

When Mammoth Bones Shook My Theology

A Personal Narrative of a Theological Journey Through Genesis

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One: The Visit That Started Everything

It started with a field trip. My wife Jaishee and I visited the Waco Mammoth National Monument, a place where genuine mammoth bones lie exposed in the earth, preserved for tens of thousands of years according to the scientific dating on the exhibit plaques. I am a man who has read Genesis carefully and believed it literally for most of my adult life. I have taught it to men at a shelter for over twenty-five years. I thought I had it fairly well figured out.

Standing in front of those bones, Jaishee began asking me questions about the dates on the plaques and how they connected to Genesis. I had taught this material for decades and yet I found myself without clean answers. I came home with questions I had not had before and took them to my teacher, Mark Lanier, who has been teaching me the Bible for two decades. He gave me a book by Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman III on Genesis. That book did not resolve my questions. It multiplied them.

What follows is an honest account of what I found when I started pulling that thread. It is not a tidy resolution. It is a record of a journey that shook me to the core and what remained standing when the shaking stopped.

Two: The Flood and the Fossil Problem

My first questions concerned the flood. The mammoth exhibit dated those remains to approximately 66,000 years ago using multiple independent methods. If Noah's flood was a recent global event that laid down most of the earth's sedimentary deposits, those dates are simply incompatible with a straightforward reading of Genesis chronology.

Longman does not hold to a young earth global flood in the strictest sense. He takes seriously the possibility of a large regional catastrophe that was described in universal terms because it was universal from the perspective of the people experiencing it. This was a common feature of ancient Near Eastern narrative. The language of Genesis 7:23 and 1 Peter 3:20, that only eight souls survived, does not necessarily require biological universality if the covenant community is the referent rather than the entire human species.

This immediately raised a harder question. If the flood was regional, were there human populations outside the flood zone who survived? And if so, what does that mean for Adamic humanity and for the biblical claim that all people descend from Noah?

Three: Every Culture Remembers a Flood

Before going further into the Adam question, something needs to be said about the flood narratives themselves because it is one of the most remarkable pieces of evidence in this entire discussion.

Flood narratives appear across virtually every major ancient culture independently. The Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh and the earlier Atrahasis epic predate Genesis in written form and contain strikingly parallel details: a divine warning to one righteous man, a command to build a boat, animals brought aboard, a great flood, a bird sent out to find land, a sacrifice afterward, a divine promise. The Greek Deucalion story, the Hindu Manu narrative, the Chinese Gun-Yu flood tradition, hundreds of independent Native American flood traditions across North and South America, Australian Aboriginal traditions, African traditions, Polynesian traditions. The geographical and cultural spread is so wide that these cannot all be borrowing from each other.

Three interpretations present themselves. First, a global flood actually happened and the memory of it survived independently across all cultures through ancestral traditions going back to a common human experience. Second, a catastrophic regional flood was so devastating to early human populations that survivors carried the memory with them as they migrated and populated the earth. Third, floods are so universally catastrophic in human experience that every culture independently developed flood mythology without any shared historical event behind them.

The third option is the weakest because the structural parallels across cultures are too specific to explain by coincidence. The first two options both support the historical reality of the biblical flood, differing only on its geographic scope.

Longman and other scholars argue that Genesis is not copying Gilgamesh but that both narratives independently preserve the same ancient catastrophic flood memory. Genesis does so with theological precision and monotheistic clarity that Gilgamesh entirely lacks. Genesis demythologizes the story. Instead of gods fighting and accidentally flooding the earth, you have one sovereign God acting with moral purpose and covenant faithfulness.

The universality of the flood memory across unconnected cultures is actually one of the strongest arguments that something genuinely happened rather than that Genesis invented it. God may have so designed human memory and narrative that a real event left its fingerprint on every culture that descended from those early survivors. C.S. Lewis made a similar argument about dying and rising god myths across world cultures. He said they were not proof that Christianity borrowed from mythology but proof that the mythological imagination of humanity was unconsciously reaching toward a truth that the gospel would state plainly and historically. The flood traditions may be doing the same thing. Every culture remembered something. Genesis tells you what it actually was and why it happened and what God was doing through it.

Four: Were There Other Humans?

The text of Genesis itself raises the other-humans question without fully answering it. Cain fears being killed by others after murdering Abel, implying a population beyond his immediate family. He goes to the land of Nod and builds a city, which presupposes existing inhabitants. He finds a wife whose origin the text does not explain. These details have troubled careful readers for centuries.

Longman acknowledges these tensions rather than smoothing them over. He is open to the possibility that Genesis is not presenting Adam and Eve as the sole biological ancestors of all humanity in a strict scientific sense, but rather as theological representatives, the first humans into whom God breathed spiritual life and covenantal accountability, while other biological hominids may have existed alongside or before them.

Then came the DNA evidence. Population geneticists studying human genetic diversity conclude that the variation present in the modern human genome could not have descended from a single pair of individuals. The minimum ancestral population needed to account for current genetic diversity is estimated at roughly ten thousand individuals at its lowest point, sometimes called the population bottleneck. Longman engages this data seriously rather than dismissing it, which is where many conservative readers find him most unsettling.

Five: Mitochondrial Eve and What Science Accidentally Confirmed

In 1987 geneticists studying mitochondrial DNA, which is passed exclusively through the mother and does not recombine, traced all living human maternal lineages back to a single woman. They called her Mitochondrial Eve. She is estimated to have lived in Africa somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago.

Popular reporting badly misled people about what this means. Mitochondrial Eve was not the only woman alive at her time. She was simply the one woman from whom all maternal lineages have survived to the present day. Other women lived alongside her. Their maternal lines simply died out over time through daughters who had no daughters. It is a statistical inevitability, not a biological singularity.

But here is what I find most striking for this theological journey. Science itself is saying that all humanity traces to a single woman. That resonates powerfully with Genesis. The dispute is entirely about mechanism, timing, and whether others coexisted. The science confirms the theological instinct of Genesis without confirming its precise historical framework. The text points toward singular origin. Science points toward singular origin. The coordinates differ but the arrow points in the same direction.

Similarly there is a Y-chromosomal Adam, the single male from whom all living human paternal lineages descend. He is estimated to have lived between 200,000 and 340,000 years ago, also in Africa, and also surrounded by other humans whose male lines simply

died out. Science keeps finding its way back to a single ancestral man and a single ancestral woman, which is not what you would expect if the Genesis narrative were purely mythological invention.

Six: Reconciling Mitochondrial Eve With the Population Bottleneck

Having introduced both Mitochondrial Eve and the population bottleneck of ten thousand individuals, I need to address an obvious tension. If all humanity traces to one woman and one man, how can the minimum founding population be ten thousand? Those two claims seem to cancel each other out entirely. They do not, but understanding why requires careful thinking.

They Are Measuring Completely Different Things

Mitochondrial Eve and Y-chromosomal Adam are measuring lineage survival. The population bottleneck is measuring total genetic diversity. These are entirely separate calculations that happen to point in different directions without actually contradicting each other.

Mitochondrial Eve is not the only woman who existed. She is simply the only woman whose unbroken maternal line has survived to the present day. Every other woman alive at her time either had no daughters, or her daughters had no daughters, and so on down through time until that maternal line died out completely. Given enough generations, every lineage except one will eventually go extinct through random chance alone even within a very large population. It is pure statistical inevitability over deep time.

The population bottleneck of ten thousand is measuring something entirely different. It is measuring the total genetic variation present across all human chromosomes, not just mitochondrial DNA or the Y chromosome. That variation is so extensive that it requires a minimum founding population of roughly ten thousand to have generated it within the timeframe the evidence suggests. You simply cannot produce that much genetic diversity starting from two individuals.

The Town Illustration

Imagine a town of ten thousand people all alive at the same time. One woman among them happens to be the great-great-grandmother of every person alive today through an unbroken female line. The other nine thousand nine hundred and ninety nine women also lived and had children but their female lines eventually died out over the following centuries. That one woman becomes Mitochondrial Eve. But she did not generate all the genetic diversity in the town by herself. The whole population of ten thousand contributed to the total genetic pool. Eve simply won the maternal lineage lottery over time while contributing her own genetic material to a much larger shared pool.

So Mitochondrial Eve and Y-chromosomal Adam do not contradict the population bottleneck. They exist within it. They are the last common ancestors of specific lineages within a much larger population, not the sole biological progenitors of the species.

What This Does to the Biblical Adam

This is where it gets theologically sharp again. The scientific Adam and Eve are not a couple. Y-chromosomal Adam and Mitochondrial Eve did not necessarily know each other, live in the same place, or even exist at the same time. Current estimates place Mitochondrial Eve at roughly 150,000 years ago and Y-chromosomal Adam somewhere between 200,000 and 340,000 years ago. They may have been separated by tens of thousands of years and thousands of miles.

So science gives us a maternal ancestor and a paternal ancestor but they are not a pair. They were surrounded by thousands of other humans. They lived in Africa far outside any conventional biblical chronology. The scientific Adam and Eve are a statistical artifact of lineage survival, not a biological couple in a garden.

What Does Not Move

Every framework that takes Scripture seriously agrees on one thing. Sin is real and universal. Every human being in every culture confirms it experientially. The remedy is real and singular. Christ's work is not made uncertain by uncertainty about Adam's biology. The covenantal and legal argument of Romans 5 stands on its own ground independent of the genetic evidence.

Seven: The Most Recent Common Ancestor of All Living Humans

One of the most stunning and least known findings in all of population genetics deserves its own chapter because it changes the shape of this entire discussion in a theologically significant way.

What the Research Shows

In 2004 mathematicians Douglas Rohde, Steve Olson, and Joseph Chang published a landmark paper in *Nature* titled *Modelling the Recent Common Ancestry of All Living Humans*. Their computational models produced a finding that astonished the scientific community. The most recent common ancestor of every person alive today, when you trace all ancestral lines simultaneously rather than just the maternal or paternal line, probably lived somewhere between 2,000 and 5,000 years ago. Some models placed it even more recently. A follow-up study went further, suggesting that everyone alive today descends from every person who was alive at a certain point in the past and left any descendants at all.

Why This Is Completely Different From Mitochondrial Eve

Mitochondrial Eve traces only the unbroken maternal line, one single thread out of an astronomically large web of ancestry. But you have two biological parents. Four grandparents. Eight great-grandparents. Sixteen great-great-grandparents. The number doubles with every generation. Go back forty generations, roughly a thousand years, and you theoretically have more than a trillion ancestors, far more people than have ever lived. Which means your family tree does not expand forever. It collapses back on itself. You and every other person alive today share the same ancestors from a certain point backward because there simply were not enough distinct people to go around. The family trees of all living humans are not separate trees. They are one single tree.

The Identical Ancestors Point

Even more striking was a second finding embedded in Rohde's research. Not only does everyone alive today share a most recent common ancestor from just a few thousand years ago, but there is also what researchers call an identical ancestors point further back in time. At this point every person who was alive and left any descendants at all is an ancestor of every person alive today without exception. Their models placed this identical ancestors point at roughly five thousand to fifteen thousand years ago. This means the human family tree is not a collection of separate trees that occasionally intertwine. It is one single unified tree, and that unification happened astonishingly recently.

What This Does Theologically

If the most recent common ancestor of all living humans lived only a few thousand years ago, that places that ancestor squarely within the range of recorded biblical history. Not in the deep evolutionary past. Not in Africa 150,000 years ago. Within the timeframe of the patriarchs, the early civilizations, the flood narrative, the table of nations in Genesis 10.

It does not prove that this common ancestor was Noah. But it makes the theological claim of Noah as the common ancestor of all post-flood humanity not only plausible but mathematically consistent with what population genetics itself is finding through an entirely independent line of inquiry. Paul writes in Acts 17:26 that from one man God made all the nations of the earth. Population genetics in 2004 found the same thing without looking for it.

Eight: Then Why Did God Make Eve From Adam's Side?

This question cuts right through every other-humans framework. Genesis 2:18 to 23 is not ambiguous. God surveys all living creatures, finds no suitable helper for Adam among them, and then specifically constructs Eve from Adam's own body. The phrase bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh is a covenant formula in Hebrew, meaning deepest kinship and shared identity.

If other human women already existed outside Eden, God could have simply brought one to Adam the way he brought the animals. He did not. He made Eve from Adam specifically. That is not incidental narrative detail. It is the theological load-bearing center of the whole passage.

The rib narrative strains every framework that tries to accommodate a pre-existing human population alongside Adam and Eve. Even scholars sympathetic to Longman's approach have to work hard here. John Walton argues that Adam and Eve were given a unique functional identity as archetypes, appointed to represent humanity before God regardless of whether others existed biologically. But the construction of Eve from Adam's body resists being reduced to a functional appointment. It presents unmediated direct divine action producing a unique individual from another unique individual.

This is where the text itself keeps pushing back against the frameworks scholars try to impose on it.

Nine: God Spoke Everything Into Existence and Formed Man With His Hands

One of the most theologically significant literary distinctions in all of Genesis is one I noticed simply by reading carefully. Genesis 1 uses a consistent pattern for everything in creation. God speaks and it exists. Let there be light. Let the waters swarm. Let the earth bring forth. Distant, powerful, sovereign command. Creation by divine speech.

Then you reach humanity and everything changes. Genesis 2:7 says God formed man from the dust of the ground. The Hebrew word is *yatsar*, the word used for a potter working clay with his hands. Then God breathed into his nostrils. Direct contact. Divine breath to human face. This is not accidental. The author is making a point so obvious it should not be missed.

Everything else was spoken into existence from a distance. Man was formed by hand and animated by direct breath. The intimacy is the theology. Humanity occupies a categorically different relationship to God than everything else in creation, not just functionally different but ontologically different, different in kind not just degree.

Longman's Clarification: God Does Not Have Lungs

At this point Longman introduces a clarification that initially surprised me but ultimately deepened rather than diminished the text's meaning. He notes that God is spirit, as Jesus himself declares in John 4:24. God does not have a physical body, lungs, hands, or fingers in a literal biological sense. Therefore when Genesis 2:7 says God breathed into Adam's nostrils, Longman reads that as theological and literary imagery rather than a literal description of a biological event.

The technical term for this kind of language is anthropomorphism, which means describing God using human physical characteristics to communicate something true about his nature or actions that transcends the literal description. The Bible speaks of God's mighty hand, his outstretched arm, his eyes scanning the earth, his ears hearing

prayer. Nobody reads those as claims that God has a literal arm with an elbow joint. They are communicating power, attention, care, and presence in terms human minds can grasp. Longman applies that same hermeneutic to the breathing in Genesis 2:7.

The point is not that God has respiratory anatomy. The point is the intimacy of direct divine personal impartation of life to humanity. The image of breath communicates something real and irreducible, that the life in Adam came directly and personally from God himself, without that image requiring literal pulmonary mechanics on God's part.

The Hebrew Word Neshamah

The Hebrew word used in Genesis 2:7 for what God breathed into Adam is neshamah. This is not an ordinary word for breath or air. It is the same word used elsewhere in Scripture for the breath of the Almighty that gives understanding, for the human spirit, and in some contexts for the divine animating presence itself. It carries the weight of divine life imparted personally to human life.

When God breathes neshamah into Adam he is not transferring air. He is transferring something of himself, his own life, his own animating presence, into the human creature he has just formed. The breath imagery is the vehicle. The divine impartation of personal spiritual life is the cargo. Longman's point about God not having lungs is not a diminishment of this event. It is a clarification that prevents us from reducing a profound theological statement to a biology lesson.

What the Anthropomorphic Reading Cannot Escape

Even granting the anthropomorphic reading of both the hands and the breath, the theological claim being made remains the same. Adam's constitution is the direct personal work of God in a way that the constitution of plants and animals simply is not. The anthropomorphic language is not a concession to mythology. It is the text reaching for the most intimate human imagery available to describe something that transcends ordinary categories entirely. God stooping down, getting his hands in the dust, putting his face close to Adam's face, breathing his own life-breath into a creature made from the ground. That is not primitive science. That is theology at its most profound, using the language of intimacy to describe the unique dignity of humanity in terms no other creature in all of Genesis receives.

Ten: The Two Creation Accounts and the Sequence of Plants

There is another puzzle I found simply by reading. Genesis 1 places plants on day three and man on day six. Then Genesis 2:5 says there was no shrub of the field and no plant of the field because there was no man to work the ground, after which God forms Adam and then plants and trees appear in the garden. That is a different sequence. The text itself creates a tension that a flat chronological reading cannot resolve.

Longman's literary approach argues that Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are not meant to be read as sequential chronological accounts at all. Genesis 1 is a cosmic inauguration narrative answering the question of who made the world and why it is ordered the way it is. Genesis 2 zooms in theologically on humanity's specific creation and role. They are two different lenses on the same reality, not two competing timelines.

The reason Genesis 2 mentions no man to tend the garden before describing Adam's creation is not to establish chronological sequence. It is to establish theological purpose. Man was made for the garden and the garden was made for man. Ancient readers would not have been troubled by this the way modern Western readers are because they were not expecting the text to function as a sequential timeline. They were expecting it to answer who made the world, why it exists, and what humanity's role in it is.

Eleven: If There Were Other Humans, How Did Sin Enter by One Man?

Romans 5:12 is the text that makes this most acute. Paul writes that sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people. The entire architecture of redemption in Paul rests on a symmetry between one man whose act brought condemnation and one man whose act brings justification. As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. If Adam is fuzzy, Christ's work starts to feel fuzzy by the same logic.

Longman and scholars like John Walton navigate this through the concept of federal headship. Adam acted as the representative of all humanity, not merely as biological ancestor. His sin affected all people under his headship, much as a king's treaty decision binds an entire nation. The mechanism of transmission is less important than the universality of the condition and the universality of the remedy.

Paul is not writing biology. He is writing covenant theology. His concern is not the genetics of how sin spread but the legal and relational reality that all humans stand condemned and all humans can stand justified. The universality of sin is not in dispute anywhere. Every human culture in every century has confirmed it experientially.

Twelve: So Was Darwin Right?

That question sits underneath all the others. The honest answer is that Darwin was partially right and entirely silent on what matters most.

Darwin was right that species change over time, that there is common ancestry across biological life, and that natural selection is a real mechanism. The evidence for these things is now overwhelming and comes from multiple independent fields including genetics, paleontology, geology, and comparative anatomy. Longman would not dispute this and neither should careful readers who respect both Scripture and the created order.

But Darwin was doing biology, not theology. He was not addressing whether existence itself requires a Creator, whether humanity bears the image of God, whether there is moral accountability, whether a fall occurred, or whether redemption is possible and necessary. Those questions are simply outside the scope of what evolutionary biology can answer.

The origin of life itself remains unexplained by evolutionary theory. How you get from chemistry to the first self-replicating cell is still an open and deeply contested scientific question. Evolution explains what happened after life began, not why there is something rather than nothing. Augustine said in the fifth century that we should not read Genesis to learn what we can learn by reason and observation elsewhere. Accepting that God may have used biological processes does not require abandoning Genesis. It requires reading Genesis as what it is, a theological document answering who and why, not a biology textbook answering how and when.

Thirteen: John Lennox: A Second Voice Worth Hearing

At this point it is worth bringing in additional serious scholarly voices because Tremper Longman is not the only faithful thinker engaging these questions, and hearing where scholars agree and disagree is itself instructive.

John Lennox is a mathematician and philosopher of science from Oxford, a committed Christian and one of the most effective defenders of theistic faith in the academic world. He has debated Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Peter Singer. He approaches Genesis from a scientific and philosophical angle rather than a strictly Old Testament scholarly angle, which makes him a useful complement to Longman.

Where Lennox and Longman Agree

Both reject young earth creationism as the only faithful reading of Genesis. Both take science seriously as genuine knowledge about God's creation. Both insist that Genesis is theological literature that must be read with attention to its literary genre and ancient context. Both hold firmly that God is the Creator, that humanity is uniquely made in God's image, and that the fall was a real historical event. Both argue that the conflict between science and Genesis is largely a false conflict created by reading Genesis through modern Western assumptions it was never designed to satisfy.

Where Lennox Differs From Longman

Lennox is more conservative on the historical Adam question. He insists on a real singular Adam and a real singular Eve as the biological progenitors of all humanity. He is not comfortable with the population genetics argument that Longman entertains and would push back on the assumptions embedded in those models. The science is real, Lennox would say, but the interpretive framework applied to it involves philosophical commitments that deserve scrutiny and are not as settled as they are sometimes presented.

Lennox handles the Genesis days differently from many evangelicals. In his book *Seven Days That Divide the World* he argues that the Hebrew word *yom* translated day can legitimately refer to long periods rather than strictly twenty four hour periods, and that faithful Christians have disagreed on this since long before Darwin. He points to Augustine and others who questioned strict literalism centuries before modern science made it an issue.

On the flood Lennox leans toward a regional catastrophic flood interpretation similar to Longman, though he holds it with appropriate tentativeness. His books *Seven Days That Divide the World* and *Cosmic Chemistry* are accessible starting points for anyone wanting a more conservative framework than Longman while still engaging the science honestly.

Fourteen: William Lane Craig and the Mytho-Historical Adam

William Lane Craig is one of the most widely respected Christian philosophers and apologists alive today, known particularly for his work on the cosmological argument, the resurrection of Jesus, and the rationality of theistic belief. In 2021 he published *In Quest of the Historical Adam*, a substantial interdisciplinary investigation that brought his formidable philosophical and theological tools to bear directly on the questions this journey has been asking.

Genesis 1 to 11 as Mytho-History

Craig's first major contribution is his careful argument that Genesis 1 through 11 is best classified as mytho-history, a genre that combines genuine literary and symbolic elements with genuine historical intent. It is not pure myth with no historical referent. It is not flat literal chronicle. It is something ancient cultures did with regularity: narrate real events and real persons through the conventions and imagery of their literary world.

This is a more nuanced position than simply calling Genesis poetry or allegory. Craig is insisting that the text intends to refer to real events and a real person named Adam while using literary conventions that modern Western readers schooled in journalistic literalism find disorienting. The disorientation is ours, not the text's failure. Ancient readers would have recognized the genre immediately and known how to read it accordingly.

Adam Must Be Historical

Having established the genre, Craig then argues from the New Testament that the entire biblical witness, including the words of Jesus and the writings of Paul, treats Adam as a genuine historical individual who was the progenitor of the human race. This is not a peripheral claim. Craig insists it is so woven into the fabric of biblical theology, particularly in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, that it must be accepted as a theological premise by anyone who takes the inspired truth of Scripture seriously.

This puts Craig in a more conservative position than Longman on the historical Adam question. Where Longman is willing to entertain Adam as a theological representative selected from an existing population, Craig insists on Adam as the actual historical progenitor of humanity, the one through whom sin and death genuinely entered the human story.

Where Craig Places Adam in History

Having established that Adam must be historical and must be the progenitor of all humanity, Craig then does something genuinely bold. He surveys the scientific and paleontological evidence and places Adam within the evolutionary history of humankind, concluding that Adam most plausibly lived between 750,000 and 1,000,000 years ago as a member of the archaic human species *Homo heidelbergensis*.

This is a remarkable conclusion. Craig fully accepts evolution as the mechanism by which human biology developed. He accepts deep time. He accepts that Adam lived in a world of other hominids. But he insists that at a specific moment in that deep history, God constituted a real individual as the first true human, the image bearer, the covenant head, and the progenitor of all who would follow. The mytho-historical genre of Genesis, Craig argues, does not require us to read the garden narrative as a precise description of Pleistocene ecology. It requires us to affirm that something real happened to a real person whose act had real universal consequences.

How Craig Handles the Population Genetics Problem

Craig's deep time Adam actually creates an interesting relationship with the population genetics data. If Adam lived nearly a million years ago rather than a few thousand years ago, the genetic diversity that the population bottleneck models require becomes much more manageable from a single founding pair. The longer the timeframe, the more genetic diversity two individuals could generate through normal mutation and reproduction across hundreds of thousands of years.

This is one of the more creative aspects of Craig's proposal. By pushing Adam deep into evolutionary history rather than locating him within the recent past of conventional biblical chronology, Craig creates genetic and demographic space that the standard young earth or recent Adam frameworks cannot provide. It comes at the cost of reading the Genesis genealogies very loosely, but Craig argues the mytho-historical genre licenses that reading.

Where Craig Is Critiqued

Not everyone finds Craig's proposal compelling. Critics from the right argue that placing Adam nearly a million years ago requires such a loose reading of the Genesis genealogies and the broader biblical chronology that it effectively abandons what Scripture intends to communicate about human origins. Critics from the left argue that identifying Adam with *Homo heidelbergensis* involves more paleontological confidence than the evidence warrants, since the fossil record for that period is fragmentary and the behavioral and cognitive capacities of those hominids remain debated.

Nevertheless Craig's proposal represents one of the most sophisticated attempts by a conservative evangelical scholar to take both the historical Adam and the evolutionary timeline with full seriousness simultaneously. It is an intellectual achievement regardless of where one lands on its conclusions.

Fifteen: S. Joshua Swamidass and the Genealogical Adam

S. Joshua Swamidass is a computational biologist and physician at Washington University in Saint Louis and a committed Christian who grew up in a young earth creationist household. In 2019 he published *The Genealogical Adam and Eve*, a book that has genuinely changed the terms of the conversation about human origins in a way that few anticipated.

His proposal is elegant, scientifically rigorous, and theologically consequential. It deserves careful attention because it resolves several tensions that other frameworks leave unresolved, though it creates its own questions in the process.

The Key Distinction: Genetic Ancestors Versus Genealogical Ancestors

The heart of Swamidass's argument rests on a distinction that population geneticists know well but that theologians and popular writers have largely overlooked: the difference between genetic ancestors and genealogical ancestors.

A genetic ancestor is someone from whom you have inherited actual DNA. Because of how inheritance works, you share DNA with only a fraction of your actual biological ancestors. Go back far enough and most of your genealogical ancestors contributed no detectable DNA to you at all. Their genetic contribution was diluted to zero through the random process of inheritance across generations.

A genealogical ancestor is anyone who appears in your family tree, whether or not they contributed any DNA to you. This is a much larger and faster-growing category. As we saw in the chapter on the most recent common ancestor, genealogical ancestry collapses all living humans together at a point just a few thousand years ago. Every living human shares every genealogical ancestor from that point backward.

Swamidass's insight is that the population genetics objection to a historical Adam, the argument that genetic diversity requires a founding population of at least ten thousand, applies only to genetic ancestry. It says nothing about genealogical ancestry. These are different things measured by different methods producing different answers.

What the Genealogical Hypothesis Proposes

Swamidass proposes that Adam and Eve were a real couple, created specially by God, who lived perhaps six to ten thousand years ago in the ancient Near East alongside other humans who had evolved through normal biological processes. Those other humans are

the people Cain feared, the inhabitants of Nod, the source of Cain's wife. They were real biological humans. They were simply outside the garden.

Over the following millennia, through normal intermarriage and migration, the genealogical descendants of Adam and Eve mixed with the people outside the garden until, within a few thousand years, Adam and Eve became the genealogical ancestors of every living human. Not the genetic ancestors. The genealogical ancestors. Their family tree expanded until it encompassed all of humanity, which is precisely what the most recent common ancestor mathematics shows is possible in a surprisingly short timeframe.

This means that today, every living human being is a genealogical descendant of Adam and Eve. Not because they were the only humans, but because their descendants spread and interbred with all other human populations until their genealogical line reached everyone. The science does not rule this out. Swamidass demonstrates that it is entirely consistent with the current genetic evidence.

How This Handles the Major Problems

The population genetics bottleneck problem dissolves immediately under Swamidass's framework because the genetic diversity of the human genome was generated by the larger population outside the garden evolving over deep time. Adam and Eve contributed their own genetics to the pool but they did not need to generate all human genetic diversity from scratch.

The people outside the garden explain Cain's wife, the inhabitants of Nod, and Cain's fear of being killed, without requiring the text to invent details it never mentions. They were real people. They simply were not in the covenant relationship that defined Adam and Eve's unique status before God.

The universal descent of all living humans from Adam and Eve is preserved, not as genetic ancestry but as genealogical ancestry, which is actually what the biblical text consistently claims. The Bible speaks of all people descending from Adam in the sense of coming from his line, not in the sense of carrying his specific DNA sequences.

The Theological Elegance

What Swamidass preserves that other frameworks struggle to preserve is the plain reading of the text in its most important claims. Adam and Eve were real. They were specially created. Eve really was made from Adam. The fall was a real historical event. Universal sin really does trace to them. And all living humans really are their descendants, every one without exception, because genealogical ancestry spreads faster and further than genetic ancestry.

Swamidass also preserves the people outside the garden as a coherent category without requiring them to be fictional. They explain the details Genesis raises without explaining. They integrate rather than compete with the evolutionary history of the species. And they make the theological boundary between inside and outside the covenant relationship visible and meaningful: Adam and Eve were uniquely constituted

by God within the garden for a specific covenantal purpose, while other humans existed outside that covenant space.

The Questions Swamidass Leaves Open

Swamidass himself is careful to note that his proposal is a scientific hypothesis about what is possible, not a theological prescription about what must be believed. He demonstrates that traditional readings of Adam and Eve are not scientifically excluded. He does not claim to prove they are scientifically required.

Theological questions remain about the moral status of the people outside the garden before Adam and Eve's descendants reached them. What was their relationship to God? Were they accountable before him? How does sin and redemption apply to hominids who lived and died before Adam's descendants interbred with their populations? Swamidass acknowledges these questions and largely leaves them to theologians to work through.

Nevertheless his proposal is the most scientifically sophisticated attempt to show that a historically traditional reading of Adam and Eve is not in conflict with mainstream evolutionary science. His book earned endorsements from scientists who had previously argued that a historical Adam was scientifically impossible, which is itself a remarkable achievement.

Sixteen: The Story of Lilith

One more figure deserves attention because she surfaces regularly in popular culture and occasionally in serious theological discussion, usually in contexts where someone is using her to challenge the biblical account of creation.

The Bible says virtually nothing about Lilith by name. The Hebrew word *lilit* appears once in Isaiah 34:14 in a list of wild creatures inhabiting a desolate wasteland. Most modern translations render it as screech owl or night creature. That is the entire biblical witness, a single word in a passage about divine judgment on Edom.

The developed Lilith narrative comes primarily from medieval Jewish mystical literature, particularly the Alphabet of Ben Sira written somewhere between the seventh and tenth centuries. This is a satirical and often irreverent text that many Jewish scholars themselves do not treat as authoritative religious teaching. What the medieval story says is this: Lilith was Adam's first wife, created simultaneously from the same earth in Genesis 1:27. She refused to be subordinate to Adam, fled the garden, became a demon, and was replaced by Eve. The medieval rabbis invented this narrative to explain the apparent tension between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, the same tension that careful readers notice on their own.

She is creative Jewish midrash, a form of interpretive storytelling that fills gaps in the text with imaginative narrative, never meant to carry the same authority as Scripture. Lilith has been enthusiastically adopted by feminist scholars and popular culture as a symbol of female independence but she is not a biblical figure. The Lilith narrative

directly contradicts the plain reading of Genesis 2, which presents Eve as the first and only woman made for Adam, and Paul's references to Adam and Eve in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2 contain no suggestion of a prior wife whatsoever.

What is genuinely interesting about the Lilith story is not the story itself but why it was invented. The rabbis who constructed it noticed the same textual tension between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 that careful readers notice today and simply answered it with creative fiction rather than literary and theological analysis. Longman answers that same tension by saying the two chapters are not competing chronological accounts but two different theological lenses on the same reality. The medieval rabbis answered it by inventing a first wife. Both are attempts to resolve genuine textual friction. Only one of them is doing it faithfully.

Seventeen: Five Scholars, One Question, No Easy Answers

By this point in the journey five serious scholarly voices have been introduced, each approaching the same questions from a different angle and arriving at genuinely different conclusions. It is worth pausing to map the landscape they together create.

Tremper Longman reads Genesis as ancient Near Eastern theological literature and is willing to accommodate both population genetics and the possibility of other humans alongside Adam. He preserves a historical Adam as covenantal representative but loosens the biological framework considerably. His great virtue is hermeneutical honesty. His vulnerability is that the text keeps pushing back against his accommodations.

John Lennox reads Genesis through the lens of philosophy of science and insists on a singular biological Adam and Eve while accepting deep time and an old earth. He is more conservative than Longman on the Adam question and more skeptical of the population genetics models. His great virtue is philosophical precision. His vulnerability is that he does not fully resolve the genetic diversity problem on a conservative timeline.

William Lane Craig reads Genesis 1 through 11 as mytho-history and insists that Adam was a real historical progenitor of all humanity, placing him nearly a million years ago as a member of *Homo heidelbergensis*. He takes evolution fully on board while preserving a singular historical Adam. His great virtue is philosophical rigor combined with genuine biblical conservatism on the historical Adam. His vulnerability is that his deep time Adam requires reading the biblical genealogies very loosely.

S. Joshua Swamidass reads the genetic evidence through the lens of the distinction between genetic and genealogical ancestry, demonstrating that a real Adam and Eve created a few thousand years ago alongside other evolved humans is fully consistent with the scientific data. He preserves the plain reading of the text most completely of the four. His great virtue is scientific precision combined with genuine theological conservatism. His vulnerability is that he leaves open significant theological questions about the people outside the garden.

John Walton, who underlies much of the discussion throughout, reads Genesis through the lens of ancient Near Eastern cosmic temple inauguration and argues that Adam and Eve were given a functional role and identity as humanity's representatives before God, an archetypal appointment rather than strictly a biological origination. His great virtue is deep contextual scholarship. His vulnerability is that the rib narrative and the forming from dust resist being reduced to functional appointment.

None of these scholars is a liberal trying to undermine Scripture. All of them are committed believers doing serious work. The fact that they disagree on significant points is not a scandal. It is an honest reflection of the genuine difficulty of the questions. What they agree on is more important than what divides them: Adam was real, the fall was real, sin is universal, Christ is the answer, and the text of Genesis is doing something theologically profound that cannot be reduced to either naive literalism or easy dismissal.

Eighteen: What Remains Standing

After working through all of this, here is what I can hold firmly regardless of the open questions.

Adam was a real historical individual. The fall was a real historical event. Sin entered through a definite act by a definite person. Death followed as a real consequence. Every human being across every culture in every century has confirmed the universality of the human sin condition experientially. The flood was a real catastrophic event whose memory survived in virtually every human culture on earth. Mitochondrial Eve and Y-chromosomal Adam confirm that science keeps finding its way back to single human origin points. The most recent common ancestor of all living humans lived just a few thousand years ago, placing that ancestor within the timeframe of the biblical narrative. Swamidass has demonstrated that a real Adam and Eve created a few thousand years ago alongside other humans is fully consistent with the genetic evidence when genealogical rather than genetic ancestry is the relevant category. Craig has demonstrated that a historical Adam who was the genuine progenitor of humanity is compatible with evolutionary science if placed in deep time. Lennox has demonstrated that the assumptions embedded in population genetics models deserve philosophical scrutiny. Christ's work as the second Adam is not undermined by uncertainty about the biological mechanism of the first Adam's origins. Paul's argument in Romans 5 stands because it is a covenantal and legal argument, not a genetic one. The image of God in humanity is real, unique, and non-negotiable. God breathed neshamah into Adam, not biological air from biological lungs, but his own divine life-presence, directly and personally imparted in a way no other creature in Genesis received. Lilith is not a biblical figure.

What remains genuinely open is the precise biological mechanism by which Adam came to be, the exact relationship between Adam and other humans who may have existed alongside him, how universal sin spread across the species mechanically, and the precise relationship between the Genesis chronology and the deep time the physical evidence

suggests. These are real questions without clean consensus even among faithful evangelical scholars.

Nineteen: What This Journey Has Done to Me

I began this journey with my theology nailed down in ways that were easy to explain, especially when talking to the men at the shelter. A clear timeline, a literal six days, a global flood, two original humans from whom all people descend. Clean. Simple. Defensible in a ten minute conversation.

It started when Jaishee asked me questions in front of mammoth bones that I could not cleanly answer. I have been teaching Genesis for twenty-five years and the questions of a curious wife in a museum stopped me cold. That is not a failure. That is the right kind of moment. It means the world was pushing back on my assumptions honestly and I was willing to feel the push.

I no longer have that clean simplicity. What I have instead is something I think is more durable. A faith that has looked at the hard questions directly and did not collapse. The core held. Adam was real. The fall was real. Sin is real and universal. Christ is the answer to a real problem. Every culture on earth remembers a catastrophic flood. Science keeps finding its way back to single ancestral origin points. The most recent common ancestor of all living humans converges within the timeframe of the biblical story. Swamidass shows the science does not exclude a traditional Adam. Craig shows a historical progenitor Adam is compatible with evolution. Lennox shows the philosophical assumptions in the genetic models are not beyond scrutiny. And the text itself, when read carefully, keeps insisting on things that no single framework fully contains.

The unresolved questions are real too and I am not going to pretend otherwise. Five serious scholars reading the same evidence reach genuinely different conclusions on significant points. That is not a reason for despair. It is a reason for humility, continued inquiry, and the recognition that we are dealing with questions at the boundary of what human knowledge can currently reach.

But I have come to believe that unresolved tension at the edges of our understanding is not a sign of weak faith. It is a sign that we are taking both God's Word and God's world seriously, which is exactly what faithful reading requires. The God who formed man from dust and breathed his own life into his face is the same God who put mammoth bones in the earth for us to find. He is not threatened by our questions. He put the questions there.

Mammoth bones sent me deeper into Genesis. Every culture's flood memory sent me back to Noah. Mitochondrial Eve sent me back to Genesis 2. The population bottleneck sent me back to federal headship and Romans 5. The most recent common ancestor finding sent me back to the table of nations in Genesis 10 and Paul's sermon in Athens. Swamidass sent me back to the distinction between genealogical and genetic ancestry and showed me the science does not require abandoning Adam. Craig sent me back to the genre of mytho-history and showed me that a historical progenitor Adam is

philosophically defensible. Darwin sent me back to Augustine. Longman sent me back to the text itself. Lennox reminded me that scientific assumptions deserve the same scrutiny we apply to theological ones. And Jaishee's questions in front of those mammoth bones started the whole thing.

That is not confusion. That is revelation working through curiosity. And I am grateful for every mammoth bone, and for a wife who asks good questions.

Bobby Joseph

A theological reflection prompted by the Waco Mammoth National Monument, Tremper Longman III's commentary on Genesis, John Lennox's Seven Days That Divide the World, William Lane Craig's In Quest of the Historical Adam, S. Joshua Swamidass's The Genealogical Adam and Eve, Rohde, Olson and Chang's 2004 Nature paper on human common ancestry, and twenty years of Biblical Literacy teaching by Mark Lanier at Champion Forest Baptist Church.