Adam and Eve in Christian Orthodoxy:

Evaluating Theological Models and Their Boundaries

D. Gene Williams Jr., PhD

Defend the Word Ministries

NorthPointe Church

ABSTRACT

This paper conducts an examination of major theological interpretations of Adam and Eve within Christian orthodoxy, delineating them from heretical perspectives. Models range from historical-literal views of Adam and Eve as sole progenitors to archetypal-representative frameworks within broader populations, yet orthodoxy consistently affirms the Fall's reality, sin's human origin, and redemption through Christ. Conversely, Pelagianism, Gnosticism, radical naturalism, and purely mythological readings reject these essentials, falling outside orthodox bounds. Through detailed biblical exegesis, historical theology, and anthropological synthesis, this study clarifies faithful belief's boundaries, proposing a Covenantal Image-Bearing Model situating Adam and Eve ~70,000 years ago in the Last Ice Age Persian Gulf. This model integrates Scripture with science, upholding orthodoxy's core: a historical Fall, the *Imago Dei* as spiritual capacity, universal sin, and Christ's atonement. The analysis offers a robust contribution to theological anthropology, bridging ancient faith and modern inquiry.

I. INTRODUCTION

The narrative of Adam and Eve, enshrined in Genesis 1–3, stands as a theological cornerstone within Christian doctrine, shaping foundational understandings of sin, salvation, human identity, and God's redemptive purpose for creation. From the earliest reflections of church fathers such as Irenaeus and Augustine, through the medieval synthesis of Thomas Aquinas, to the Reformation insights of Luther and Calvin, and into the systematic theology of the modern era, Adam and Eve have been pivotal figures in the Christian imagination.[1] Their story is not a mere historical footnote but the opening act in a divine drama that culminates in the person and work of Jesus Christ, a narrative arc that spans from the dust of Eden to the glory of the eschaton. Yet the interpretation of this narrative has never been uniform, and contemporary pressures—scientific discoveries about human antiquity, literary analyses situating Genesis within ancient Near Eastern contexts, and philosophical shifts toward materialistic naturalism—have intensified debates over how to faithfully understand Adam and Eve within the bounds of orthodoxy.

Orthodox Christianity, in its rich theological heritage, accommodates a spectrum of interpretive models concerning Adam and Eve's nature and role. Some theologians, adhering to a historical-literal reading, uphold them as the sole biological progenitors of all humanity, tracing every human lineage back to their creation from dust and rib as

[1] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 5.16.2, 544; Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1993), 14.1, 442.

recounted in Genesis 2:7 and 2:21–22.[2] Others, responding to genetic and archaeological evidence suggesting a broader ancestral population, propose that Adam and Eve were historical figures chosen by God to serve as covenantal representatives within a pre-existing human community, a view that aligns with the federal headship theology articulated by Paul in Romans 5.[3] This diversity reflects the depth and adaptability of Christian thought, yet it is not without boundaries. Perspectives that deny their historicity outright—reducing them to myth—or reject the doctrine of original sin as a theological construct, or attribute human origins solely to natural processes devoid of divine intent, transgress the limits of orthodoxy, undermining the coherence of the biblical storyline from creation to redemption.

The purpose of this paper is threefold: first, to survey the major orthodox models of Adam and Eve with rigorous biblical exegesis, historical analysis, and theological reflection; second, to identify and critique perspectives that fall outside these boundaries as heretical, drawing on church tradition and scriptural authority; and third, to propose a novel Covenantal Image-Bearing Model that situates Adam and Eve ~70,000 years ago during the Last Ice Age. This model, grounded in Psalm 19's dual revelation—the Book of Nature declaring God's glory and the Book of Scripture revealing His law—posits that God imparted the *Imago Dei*, a spiritual capacity encompassing moral awareness and covenantal responsibility, to Adam and Eve, whether through de novo creation or

[2] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Dallas: Word Books, 1987), 59–60.

[3] John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 88–89.

selection from an existing Homo sapiens population.[4] Situated in the Persian Gulf region—then a fertile valley above sea level due to glacial water storage—this model integrates scientific timelines with theological imperatives, preserving orthodoxy's essential doctrines: a real Fall, the *Imago Dei*, universal sin, and Christ's redemptive necessity.

A critical distinction underpins this study: while later biblical events—such as Noah's flood (potentially dated to ~5600 BC based on regional flood evidence), the emergence of written language around 3400 BC in Mesopotamia, or the patriarchal era of Abraham—often fall within a 6,000–10,000-year window, this timeframe need not constrain Adam and Eve's origin.[5] Instead, the Covenantal Model views this period as marking significant covenantal milestones within a much deeper human history, allowing for an ancient origin that aligns with anthropological data, such as the *behavioral modernity* shift ~70,000 years ago, while maintaining the narrative continuity from Genesis to Revelation. This paper thus offers a robust, expansive exploration, eschewing conciseness for depth, contributing a substantive theological anthropology that bridges ancient faith with modern inquiry.

II. Criteria for Orthodoxy

For a theological model of Adam and Eve to reside within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy, it must align with a set of core doctrines distilled from the authoritative

[4] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 147–148.

[5] Richard S. Hess, The Old Testament: A Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 94–96.

witness of Scripture and affirmed through centuries of church tradition. These criteria provide a robust framework that permits interpretive flexibility—whether concerning the precise mechanics of their creation, their biological relationship to humanity, or their symbolic significance within the biblical narrative—but they demand an unwavering commitment to specific theological affirmations that form the bedrock of faithful Christian belief.

The first and most foundational criterion is the reality of the Fall as a historical event. Genesis 3 narrates the pivotal moment when Adam and Eve, tempted by the serpent, disobeyed God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thereby introducing sin into the human condition.[6] This act precipitated a profound rupture with God, described in Scripture as spiritual death—a state of alienation, shame, and moral corruption that later manifests in physical mortality and divine judgment. Paul's theological exposition in Romans 5:12–21 explicates this causal link: "*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.*"[7] Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, he contrasts Adam's trespass with Christ's redemptive act: "*For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.*"[8] The Fall is not a mere allegory but a concrete event with universal consequences, and denying its historicity—whether by

[6] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 50–52.

[7] Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 315–317.

[8] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1226–1228.

reducing Genesis to myth or attributing sin to natural evolution—severs the causal connection between Adam's disobedience and Christ's atonement, rendering the latter theologically incoherent. Orthodoxy thus demands that any model affirm a real, historical Fall as the origin of human sinfulness.

The second criterion is the doctrine of the *Imago Dei*, the affirmation that humanity uniquely bears God's image and likeness, as declared in Genesis 1:26–27: "*Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*"[9] This *Imago Dei*, as I explore extensively in my paper "*What It Means to Be the Image of God: A Theological and Functional Perspective,*" transcends mere biological form, encompassing spiritual capacities such as rationality, moral discernment, and relational communion with God, alongside a functional vocation to exercise dominion over creation. The Hebrew terms tselem (image) and demut (likeness) suggest both an ontological reality—humanity reflecting God's communicable attributes—and a representational role, with the preposition בְּ (b') potentially translated as "*as*" rather than "*in,*" emphasizing humanity's calling to act as God's stewards.[10] This divine imprint sets humanity apart from the animal kingdom and the broader natural order, conferring intrinsic dignity and purpose. Any theological perspective that equates humans with animals or denies this unique status—such as radical naturalism, which sees humanity as a product of undirected processes—fails to meet orthodoxy's standard, stripping away the theological foundation for human worth and responsibility.

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[9] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 29–31.

[10] Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 45–47.

Third, orthodoxy requires the affirmation of the universality of sin, the doctrine that all humans inherit a fallen nature from Adam, not merely a propensity to sin but a pervasive condition that necessitates divine grace for restoration. Romans 5:12 establishes this: "*Death spread to all men because all sinned,*" a truth rooted in Adam's act and affirmed across Scripture.[11] The early church decisively rejected Pelagianism, which posited that humans are born in a neutral state capable of achieving righteousness without grace, as heretical at councils such as Carthage in 418 CE.[12] Whether understood through federal headship—Adam as humanity's representative—or through natural descent, orthodoxy insists that sin's reach is total, affecting every individual from birth. Models that deny this inherited condition, framing sin as solely an individual choice without a corporate origin, fracture the soteriological framework that undergirds the necessity of Christ's redemptive work.

Finally, the necessity of Christ's redemption stands as the capstone criterion. The New Testament presents Jesus as the "*second Adam,*" whose obedience reverses the curse initiated by the first. Romans 5:18–19 declares, "*As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men,*" while 1 Corinthians 15:22 adds, "*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*"[13] In Colossians 1:15, Paul describes Christ as "*the image of the invisible God,*" the perfect embodiment of what Adam was called to be, restoring humanity's marred *Imago*

[11] Moo, *Romans*, 320–322.

[12] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (London: Continuum, 2000), 357–359.

[13] Moo, *Romans*, 337–339.

Dei through His life, death, and resurrection.[14] This typological connection ensures the gospel's universal scope: sin entered the world through one man's disobedience, and salvation comes through another's righteousness. Any theology that severs this link—whether by denying Adam's historical role or diminishing Christ's necessity as the sole mediator of redemption—undermines the cosmic and personal reach of the gospel message.

III. THEOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

One of the most pressing challenges in contemporary theology is reconciling the Genesis account of Adam and Eve with the expansive timeline and material evidence uncovered by anthropological and scientific inquiry. A robust synthesis emerges when we distinguish between biological life and spiritual life, and between genetic humanity and theological humanity, allowing us to honor both the authoritative witness of Scripture and the observable data of human history. This framework provides a solid foundation for the orthodox models explored later, integrating theological depth with anthropological breadth.

Paul's statement in Romans 5:12— "*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned*"— is often taken to mean that Adam and Eve were the sole biological ancestors of humanity, with "*death*" equated to physical mortality.[15] Scholars like Hugh Ross contend

[14] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 57–59.

[15] Moo, *Romans*, 315–317

that Adam's unique creation and Fall account for humanity's genetic unity and moral state, viewing spiritual separation from God as the primary consequence of the Fall, followed by physical death as a later outcome. Yet, Scripture suggests that "*death*" refers primarily to a spiritual condition—alienation from God, moral corruption, and loss of covenantal communion—with physical death as a secondary result. In Genesis 2:17, God warns Adam, "*In the day you eat of it you shall surely die*," but Genesis 5:5 records Adam living 930 years afterward.[16] The immediate consequences—shame (Genesis 3:7), fear (Genesis 3:10), and expulsion from Eden (Genesis 3:23–24)—highlight spiritual death as the primary effect, echoed in Ephesians 2:1: "*You were dead in your trespasses and sins,*" despite physical life. Thus, Romans 5:12 primarily addresses the onset of spiritual death through Adam's sin, which later manifests in physical decay and divine judgment, providing a theological framework for engaging anthropological evidence.

Anthropologically, the emergence of Homo sapiens dates back approximately 300,000 years, as evidenced by fossils from Jebel Irhoud, Morocco, which display modern cranial features indicative of our species' anatomical origins.[17]

However, a significant behavioral shift occurs ~70,000 years ago, often termed "*behavioral modernity,*" marked by the appearance of symbolic art (e.g., ochre engravings at Blombos Cave, South Africa), ritual burials (e.g., Qafzeh, Israel), and

[16] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 66–68.

[17] Ian Tattersall, *The Strange Case of the Rickety Cossack: And Other Cautionary Tales from Human Evolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 185–187.

complex trade networks across regions.[18] This shift, occurring during the Last Ice Age, may correspond to a divine intervention: God imparting the *Imago Dei* to Adam and Eve, either through a de novo act of creation as described in Genesis 2:7— "*Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature*"— or by selecting them from this existing Homo sapiens population.[19] As I argue in "*What It Means to Be the Image of God,*" the *Imago Dei* is not a biological trait but a spiritual capacity—encompassing rationality, moral awareness, relational communion with God, and a functional vocation to steward creation—conferred uniquely upon humanity.[20] Pre-Adamic Homo sapiens, while biologically modern and capable of intelligence, tool use, and social organization, may not have been spiritually alive in the biblical sense until this transformative moment, setting Adam and Eve apart as the first covenantal humans endowed with God's image.

The ~70,000 BC placement of Adam and Eve aligns with the onset of behavioral modernity and the first major migration wave into Asia ~60,000 BC, as evidenced by fossils from Niah Cave, Malaysia, and Tam Pa Ling, Laos. This migration facilitated the rapid genealogical spread of their covenantal lineage, as their descendants interbred with pre-Adamic populations, achieving universal ancestry by the first century AD.

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[18] Christopher S. Henshilwood and Francesco d'Errico, "*The Origins of Symbolism,*" in *Homo Symbolicus: The Dawn of Language, Imagination and Spirituality*, ed. Christopher S. Henshilwood and Francesco d'Errico (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2011), 75–78.

[19] Walton, *Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 35–37.

[20] D. Gene Williams Jr., *What It Means to Be the Image of God: A Theological and Functional Perspective,* accessed April 2025, https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr; https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html.

The transmission of spiritual death from Adam and Eve to all humanity does not require genetic inheritance but can occur through genealogical descent, as proposed by S. Joshua Swamidass in his Genealogical Adam and Eve (GAE) model.[21] Swamidass introduces "*ghost DNA*," where ancestors leave no detectable genetic trace in modern populations yet remain part of our genealogical family tree. Population models show that a single couple, living tens of thousands of years ago, could become universal genealogical ancestors of humanity by the time of Jesus through interbreeding with other populations, accelerated by migration, genetic drift, and cultural practices like Levirate marriage.

In Levirate marriage, a man marries his deceased brother's widow to preserve the family line (e.g., Deut. 25:5–6), ensuring genealogical continuity even without direct genetic contribution, as seen in the ancestry of Jesus (Matt. 1:1–17).[22] In this framework, Adam and Eve's sin introduced spiritual death, which spread not through DNA but through their covenantal lineage and influence, reaching every individual by the first century AD. This aligns with Genesis 5:3—"*When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image*"—and Genesis 9:6— "*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image*"—affirming that the *Imago Dei* and fallen nature persist universally across humanity.[23]

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[21] S. Joshua Swamidass, *The Genealogical Adam and Eve: The Surprising Science of Universal Ancestry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 103–106

[22] Swamidass, *Genealogical Adam and Eve*, 120–123.

[23] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 76–78.

This theological and anthropological synthesis situates Adam and Eve in a plausible historical context: the Persian Gulf valley during the Last Ice Age, ~70,000 years ago. At that time, global sea levels were 50–80 meters lower due to water locked in glaciers, rendering the Gulf a fertile riverine oasis—potentially fed by the Tigris, Euphrates, and other rivers—above sea level, as proposed by Hugh Ross as a candidate for Eden.[24] Geological evidence supports this, indicating a lush ecosystem submerged by rising waters between 15,000 and 6000 BC as the Ice Age waned, a flooding event that may have left its mark in ancient memory, preserved through oral tradition until recorded in Genesis.[25] This setting does not contradict the continuity of life elsewhere, as evidenced by ancient clonal systems like the Pando aspen grove in Utah, dated to ~80,000 years, or the 9,500-year-old Old Tjikko spruce in Sweden, suggesting no global cataclysm erased pre-Adamic populations.[26]

This framework robustly preserves the core elements of Christian orthodoxy:

- A historical Adam and Eve as real individuals, whether created or chosen
- The *Imago Dei* as a spiritual and relational status, distinguishing humanity
- The universal spread of spiritual death through Adam's disobedience
- The necessity of Christ's redemption as the second Adam, reversing the Fall

[24] Ross, *Navigating Genesis*, 145–148.

[25] Jeffrey I. Rose, "*New Light on Human Prehistory in the Arabo-Persian Gulf Oasis,*" *Current Anthropology* 51, no. 6 (December 2010): 849–851.

[26] Paul C. Rogers and Darren J. McAvoy, "*Mule Deer Impede Pando's Recovery: Implications for Aspen Resilience from a Single-Genotype Forest,*" *PLOS ONE* 13, no. 10 (October 2018): 3–5.

It respects the inerrancy of Scripture, engages scientific data without capitulation, and avoids imposing modern categories onto ancient texts, providing a comprehensive foundation for the orthodox models that follow.

IV. CLARIFYING "*ALONE*" AND "*MOTHER OF ALL THE LIVING*"

Two verses frequently cited to argue that Adam and Eve were the sole biological progenitors of humanity—Genesis 2:18 ("*It is not good that the man should be alone*") and Genesis 3:20 ("*The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living*")—warrant a detailed exegetical and contextual analysis. When viewed through a theological lens informed by anthropology, these passages suggest a focus on spiritual and relational roles rather than strict biological exclusivity, offering support for broader orthodox models like the Covenantal Image-Bearing framework.

Genesis 2:18 states, "*Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."*" The term "*alone*" (Hebrew: לְבַדּוֹ, levaddo) is often assumed to imply that Adam was the only human in existence, necessitating Eve's creation as the second human.[27] However, as I explore in "*What It Means to Be the Image of God,*" the broader context of Genesis 1–2 and the linguistic flexibility of Hebrew suggest a different emphasis. The preposition בְּ (b') in Genesis 1:26— "*Let us make man in our image*"—can be translated as "*as*" rather than "*in,*" shifting the focus from ontology (humanity's inherent nature) to vocation (humanity

[27] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 68–70.

acting as God's representatives).[28] In this light, "*alone*" does not necessarily denote physical isolation but rather a lack of a suitable covenantal counterpart—someone capable of sharing Adam's spiritual and relational calling as an image-bearer. Eve's creation from Adam's side (Gen 2:21–22) addresses this need, completing the partnership mandated in Genesis 1:28: "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.*"[29] Adam could have existed among pre-Adamic Homo sapiens—biologically modern but not yet spiritually alive—yet been "*alone*" in his unique status as the first to bear God's image, requiring Eve to fulfill this divine purpose relationally and functionally.

Genesis 3:20 further declares, "*The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living*" (Hebrew: *ḥayy*). Traditionally, this is interpreted as evidence that Eve was the biological ancestress of every human, implying no other progenitors existed.[30] Yet the context of Genesis 3—framed by the interplay of life, death, and exile following the Fall—suggests a theological nuance. The term *ḥayy* ("*living*") may not refer solely to biological life but to those spiritually alive, a concept echoed in New Testament language such as John 5:24: "*Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life… he has passed from death to life.*"[31] In this reading, Eve becomes the mother of all who bear the *Imago Dei*, the spiritually alive lineage initiated through her covenantal role alongside Adam. This interpretation retains

[28] Middleton, *Liberating Image*, 50–52.

[29] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 35–37.

[30] Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 268–270.

[31] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 182–184.

the verse's theological weight without mandating that she be the sole genetic source of humanity, allowing for the presence of pre-Adamic populations who interbred with her descendants, as posited in the Covenantal Model.

Anthropologically, this framework aligns with the Last Ice Age setting of ~70,000 years ago, when the Persian Gulf—Hugh Ross's proposed location for Eden—was a fertile valley above sea level, its rivers sustaining a lush ecosystem.[32] During this period, sea levels were significantly lower (50–80 meters below present), exposing land that later flooded as glaciers melted, an event potentially reflected in ancient flood narratives.[33] Adam and Eve, placed in this Gulf region, could have been surrounded by other Homo sapiens, yet their unique spiritual endowment distinguished them. Their legacy—both the *Imago Dei* and the fallen nature—spread through their lineage, preserved in oral tradition across millennia until codified in Genesis, even as the Gulf submerged (~6000 BC).[34] This scenario supports a non-global flood later (~5600 BC), impacting their descendants without erasing global populations, consistent with ecological continuity evidenced by ancient trees like Old Tjikko.[35]

This exegesis and synthesis demonstrate that "*alone*" and "*mother of all the living*" emphasize Adam and Eve's covenantal and spiritual significance, not necessarily

[32] Ross, *Navigating Genesis*, 145–148.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Walton, *Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 95–97.

[35] Rogers and McAvoy, "*Mule Deer*," 3–5.

their biological exclusivity. Such a reading bridges Scripture and science, reinforcing orthodoxy's flexibility while upholding its core doctrines.

V. ORTHODOX MODELS OF ADAM AND EVE

Within the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy, a variety of theological models for understanding Adam and Eve have emerged, each adhering to the criteria of a real Fall, the *Imago Dei*, universal sin, and Christ's redemption, while differing in their historical, biological, and symbolic interpretations.

Below, six models are explored, culminating in the proposed Covenantal Image-Bearing Model.

Historical-Literal View

In this traditional model, Adam and Eve are specially created by God—Adam from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7) and Eve from Adam's side (Gen 2:21–22)—as the sole biological progenitors of all humanity.[36] Dominant among early church fathers like Augustine, medieval theologians like Aquinas, and Reformers like Calvin, this view interprets the Fall as a literal historical event with global consequences, introducing sin and death to all descendants.[37]

It aligns with a straightforward reading of Genesis 1–3 and Paul's theology in Romans 5, accommodating either a young-earth timeline (~6,000 years, per Ussher's

[36] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.1, 442–444.

[37] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), I, Q. 94, Art. 1, 482–483.

chronology) or an old-earth perspective, depending on how genealogies are understood.[38] This model robustly upholds all orthodox criteria, emphasizing Adam's direct creation and Eve's role as "*mother of all the living*" in a biological sense.

Historical-Representative Model

Here, Adam and Eve are historical individuals selected by God from a broader hominin population to serve as covenantal representatives of humanity.[39] Rather than being the sole progenitors, their disobedience introduces sin through federal headship, affecting all humans spiritually rather than genetically.

This model draws on ancient Near Eastern motifs of a chosen figure standing for a people, harmonizing with genetic evidence of a diverse ancestral pool (e.g., Neanderthal DNA in modern humans) while preserving the Fall, *Imago Dei*, and Christ's redemption.[40] It offers a middle path, maintaining historicity without requiring monogenesis.

Archetypal-Historical View

[38] James Ussher, *The Annals of the World*, trans. Larry Pierce and Marion Pierce (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2003), 17–19.

[39] Walton, *Lost World of Adam and Eve*, 88–90.

[40] Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2014), 305–307.

This approach sees Adam and Eve as real historical figures whose narrative also functions as a theological archetype, conveying universal truths about humanity's condition, calling, and fall.[41] The Hebrew names— "*Adam*" (mankind) and "*Eve*" (life)—and Genesis 2–3's literary style suggest typological depth, yet their disobedience remains a concrete event.[42] This "*both/and*" model integrates history and symbolism, affirming orthodoxy's essentials without insisting on sole biological descent, appealing to those who see Genesis as theological narrative.

Genealogical Adam and Eve (GAE)

Proposed by S. Joshua Swamidass, this model posits Adam and Eve as historical figures, potentially living ~6,000–10,000 years ago (though flexible in timing), who become genealogical ancestors of all humans by Jesus' time through interbreeding with pre-Adamic populations.[43] Peer-reviewed population modeling supports this, showing a couple could achieve universal ancestry via "*ghost DNA*"—ancestors leaving no genetic trace—within millennia.[44] It preserves the Fall, *Imago Dei*, and universal sin/redemption, accommodating evolutionary data while affirming a real Adam and Eve, making it a scientifically informed orthodox option.

The Tower of Babel (~4000 BC, Genesis 11) marks a significant diffusion of Adam's covenantal lineage, accelerating its genealogical spread as humanity dispersed

[41] Middleton, *Liberating Image*, 25–27.

[42] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 40–42.

[43] Swamidass, *Genealogical Adam and Eve*, 103–106.

[44] Ibid., 120–123

linguistically and culturally, consistent with the gradual universal ancestry posited by the Genealogical Adam and Eve model.

Augustinian Model of Original Sin

Augustine's framework focuses on sin's transmission, teaching that all humans inherit both a sinful nature and guilt from Adam, either through natural descent (traducianism) or divine soul creation.[45] Shaping medieval theology and Protestant doctrine (e.g., Luther's bondage of the will), it emphasizes humanity's fallen state—"*born under sin's reign*"—necessitating grace.[46] While not specifying Adam's origin, it complements other models by reinforcing universal sin and Christ's role, a cornerstone of orthodoxy.

Covenantal Image-Bearing Model

Rooted in Psalm 19's dual revelation—the Book of Nature and Scripture—this model proposes God imparted the *Imago Dei* to Adam and Eve ~70,000 years ago during the Last Ice Age, either creating them de novo or selecting them from Homo sapiens, placing them in the Persian Gulf valley.[47] The Book of Nature reveals Homo sapiens emerging ~300,000 years ago, with *behavioral modernity* (~70,000 years ago) marking a divine act: "*The Lord God… breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*" (Gen 2:7).[48] As I argue in "*Trichotomy, Dichotomy, and Naturalism,*" humans reflect God's triune

[45] Augustine, *On the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin*, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 2.12, 240–241.

[46] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 361–363.

[47] Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 147–149.

[48] Henshilwood and d'Errico, "*Origins of Symbolism*," 75–78.

nature—body (soma), soul (nephesh/psyche), spirit (ruach/pneuma)—per 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12.[49]

Their Fall introduced spiritual death (Gen 3:7–10), spreading covenantally as descendants interbred with pre-Adamic humans, conferring the *Imago Dei* and fallen nature spiritually.[50] A non-global flood (~5600 BCE) later affected their line, preserving continuity (e.g., Pando, ~80,000 years).[51] This model affirms all orthodox criteria, aligning with Ice Age geography and behavioral shifts. For a more in-depth exploration of this model, see the companion paper, *An Apologetic for the Covenantal Image-Bearing Model*.[52]

VI. NON-ORTHODOX OR HERETICAL VIEWS

While Christian orthodoxy allows interpretive flexibility concerning the historical and theological nature of Adam and Eve, it also establishes clear boundaries. Views that reject core doctrines such as the Fall, original sin, or the necessity of Christ's redemptive work fall outside these boundaries. The following models are considered non-orthodox or heretical based on their departure from the apostolic faith and historical Christian teaching.

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[49] D. Gene Williams Jr., *Trichotomy, Dichotomy, and Naturalism: A Study of the Soul and Spirit in Biblical and Theological Contexts,* accessed April 2025, https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr; https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html.

[50] Ross, *Navigating Genesis*, 150–152.

[51] Rose, "*New Light*," 852–854.

[52] D. Gene Williams Jr., *An Apologetic for the Covenantal Image-Bearing Model: A Companion to Orthodox Theological Reflections on Adam and Eve,* accessed April 2025, https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr; https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html.

What is the danger of holding to the Mythological Adam and Eve view?

This view treats the Genesis account as pure myth, with no historical or theological anchor in real individuals. It often arises in liberal Protestant theology influenced by higher criticism and modernist philosophy. Advocates argue that Genesis functions like other ancient Near Eastern myths, offering existential truths rather than historical claims.

However, the denial of a historical Adam contradicts the New Testament's use of Adam as a real figure in explaining sin and salvation. Paul's argument in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 depends on the typological and historical relationship between Adam and Christ. To sever that link is to undermine the foundation of Christian soteriology.[53]

Pelagianism

Pelagianism, named after the British monk Pelagius, denies the doctrine of original sin. It holds that Adam's sin did not corrupt human nature and that each person is born morally neutral and capable of righteousness without divine grace. This view was condemned as heretical by several early church councils, including the Council of Carthage (418) and the Council of Ephesus (431).[54]

Orthodoxy affirms that human nature is fallen and that grace is necessary not only to assist the will but to renew it. Pelagianism's denial of inherited sin and the necessity of grace is a direct contradiction to Romans 3:23 and Ephesians 2:1–5, where all are said to be dead in sin and saved only by God's mercy.

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[53] G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin*, trans. Philip C. Holtrop (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 25–27.

[54] Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 357–359.

Gnostic Reinterpretations

Gnostic texts, such as those found in the Nag Hammadi Library, present a radically inverted version of the Genesis narrative. In these accounts, the serpent is a liberator who brings true knowledge, while the Creator (often identified with Yahweh) is portrayed as an ignorant or malevolent demiurge.[55]

Such views are incompatible with biblical monotheism and the goodness of creation. The church fathers, especially Irenaeus and Tertullian, vigorously opposed Gnostic dualism, which denigrated the material world and subverted the narrative of sin and redemption.

Radical Darwinian Naturalism

Unlike theistic evolution, which affirms divine purpose in the evolutionary process, radical naturalism posits that human beings are the product of blind, purposeless evolutionary forces. There is no divine image, no Fall, and no need for salvation.[56]

VII. THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

The question of Adam and Eve is not merely academic—it has deep theological and pastoral consequences. The way Christians understand the first humans shapes their view of sin, salvation, human dignity, and the authority of Scripture. While the Church

[55] Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), 28–30.

[56] N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 93–95.

may tolerate a range of interpretive models within orthodoxy, the stakes remain high when core doctrines are at risk.

Why does understanding Adam Still Matter?

In a cultural moment dominated by scientific skepticism and historical revisionism, some Christians may be tempted to view Adam and Eve as irrelevant or outdated. However, Scripture presents Adam not as a peripheral figure, but as central to the gospel narrative. As Paul writes, "*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive*" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

This connection between the first and last Adam is not merely rhetorical—it is theological. The universality of sin and death is grounded in a real historical fall, and the universality of salvation is grounded in the incarnation, obedience, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[57]

To jettison Adam as a theological fiction is to risk unraveling the logic of salvation history. It detaches Christ's redemptive work from the very problem it was meant to solve.

As Christians we need to hold strong to Unity in Essentials, Charity in Non-Essentials

Orthodox theology recognizes the difference between dogma (what must be believed), doctrine (what should be believed), and opinion (what may be believed). In the case of Adam and Eve, the dogmatic core includes the Fall, the *Imago Dei*, the universality of sin, and the necessity of Christ's redemptive work. How these truths are

[57] Moo, *Romans*, 340–342.

expressed—whether through a historical-literal model or a genealogical framework—may fall into the category of doctrine or even opinion, depending on the interpretive system.

This calls for discernment and charity. As the adage often attributed to Augustine of Hippo states, "*In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, charity; in all things, love*." Sometimes expressed in Latin as "*In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*"—meaning *"In necessary things, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity*" [58]—this principle, though debated in origin, guides the pastoral task. Churches should uphold essential truths with clarity while granting faithful believers interpretive flexibility on secondary matters. Theological rigidity over non-essentials risks division, while careless openness invites heresy. Maintaining unity without compromising truth remains a core pastoral responsibility.

How to respond to Scientific and Cultural Challenges

One of the chief reasons Christians reconsider traditional views of Adam is the perceived conflict between Scripture and science. Genetic studies suggest a large ancestral population, while anthropology traces human traits far beyond the scope of the biblical timeline.

Rather than retreat into denial or revisionism, the Church should engage with humility and confidence. Some models—like the genealogical Adam or representative views—offer a way to affirm both scientific credibility and theological integrity. More

[58] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson Jr. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958), 2.9, 43–45.

importantly, pastors and teachers must equip believers to distinguish between what the Bible requires us to affirm and what it allows us to explore.

Faithful engagement does not mean conceding the faith. It means showing how the Christian worldview is broad enough to accommodate mystery, diverse interpretive frameworks, and ongoing discovery—without surrendering its core truths.[59]

VIII. CONCLUSION

The theological significance of Adam and Eve cannot be overstated. Though Christian orthodoxy permits a range of views concerning the manner and mode of their creation, it draws firm boundaries around essential doctrines: that humanity is created in the image of God, that sin entered the world through human disobedience, that all humans now bear the effects of that Fall, and that redemption comes only through Christ, the second Adam.

This study has shown that multiple models—historical-literal, representative, archetypal-historical, genealogical, Augustinian, and the Covenantal Image-Bearing Model—preserve these truths while offering different explanatory frameworks. These interpretations, despite their differences, remain within the circle of orthodoxy because they uphold the theological essentials rooted in Scripture and affirmed through historic Christian tradition.

In contrast, heretical views—such as Pelagianism, radical naturalism, Gnostic revisionism, and fully mythological interpretations—deny these core doctrines and

[59] C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1947), 22–24.

thereby sever the connection between biblical anthropology and the gospel itself. Theological diversity must not become doctrinal relativism. The church is called to embrace interpretive charity without crossing into theological compromise.[60]

The continued relevance of Adam and Eve in Christian theology lies not only in their place at the beginning of the biblical narrative, but in their role as the first link in the story of redemption. From Adam's dust to Christ's cross, and ultimately to the new creation, the biblical vision of humanity is one of purpose, dignity, fallenness, and hope. The Church must hold fast to that vision, proclaiming a gospel that speaks to both our origin and our destiny in Christ.

[60] Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 201–204.

APPENDIX A: INTEGRATED TIMELINE: FROM EARLY HUMANS TO THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

Covenantal Image-Bearing Model + Anthropological Data

Timeframe	Scientific / Historical Event	Covenantal Interpretation (Your Model)
~300,000 BC	Anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* appear (e.g., Jebel Irhoud, Morocco)	Biological humanity begins, without spiritual Imago Dei or divine covenant.
~200,000 BC	Genetic diversification of Homo sapiens across Africa	Reflects natural dispersion, not yet a covenantal population.
~100,000 BC	First attempted migration into the Levant (Skhul and Qafzeh)	Early expansion efforts fail, no divine image or covenant present. No "be fruitful and multiply" command.
~70,000 BC	*Behavioral modernity* appears (symbolism, burial, art, long-distance trade)	God creates or selects Adam and Eve, imparting Imago Dei (body, soul, spirit; Genesis 2:7). They fall, introducing spiritual death (Genesis 3), spread covenantally (Romans 5:12).
~60,000–20,000 BC	Homo sapiens migrate worldwide (e.g., Asia ~60,000–50,000 BC, Australia ~50,000 BC, Europe ~45,000 BC, Americas ~20,000 BC)	Adam's descendants interbreed with pre-Adamic humans, spreading Imago Dei and fallen nature genealogically, universal by Jesus' time (Genesis 4, Romans 5:12).
~6,000 BC	Persian Gulf region floods due to glacial melt (Eden submerged)	Beginning of the end for the Edenic homeland; remembered later in flood traditions.
~5,600 BC	Noah's Flood (regional, not global)	Divine judgment on Adam's covenantal line; Noah's family preserved (Genesis 6–9).
~5,600–4,000 BC	Noah's family repopulates the region	Adam's covenantal line regrows. Civilization develops around Mesopotamia.

Timeframe	Scientific / Historical Event	Covenantal Interpretation (Your Model)
~4,000 BC	Early linguistic and cultural diversification in Mesopotamia.	God confuses languages at Babel (Genesis 11), forcibly dispersing the covenantal lineage globally. This initiates the global spread of covenantal identity, completing the genealogical reach of Adam. According to the Divine Council Worldview (Deuteronomy 32:8–9, LXX/DSS), this dispersion also marks the assignment of the nations to spiritual rulers ("sons of God"), with Yahweh reserving Israel as His own inheritance. This act explains the rise of distinct religious worldviews and cosmic rebellion outside the covenantal center.
~3,000–2,000 BC	Rise of early civilizations: Sumer, Akkad, Egypt	Cultural growth post-Babel. Covenant line continues through Shem → Abraham (Genesis 11).
~2,000 BC	Rise of Sumer, Akkad, Egypt.	God reestablishes covenant in a new form—Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12)—building on Adam's legacy.
~1,400–1,000 BC	Exodus, Conquest, and United Monarchy (Moses to David)	Covenant narrows: national focus (Israel) to prepare for the universal Messiah.
~700–400 BC	Prophets foretell a coming Redeemer (Isaiah, Micah, etc.)	Prepares for reversal of the Fall—Adamic curse to be undone by a New Adam.
~5 BC	Historical figure in Roman Judea.	*Fulfillment.* Birth of Jesus Christ. Second Adam reverses Fall, restoring Imago Dei (Romans 5:12–21, 1 Corinthians 15:22).

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