

## Book Review

# Craig's Quest of the Historical Adam

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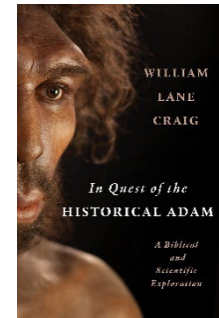
William Lane Craig has written an impressive apologetic book on the topic of the historical Adam, which like all his previous books, is comprehensive and thought-provoking. The biblical, theological, and scientific data presented in this book are enormous. The conclusions of his arguments can be easily understood through his own summaries at the end of each chapter, but to really deconstruct his arguments and critically evaluate the presented scientific data would be beyond the scope of a review article and my scientific expertise. There have been several book reviews written by other scholars on Craig's book, but Craig has been disappointed by the fact that some of them have completely missed his point (and appear to have perhaps not read his book!) This is quite plausible given the density of information and syllogistic argumentation that are weaved in this book. His responses to these various flawed book reviews can be easily found online from a simple Google search. Before presenting my critiques, I feel it necessary to provide a brief overview of the book so that readers and Craig himself, if he reads this, can easily point out where I have misunderstood him, should that happen.

This book is divided into four parts. The first and fourth parts are single chapters of introduction and reflection, respectively. Craig dedicates six chapters for the second part of the book which discuss the biblical data concerning the historical Adam. He then proceeds to the third part of the book, which consists of five chapters pertaining to the scientific data and historical Adam. The structure of the book demonstrates that this is a work in the field of religion and science. Readers should not jump into random parts of the book, or they will miss the forest for the trees. Neither should one simply read the first and last chapters alone because the value of this book is not in the conclusions reached but rather in the data presented and arguments built upon those data.

### Book Title

In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration

### Book Cover



### Author

William Lane Craig

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### Overview of Parts 1 and 2: Biblical explorations

Craig begins in the first chapter, titled “What is at stake,” by setting up the framework by which he approaches the topic. He briefly reviews several Biblical verses pertaining to historical Adam as alluded to by Paul (i.e., Rom 5:12-21) and Jesus (Matt 19:4-6) (p. 6-7). Being a philosopher and theologian, Craig proceeds to present the options that we have in taking a position on the historical Adam. If we believe the historical Adam is incompatible with science, then either Biblical authors and Jesus are scientifically incorrect, or they believe but do not teach inaccurate science. If we believe the historical Adam is compatible with science, then either Genesis 1–11 cannot be taken literally, or the relevant modern science is mistaken (p. 9). He tries to keep an open mind as to where his quest will end because he also considers what he believes is the worst possible scenario, that there was no historical Adam (p. 10–13). In the end, his position is that the existence of the historical Adam is compatible with science and that Genesis 1–11 cannot be taken literally. He proceeds first to contextualize Adam and Eve in the Pentateuch, then shifts to ancient Near Eastern (ANE) mythology. This chapter logically is followed by the second section of the book, which provides an extended discussion on the nature of myth.

In the second part of the book, Craig, being a good *analytic* philosopher, provides a clear working definition and criteria for what he calls mythology. Instead of jumping into various ANE narratives and comparing or contrasting them without some external criteria, Craig first sets the criteria by which he will evaluate the various ANE narratives and the Biblical passages on Adam (p. 45–46). Craig discusses various definitions of myth from other scholars such as Bascom, Honko, and Kirk (p. 37–42). He proceeds to construct his own criteria in identifying myths using Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblances,

which is not unlike Burridge's approach in constructing the genre of biography in evaluating the gospels (p. 42).

In Chapters 3 and 4, Craig asks whether Genesis 1–11 is a myth based on the ten criteria that he set out in chapter 2 as the definition of a myth (p. 45–46). Myths are (1) narratives that are (2) traditional, (3) sacred, (4) believed to be true, (5) involving deities, (6) the primeval world, (7) provide etiology, (8) associated with rituals that (9) express human/divine correlations and (10) exhibit fantastic elements. By the end of chapter 4, he argues that Genesis 1-11 has all the ten hallmarks of a myth (p. 131).

Though one would think that the criteria of (2) traditional narratives passed over generations and (4) that are believed to be true are sufficient to prove that Genesis 1–11 is historical, Craig further demonstrates the uniquely historical feature of Genesis 1–11 in Chapter 5. For Craig, the genealogies flag that the Biblical authors meant Genesis 1-11 to be not just myth, but what Craig would call mytho-history in agreement with Thorkild Jacobsen (p. 152). He then concludes his analysis and exegesis of Genesis 1–11 in Chapter 6 by presenting ten central truths that can be obtained by reading Genesis 1-11 as mytho-history (p. 202). Interestingly enough, none of the ten central truths completely depends on having a historical Adam. This raises the question as to the role of Craig's investigation of the genre of Genesis 1–11 in this book. However, before moving forward to the science section of the book, Craig dedicates Chapter 7 to discuss Adam in the New Testament. Here he presents the distinction between the literary and historical Adam (p. 206). He considers the possibility of a literary Adam in the New Testament, but he concludes that the New Testament writers understood Adam as a historical Adam (p. 242).

### Critical assessment of Parts 1 and 2

Overall, the approach that Craig has taken in the second part of this book (Chapters 2–7) can be considered in two ways. First, this part of the book can be understood as his attempt to prove the existence of a historical Adam by demonstrating that Genesis 1–11 is a mytho-history. The problem with this approach is that even if the primeval history of Genesis 1–11 can be correctly understood as mytho-history, this does not mean that a historical Adam must have existed. Just because the Biblical authors wrote about Adam as a historical figure does not prove he was real. The factual existence of Adam cannot be proven by the genre of Genesis 1–11 unless one believes in the inerrancy of the Bible, which Craig seems to take for granted. The driving logic behind the second part of his book appears to be:

- The Bible is inerrant.
- Genesis 1–11, which includes Adam, is mytho-history.
- Mytho-history describes historical persons and events.
- Therefore there is a historical Adam.

Though many fundamentalist Christians do place Biblical inerrancy above science, I do not think this is what Craig intended. If Craig did intend to argue in this simplistic manner, then the second part of the book will be irrelevant for any readers who do not wish to submit the inerrancy of the Biblical text as evidence for historical Adam.

The second, more proper way of reading the second section of this book is to consider this as the author's own quest to determine which exegetical position he personally wants to take in reading Genesis 1–11. Based on the options presented in Chapter 1, I believe that this was his intention. Craig is not trying to prove the existence of historical Adam by demonstrating that Genesis is a mytho-history, like how some fundamentalist Christians some-

times argue about this. Craig is basically trying to determine what Biblical position he wants to have with regards to historical Adam in Part 2, then examining if it is compatible with science in Part 3. This is a classic apologetic move of creating a case for plausibility for historical Adam that is consistent with both Biblical exegesis and science.

Having established his Biblical position on historical Adam in Part 2, Craig proceeds to engage scientific findings that could be of relevance in his quest for the historical Adam. This scientific exploration would be arguably an independent parallel set of proofs that can be more convincing to those who have no doctrinal allegiance to Christianity or certain doctrinal positions.

### Overview of Parts 3 and 4: Scientific explorations

Craig begins his scientific quest in Chapter 8 by first determining several questions that will direct his reading in the large body of scientific literature on human evolution. The two fundamental questions discussed in this chapter are when a historical Adam would have lived (p. 246–250) and what constitutes a human (p. 257–264). Nevertheless, the second question is a lot more important for Craig and even influences his temporal placement of the historical Adam. For Craig, there are key characteristics of what it means to be human, which free him from the classifications set by paleoanthropologists (p. 250–256). By locating Adam temporally farther in the distant past than his interlocutors (i.e., Swamidass, Venema), Craig is then free to look for features of humanity in even the earliest hominids in Chapter 9. These features include the capability for abstract thought, economic and technological innovation, and symbolic behavior (p. 264). Craig argues that humanity should not be constrained to homo sapiens but can also include Neanderthals and Denisovans due to their higher cognitive abilities (p. 279). In Chapters 10 and 11 he

goes deeper into the various archaeological proofs, demonstrating four major characteristics of humanity, which are ecological, technological, socioeconomic, and symbolic capabilities (p. 282). He identifies the areas inhabited by hominids to indicate hominid ecological capabilities. Blades, points, grindstones, and composite tools indicate technological capabilities (p. 285–291). Specialized hunting and structured use of domestic space indicate socioeconomic capabilities (p. 291–301). Last but not least, image representation, pigment, burial, and language indicate symbolic capabilities (p. 302–326).

In my opinion, Craig's most daring and novel contribution to the field is found in Chapter 12 where he argues that the historical Adam was a homo Heidelbergensis from about 600,000 years ago (p. 330). Being a good apologete, this chapter contains Craig's argument, counterargument, and refutation. First, he presents the proofs that homo Heidelbergensis has the four aforementioned capabilities that he sets forth in Chapter 9 as criteria to demonstrate humanity (p. 330–338). Second, he presents two major counterarguments: temporal challenge (common founding pair problem) (p. 338–347) and geographical challenge (p. 356–358). Then finally, he presents his refutations to the two aforementioned challenges (p. 347–355; p. 357–358).

In the final chapter, Craig provides what can be seen as both a short summary claim of his position as well as a brief sketch of what his theological anthropology would look like in his future systematics. He sketches out the eschatological implications of the historical Adam being homo Heidelbergensis, which is the atonement of not only Homo sapiens but also the older hominids (p. 364–365). He also focuses on several themes within theological anthropology: the image of God (p. 365–370) and the body-soul dualism (p. 370–376). He is giving us hints that his position is rather

functional and that his metaphysics is not substance dualism.

### **Critical assessment of Parts 3 and 4**

In some ways, the last two chapters are the two most important chapters to evaluate in terms of the cogency, significance, and implications of Craig's quest for the historical Adam. Despite the thorough discussion on the genre of myth that he has in the second part of the book, I think more people are interested in finding the historical Adam in a historical timeline as presented in these last two chapters. Though these last two chapters present a nice summary of his quest, the argumentation is quite sparse for two reasons. First, most of the arguments presented by Craig have been presented in the previous chapters when he set up the criteria by which we can find the historical Adam, such that Chapter 12 feels a little anticlimactic. Second, while the contents of Chapter 12 are scientific, Craig is in a difficult position to present a strong scientific argument defending his position. It is not Craig's job to discuss scientific data in great detail because it would be beyond the understanding of most lay readers. Nevertheless, this highlights the major problem in the field of science and religion in general.

The search for historical Adam is not a scientific project of mainstream scientists thus any attempt to discuss the project requires an assessment of related projects from other disciplines such as archaeology, paleobiology, genetics, etc. The problem with such an approach is that one is forced to become a multi-disciplinary scholar without the expertise to do so. Without an understanding of the scientific experimentations and projects that could be relevant for historical Adam, most religious scholars searching for the historical Adam simply do meta-analyses of the existing literature, and they are hard-pressed to be able to engage and properly critique scientists in each of the respective fields they are

analyzing. For example, even as a molecular biologist, I do not think it is appropriate for me to properly evaluate the genetic discussions in this work on FOXP2, DBQ1, DRB1, TMRCA, and TMR4A, because even though I know of them and can read about them, I do not personally work on them, so I do not have first-hand data of my own that I can compare to their findings. I do not feel comfortable discerning how these data would or would not be applicable to the quest of historical Adam. I would not be able to assess if these experiments lacked other positive and negative controls or could have used a better experimental approach. I can imagine how difficult it must be for Craig as a philosopher and theologian to have to engage these various scientific literatures and draw his own conclusions from them.

### Overall assessment

Theologically, from the very beginning, Craig has some fundamental commitments that he needs to defend. He is frank in acknowledging that it is impossible to start from neutral ground, and I concur. In the very first chapter on “What is at stake” he has basically pointed out that if one were to deny historical Adam, one would have to overhaul various other doctrines: inerrancy, original sin, and even Christology. Though many other theologians have constructed systematic theologies independent of historical Adam, Craig is free to construct his own theological system. It is very clear from the very beginning that this is the major concern of Craig, the *systematic* theologian. Craig should not be faulted for having this major concern. However, if the goal of the book is truly to evaluate the historicity of Adam, then the doctrines at stake in proving that historicity cannot be used as evidence. This is not to say that Craig directly claims that the historical Adam is necessary for various doctrines in a particular systematic theology, therefore historical Adam must be true. But his theological commitment from the very beginning sets him on

a quest to approach the topic by finding evidence for the plausibility of a historical Adam biblically by evaluating the genre of myth in part 2 and the plausible compatibility of various scientific findings with historical Adam in part 3. A truly unbiased approach would have seen the author make an equal commitment to finding and presenting evidence *against* a historical Adam.

Scientifically, the skeptical scientist in me is very concerned about Craig’s ability to avoid confirmation bias as he evaluates various data to support his arguments. Given the great importance of the historical Adam for Craig’s systematic theology, the scientist in me prefers to find as many ways as possible to give evidence *against* the historical Adam and evaluate its validity and relevance. To be fair, Craig does not shy away from discussing data contrary to his position in this book. However, the overall spirit and approach are more conformist than most scientists would approach this issue. The faster a scientist can kill a crucial fundamental hypothesis, the faster she can move on to generate other hypotheses to test. One of my greatest fears as a scientist is wasting years of time and resources performing side experiments that easily conform to the implications of my fundamental hypothesis while missing the ‘killer experiment’ that disproves it. The more a scientist can disprove other data against her hypothesis, the more confidence she has that her hypothesis is true.

Philosophically, this work is an apologetic exercise to create a case of plausibility for a historical Adam rather than a serious attempt to prove the existence of the historical Adam. Readers may find this either very rewarding or terribly disappointing. Those who need the historical Adam to be protected from the attacks of scientific findings will find the plausibility of historical Adam rewarding. Those who never questioned the existence of historical Adam and are looking for positive identification of the historical Adam will be disappointed. With that said, I find the case of

plausibility important, but it will not convince anybody who does not already believe in the historical Adam. If one were to agree with Craig's conclusions in the book, it simply shows that a Christian who believes in a historical Adam can still be a rational person who also accepts the findings of contemporary science. This work is to demonstrate the rationality of believing in historical Adam, and nothing more.

Last but not least, as a work in theology and science, Craig demonstrates what needs to be done as a ground-clearing exercise before constructing a systematic theology that engages both the scriptures and science. It is by

far not an easy task. Craig has predicted that he would be criticized by both the right and the left in the theological spectrum. But a systematician is also readily criticized by the experts from the various disciplines that she chooses to incorporate into her theological system. In Craig's case, he is open to criticisms from Biblical scholars as well as scientists. Rather than taking the cheap shot and calling Craig a generalist who cannot possibly fully understand all aspects of Biblical scholarship and scientific literature that he had explored, I encourage theologians who want to be biblically and scientifically relevant to take up the quest as Craig did in this work, knowing well the challenges that lie ahead.