of the biblical text with regard to the ongoing tension between evolution and revelation. Ouweneel ends his powerful book on a hopeful—indeed pastoral—note, encouraging his readers to long for the return of the Second Adam, who so magnificently reverses the Curse assigned to the first.