



SCIENCE & BIBLICAL STUDIES

ADAM AND THE GENOME: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science by Dennis R. Venema and Scot McKnight. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2017. xii + 225 pages. Paperback; \$19.99. ISBN 9781587433948.

The emergence of a number of books on the so-called historical Adam in evangelical Christian circles during the last decade demonstrates how conservative Protestants in particular are grappling with important issues across the theological spectrum in the light of contemporary science. The advantage of this volume is that we are treated to a way beyond “the Bible or science” impasse by the joint efforts of a biologist (Venema) and a biblical scholar (McKnight), both of whom have impeccable scientific/scholarly and evangelical credentials: Venema with a PhD in biology from the University of British Columbia and a longtime professor of biology at Trinity Western University in Vancouver, British Columbia; McKnight with a PhD in New Testament from the University of Nottingham and with three decades of service at evangelical or evangelical-friendly institutions in the Chicago area: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, North Park University, and Northern Seminary. Northern Seminary is affiliated with the American Baptist Convention (ABC), but it is more evangelically aligned than other ABC seminaries.

The first four chapters are biological; the latter four are biblical. Venema’s contributions are to introduce evangelicals to the scientific ideas related to human origins. He first explains what it means to say that evolution is a scientific theory, helping evangelicals to understand that theory in a scientific context does not signify the merely hypothetical. He then explicates genomic science, in particular, the science of population genetics and its role in helping us understand the evolution and speciation of *Homo sapiens*. Next, he elucidates the early history of hominids from a genomic perspective, showing how the interbreeding of humans leaving Africa approximately 50,000 years ago with Neanderthals (in what is now the European region) and with members of the Denisovan species (in the Asian sphere, from DNA found in the Denisova Cave in the mountains of Siberia) have produced the basic racial variations we now associate with Africa, Europe, and Asia/Oceania. Venema also shows how all members of the human family today can be descendants of the so-called Mitochondrial Eve with respect to their mitochondrial genome and DNA, yet have 10,000 or more other ancestors vis-à-vis their chromosomal DNA. Thus, he exposes the challenges that population genetics and research on the genome present to

both young earth creationist and intelligent design advocates, addressing specifically the arguments of Michael Behe (whose ideas Venema embraced at one point in his studies as a young and aspiring biologist) and Stephen Meyer, both of whom represent God-of-the-gaps approaches that have waylaid prior apologetic endeavors. Some of the terrain is dense, but evangelical Christians interested in understanding better the science of evolutionary genomics will be richly rewarded for their patience.

McKnight’s part of the book proceeds with the assumption that science is coherent and plausible, and that scripture is dependable and authoritative. How then can believers subordinated to the Bible square its message with our evolving understanding of human origins, including our relationship with other species that share 95% of our DNA? The four-stranded response begins. First, McKnight lays out basic hermeneutical principles of respect for the distinctiveness of ancient voices, honesty with current knowledge, sensitivity to students of science, and the primacy of scripture. Second, he moves to clarify how the ancient biblical authors, especially of Genesis, presented not a *historical Adam* (that has emerged in our modern scientific milieu) but a literary and genealogical perspective. Third, he traces the reception history of the Genesis narrative in Jewish tradition that produced interpretations of Adam as moral archetype (Sirach), as immortal/transhistorical figure (Wisdom of Solomon), as philosophical Logos (Philo), as exemplar of Torah observance (*Jubilees*), as Roman figurehead (Josephus), as fallen creature (Ezra 4), and as representative of all humankind (Baruch 2), all of which combined to produce Adam as “the paradigm or prototype or archetype of the choice between the path of obedience and that of disobedience” (p. 169). Finally, he concludes with a discussion of how this legacy of Adamic understandings illuminates St. Paul’s retrieval of the literary and genealogical Adam of the inherited biblical traditions in a moral, exemplary, and archetypal direction in order to accentuate Jesus’s universal relevance. By the end of the book, the argument is clear: current debates about any historical Adam are fraught with modern scientific (biological and increasingly genetic) presuppositions that are not only foreign to the biblical world but are intrusive upon a faithful approach to the sacred text considered in its original context.

As a systematician, I come away from this book more convinced than ever before that the idea that God might have picked out *Homo sapiens* from among other creaturely species (with other hominids eventually dying out) is consistent with how divine election has been shown to work (e.g., choosing Israel

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from among the nations). True, the authors recognize that there is the slenderest thread of support for such a view within Genesis itself—perhaps the lone clue being that Cain’s wife came from somewhere else—but the fact that this question was not one the biblical author(s) would have asked is precisely the point of the arc of *Adam and the Genome*. If the broad lines of the way forward presented in this book are deemed cogent, then the implications will be most impactful for those traditions for which notions of original sin/guilt remain prevalent, especially Reformation-oriented traditions. (I am thinking, for instance, of those associated with the churches represented by many contributors to Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, eds., *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*; Baker Academic, 2014.) The big question will then be hermeneutical: to what degree is scriptural interpretation dependent on ecclesially developed frames of reference and what might it mean for ecclesial traditions that take *sola scriptura* seriously to wrestle with the Bible in a late modern world quite removed from the (sixteenth century and later) polemics that precipitated formation and nurtured development of their traditions initially?

On the science side, this book will no doubt motivate young earth creationists to master especially the sciences of population genetics, which will be an interesting development to follow. Further, Christian and evangelical intelligent design theorists (not all ID proponents are either Christian or evangelical) should surely reconsider how Venema’s personal confession of “evolution as God’s grand design for creating life” (p. 90) and McKnight’s position of “planned evolution” (p. 96)—both of which also go by other names (theistic evolution and evolutionary creationism, for example)—might be allies as opposed to opponents in the overall theological task of reconciling science and scripture. For the foreseeable future, this book is a significant intervention in the convoluted space where modern science and biblical faithfulness meet, and I recommend it as a text for evangelical colleges and universities to be used not only in programs in the natural sciences but also in worldview, Bible, and theology courses.

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Along with all their other contributions, many members of ASA and CSCA publish important works. As space permits, *PSCF* plans to list recently published books and peer-reviewed articles related to the intersection of science and Christian faith that are written by our members and brought to our attention. For us to consider such works, please write to patrick.franklin@prov.ca.



SCIENCE AND RELIGION

TOUCHING THE FACE OF THE COSMOS: On the Intersection of Space Travel and Religion by Paul Levinson and Michael Waltemathe, eds. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016. 280 pages. Paperback; \$19.95. ISBN: 9780823272112.

Space exploration—human spaceflight in particular—has received much attention recently. New generations of telescopes promise ever more discoveries that elucidate the origin, structure, and fate of the universe. The rise of the commercial spaceflight industry leads to the hope that all sorts of people, not just professional astronauts, will eventually be able to travel to space. Elon Musk, founder of SpaceX, has ambitious plans to colonize Mars, and NASA’s own plans call for a human expedition to Mars in the 2030s. Recent movies and television programs have contributed to this surge of interest: *The Martian*, *Interstellar*, *Gravity*, and the *National Geographic* series *Mars*. This interest is not misplaced, for we have never been closer to making space flight a reality for thousands, to making observations that elucidate the state of the universe soon after the Big Bang, and to leaving Earth for extended stays.

In this milieu, it is perhaps natural to wonder if there is a “cosmic” meaning to space exploration. Space is, after all, historically the realm of the heavens, the home of God, the place to where we lift our hearts in prayer, the source of manna from heaven. One cannot contemplate the immensity of the times and distances inherent to space exploration without a sense of awe and wonder, and these almost inevitably bring one to thoughts of ultimate meaning, God, and religion. Thus there would appear to be a strong natural connection between space exploration and religion. Or is there?

In the June 2015 issue of this journal, I reviewed the book *To Touch the Face of God: The Sacred, the Profane, and the American Space Program, 1957–1975*, by Kendrick Oliver; this is another book that feels almost obligated to find a connection between space and religion. Nevertheless, it reached the overall conclusion that, despite expectations, in fact there is not a strong and compelling connection between space and religion. Certainly there are people who see intimations of God in the enormity of creation, and many religious scientists see science and exploration as forms of worship that attempt to fathom God’s thoughts, as Einstein put it. But there is little or no evidence of an overall religious motivation for space exploration, of a sense that those involved experience religious conversions or insights, or that space might bring us closer to God. Within this broad envelope, however,