

Response to Dick Fischer

My understanding of Fischer's position is that he believes that the biblical, archaeological, and scientific evidence leads to an obvious conclusion that Adam was a Neolithic human, living among a large and widely dispersed population of other humans, whom God selected as the progenitor of the Jews (or, more broadly, of Semitic people). The early church was mistaken in their belief that the Genesis account was not just a description of the origin of the Jews, but of all humanity. He does not argue for a liberal interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis that assigns it to the realm of myth, but does believe it to be grossly misinterpreted as describing the history of all humans. His letter leaves the question of the origin of the soul and how Adam's sin relates to non-Jews unaddressed.

The model proposed in "Genetics, the Nephilim, and the Historicity of Adam" is not dependent on a particular date in the past, so the only substantive difference with Fischer's understanding is whether Adam should be thought of as the father of only Semites, or an earlier father of all humanity. I will briefly compare the strengths of the two positions from genetic, archaeological, and biblical perspectives.

1. Genetics: The proposed model and Fischer's are equally plausible. Both have Adam and Eve existing among other hominids/humans with interbreeding among their offspring. A relatively recent common ancestor of Semitic peoples and an older common ancestor of all humans are supported by population genetics.

2. Archaeology: The descriptions in the first eleven chapters of Genesis do indeed fit within the period of recorded history from the Ancient Near East, as Fischer argues. However, the unique manner in which the human experience is recorded in these first chapters has led some to refer to it as proto-history, wherein theologians differ

on whether the geography and industry represent the period in which the events occurred, or the period in which the history was written. In the latter case, modernized language may be used to represent events from a more distant past. The common-ancestor-of-all model does not require this to be the case, but does allow for the possibility.

3. Bible: On this point, I will argue that the common-ancestor-of-all model requires less biblical massaging. The verses of greatest theological concern are found in Romans 5 (which Fischer did not mention), where Paul makes a bold claim that sin and death came to all men through one man, Adam. If Paul were addressing the church in Jerusalem, one might reasonably argue he was referring only to Jewish history, but he was writing to the church in Rome, populated principally by Gentile believers. If early Gentile believers mistakenly interpreted Adam to be their own forefather, as Fischer says, the source of the error must be pinned on Paul. Indeed, some theologians, such as Denis Lamoureux, assert that Paul was mistaken in his own view of Adam. The only alternative is a theological construct that allows a host of pre-existing and co-existing humans to have lived and died without the imputation of sin until the arrival of an isolated proto-Semite (or tribe, if one wishes to invoke the notion of federal headship).

Finally, there is an interesting dichotomy between the two argued views. (It is not a defense of either position, but merely a note of interest.) For the common-ancestor-of-all model, I argue for a less word-literal understanding of Genesis 1-11, and a more word-literal understanding of Romans 5. Fischer does the opposite, arguing for a more word-literal interpretation of Genesis, and, at least by implication, a less word-literal understanding of Romans.

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