

Craig, William Lane. *In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. 380 pp. + 21 pp. (back matter).

William Lane Craig is Professor of Philosophy at Houston Baptist University. Craig studied at Wheaton College for his undergraduate degree and earned master's degrees in both Church History and Philosophy of Religion at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He holds a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Birmingham, England, and a Doctor of Theology from Universität München, Germany. He is a prolific author of journal articles and works on apologetics.

In his latest book, *In Quest of the Historical Adam*, Craig seeks to harmonize Scripture and science regarding the existence of Adam. Craig sets out to “pursue the hermeneutical task first and independently of an examination of scientific evidence pertinent to human origins” (20). But throughout the book he unquestionably adopts the evolutionary theory of origins, which requires him to deny Genesis 1–11 as literal history. Craig holds that Genesis is “mytho-history.” It is history in that it contains fragments of truth, but whereas it is myth, it is not to be understood literally. Craig does believe that Adam and Eve existed but not in the near past.

Craig arranges the book into four parts. Part 1 discusses the importance of the historical Adam. Part 2 examines the biblical data concerning the historical Adam. Part 4 examines the scientific evidence relative to the historical Adam. In Part 4 Craig brings together his research and draws his conclusions.

In Part 1 Craig notes that traditional theologians hold that the historicity of Adam is a vital part of hamartiology, but he maintains that making “the doctrine of sin a necessary condition of the doctrine of atonement is, however, an overreach” (5). He advocates that “Christianity need not embrace the traditional doctrine of original sin but may content itself with affirming the universal wrongdoing of human beings and their inability to save themselves” (6). He agrees with Peter Enns that Paul’s interpretation is for theological purposes and goes beyond a “plain reading” of the story (6). Craig does argue that because Christ believed in an historical Adam, “denial of the historical Adam threatens to undo the deity of Christ and thus to destroy orthodox Christian faith” (8).

Craig says that while the authors of Scripture may have believed in a literal reading of Genesis 1–11 (six-day creation, worldwide flood, etc.), “we are not committed to the truthfulness of the author’s personal beliefs” (10). He holds that young earth creationism’s hermeneutic is “eminently plausible,” but its science is “wildly implausible” and “places Genesis into massive conflict with mainstream science, not to mention history and linguistics” (13).

According to Craig, the narratives of Adam and Eve must be read “within the context of the *primaeval* history of Gen 1–11” and “the *primaeval* history within its ANE cultural context” (31). This leads Craig to consider Mesopotamian and Egyptian myths more closely to see how Genesis 1–11 conforms to the nature of ANE myths.

In Part 2 Craig explores the nature of myth. He adopts the approach that myths are “stories that expressed the faith and worldview of a people and so would have much to say about their view of origins” (36n1). Craig labels Genesis 1–11 as *primaeval* history and 12–50 as Israel’s history. He dismisses the *tôlādôt* formulae (“these are the generations of”) that argue against such a divide (132–

137). He agrees that the formulae constitute a timeline, but he holds that it does not determine the structure of the book (47–48). Relying on tradition criticism, he holds the text of “Gen 1–11 has a different history of tradition than Gen 12–50 and the rest of the Pentateuch” (52). And this tradition was changed and adapted over hundreds of years before it was written down. Craig concludes that because Genesis 1–11 is a sacred narrative meant to be believed by its target audience with a deity as a main character and set in a *primaeval* age, it therefore has the characteristics of myths of origination (64). This *primaeval* narrative lays the “foundations of Israel’s worldview” (65).

Craig calls the anthropomorphisms of God’s forming man with dirt, breathing into man, and strolling in the cool of the day as “incoherence” and “storyteller’s art, not serious theology” (102). Perhaps one unique contribution to the discussion is Craig’s concept of *fantastic elements*—elements that “if taken literally, are so extraordinary as to be palpably false” (104–105). The original audience might have believed them to be true, “but in light of our increased knowledge of the world,” we do not (106). Craig holds that six-day creation (109–110), original vegetarianism (111), the talking snake (111–113), the trees of life and of the knowledge of good and evil (113), the rivers of Eden (113ff), the Cherubim (119), and even nonmiraculous elements in the narratives are *fantastic* and therefore “palpably false” (131).

Craig returns to the *tôladôt* formulae and holds that they “help order the *primaeval* narratives chronologically” (136), but chronology does not necessarily “indicate a historical interest” (136). He continues, “It is important not to confuse an interest in history with historicity” (137). He concludes that the genealogies evince “a historical interest but not relating straightforward history” (151).

In Craig’s mind, Genesis 1–11 with its *fantastic* elements is myth and with its genealogical records it is history. He holds that “myth is combined with history” (157) and labels it as “mytho-history.” Craig then wrestles with the truthfulness of myth. In his mind, “the language of myth is figurative and therefore need not be taken literally” (198). But there are fundamental truths found in Genesis 1–11, and “such truths do not depend on reading the narratives literalistically” (202).

When Craig approaches the references to Adam in the NT, he appeals to “truth-in-a-story.” Craig says that it is essential to determine whether the references to Adam “assert truths or merely truths-in-the-stories-of-Genesis” (207). He says that when Jesus is discussing marriage and refers to Adam and Eve, Jesus is “not asserting its historicity” (221). In other words, Jesus is not confirming that it is true in history, but that it is true-in-the-story. Craig holds that Paul on the other hand, does “assert a historical Adam (224ff, 241f), but the result of Adam’s sin was only spiritual death and not physical death (235). Adam and Eve were mortal and required the tree of life to be rejuvenated (236).

In Part 3 Craig seeks to determine when Adam lived. He turns to “modern science” because of “the mythical nature of the *primaeval* history of Gen 1–11” (245). Craig accepts the evolutionary process without question. Within the evolutionary framework, he details various pre-human ancestors. He wrestles with determining what it is to be human. He concludes, “Human beings, in the full sense of organisms anatomically similar to ourselves and capable of abstract thought; deep planning; behavioral, economic, and technological innovativeness; and symbolic behavior, therefore originated on this planet sometime between the Lower and Middle Paleolithic” (264). After a lengthy analysis of

palaeoneurology and archaeology, he concludes that “Adam, then, may be plausibly identified as a member of *Homo heidelbergensis*, living perhaps >750 kya” (336).

In Part 4 Craig asserts that “Adam and Eve emerged from a wider population of hominins” (376). But their “contemporaries were not human and therefore not in the image of God” (376). The change from hominin to human required biological and spiritual changes that were “perhaps divinely caused” (376). The cognitive capacity of the brain was most likely increased and would “equip the organism with the neurological structure to support a rational soul” (377). Out of several thousand hominins, God chose Adam and Eve. They sinned and brought on spiritual death.

Although Craig does hold to a historical Adam and Eve, his position has several serious flaws. First, Craig repeatedly refers to modern science as defining the factual history of human origins. But “science” is a method and not a conclusion. Scientists, not *science*, draw conclusions about the past. Furthermore, the historicity of any event does not have to be confirmed by the scientific method. The scientific method focuses on repeatable events and not historical events.

Second, Craig’s view of Genesis 1–11 as mytho-history does not reflect the language or content of the text. The waw-consecutive and other elements show that the author wrote it as historical narrative.

Third, Craig marks any elements in Genesis 1–11 that fall outside of what science can explain as *fantastic*. Other miracles throughout Scripture exist that are far more *fantastic* than those found in Genesis (i.e., resurrection from the dead). With this logic, what is to stop someone from going past Genesis 11 and declaring everything in Scripture as *fantastic*?

Fourth, if an account is true, truth-in-story and truth are equivalent. Craig does not prove that Jesus thought of the creation account as non-literal history when he referred to the foundation of marriage. There are no indicators in the NT that any of the authors saw Genesis as anything other than literal history.

Fifth, Craig’s view that Adam’s sin brought about only spiritual death does not align with 1 Corinthians 15. Paul clearly refers to physical death with a physical resurrection (1 Cor 15:21). Paul also sees physical death as the “last enemy to be destroyed” (1 Cor 15:26), which is part of Christ’s work in redeeming God’s creation.

My brief summaries of each part and the rebuttals do not adequately cover the overwhelming amount of detail that Craig delves into regarding ANE myths, palaeoneurology, and ancient archaeology. I was disappointed that Craig so quickly dismisses the effects of the Fall as merely part of the evolutionary process. Concerning the creation/Fall/redemption narrative of Scripture, Craig downplays all three. His book provides an excellent example of what lengths theistic evolutionists will go to accommodate Scripture to modern pseudoscience.

James H. Tuck Jr.

PhD, Theological Studies | Independent Contributor