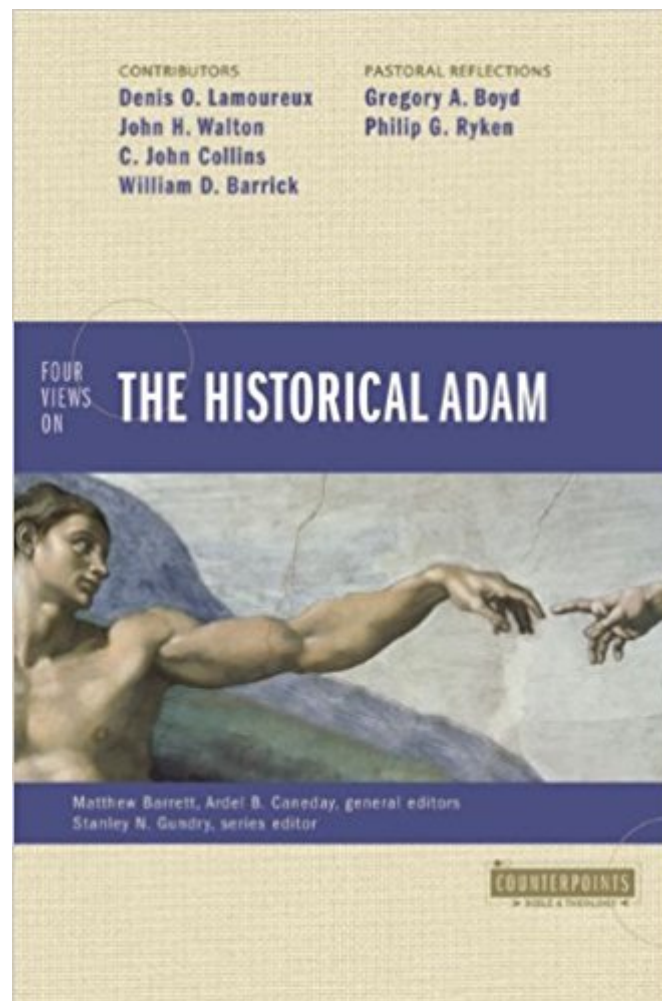


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Four Views On The Historical Adam (Counterpoints: Bible And Theology)



Synopsis

As a part of the Counterpoints series, *Four Views on the Historical Adam* clearly outlines four primary views on Adam held by evangelicals, featuring top-notch proponents of each view presenting their positions in their own words and critiquing the positions with which they disagree. You will come away with a better understanding of the key biblical and theological issues at stake and of the implications of Adam for contemporary Christian witness and church life. Contributors include Denis O. Lamoureux, John H. Walton, C. John Collins, and William Barrick. Each focuses his essay on answering the following questions: What is the biblical case for your viewpoint, and how do you reconcile it both with modern science and with passages and potential interpretations that seem to counter it? In what ways is your view more theologically consistent and coherent than other views? What are the implications of your view for the spiritual life and public witness of the church and individual believers, and how is your view a healthier alternative for both? Concluding reflections by pastor-scholars Gregory A. Boyd and Philip Graham Ryken highlight the significance of the topic in the faith of everyday believers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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Riverside, CA. He is the author and editor of numerous books such as *Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration*, *Owen on the Christian Life*, *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, and *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture*. He is the author of several other forthcoming books, which you can read about at matthewmbarrett.com.

This is a discussion we can no longer avoid as pastors. Scientific advancements in genetics by Francis Collins has pushed this controversy to the forefront (see *Language of God*). If genetics proves to be true in that human DNA can be traced to a minimum of 10,000 human pairs, then Adam and Eve as the first human pair must align with that truth (such as Galileo and heliocentricity). If all truth is God's truth, then science will agree with the truth of scripture. If it doesn't, then our interpretation must be the first thing to be revisited. God does not lie and scientific truth such as heliocentricity does not lie, so our ability to harmonize the two must be questioned. For us pastors, this requires first a careful on-going exegesis. This book is a great place to begin a re-evaluation of our theology about a historical Adam. The biblical Adam is presented through one theistic evolutionary viewpoint, two old-earth viewpoints, and one young-earth position. All four scholars do an excellent job presenting their cases considering the relatively newness of this debate in light of the recent genetic revolution. For some it will raise more questions than answers, but for others it will confirm a nagging suspicion or a previously held position. My only disappointment was its failure to address "original sin," a topic all four contributors evaded, and one that is inextricably linked to Adam. I think Zondervan should do a book on four views on original sin. Lastly, for serious students of scripture, I highly recommend Walton's *"The Lost World of Genesis,"* Collins's *"Did Adam and Eve Really Exist,"* Peter Enns *"The Evolution of Adam,"* and Francis Collins's *"The Language of God."*

The book is a useful introduction to various perspectives on the historical Adam, ranging from complete denial of Adam's historicity (Lamoureaux) to full-bore young earth creationism (Barrick). Walton and Collins fall somewhere in the middle. Others have offered more detailed summaries of the content, so I'll content myself with the following observations. I found the arrangement very helpful: each contributor makes his full-length case followed by responses from the other three. This was confusing to some extent -- e.g., in the responses to the first piece, the others had to refer to their own positions, which I hadn't read yet. But on the whole it made for more give and take than simply four contributions that cross-referenced the others. My major frustration, though, with the whole book is that the contributors did a lot of talking past each other. Lamoureaux and Barrick were

particularly guilty of this, Collins and Walton much less so. Barrick, especially, seemed to think that repeating other people's talking points is the same as actually making an argument. His chapter was very weak and unnecessarily combative. Lamoureux' contribution was stronger than Barrick, but also suffered from oversimplification (I think). So I think this volume would have been much stronger if the editor had forced the contributors to interact more with each other's views rather than letting assertion and counter-assertion count as argument and rebuttal. One issue that I think should have been addressed is philosophy of science. Lamoureux, the scientist, took an Enlightenment notion of science for granted -- science gives us objective truth about the way the world really is. He should have at least acknowledged the existence of instrumentalism -- the notion that science tells us how things work, but that it's not "true" so much as "effective." We use science as a tool to get things done and it may or may not reflect objective reality. The introduction of this distinction would have helped some of the talking past each other that I note above. One final comment: there was very little engagement with historical exegesis of Genesis. I think Luther and Calvin were mentioned once (by Barrick), and someone else mentioned Origen (Collins?). No attempt was made to draw in Roman Catholic or Orthodox approaches. I realize the "Four Views" series is for evangelicals, but to address "the historical Adam" with so little historical awareness is to put blinders on. Again, it's a useful starting point, though often a frustrating read. It's far from the last word and it's not intended to be.

There is an introduction which more or less gives a lay of the land that is set forth in this book. The first article by Denis Lamoureux presents the idea that there was no historical Adam, and Genesis 1-11 is not historical, and theistic evolution is a fact, but that this doesn't affect the core teachings of the Christian faith. The writer believes that God accommodated His message so that ancient people who did not have access to modern science could communicate the divine revelation of God. Just as parents tell their four-year-old child where he came from without getting into the nitty-gritty, so God did the same thing in the Bible. He chose to do it that way, since ancient Bible writers did not have access to the modern science we have today. John Walton presents the second view, that there was an historical Adam, but Scripture is mostly concerned with presenting him as an archetype of the human race. John C. Collins presents the third view, that there was a literal historical Adam and Eve, but that the earth is billions of years old, and that evolution may or not be right. William Barrick presents the fourth view, that Adam was a literal historical person, through whom sin entered into the world. He highlights how Jesus and Paul shared this belief, and that the doctrines of the fall of humankind, the need for the second Adam (Jesus), the institution of marriage,

and the belief in the Bible as the inerrant Word of God would all fall to the ground without an historical Adam. Lamoureux makes some zesty points, but he doesn't really give any evidence or reasons why we should reject an historical Adam and Eve. John Walton brings his expert knowledge of ancient near Eastern and Egyptian parallels into play, but he fails to grasp that Scripture does seem to teach that Adam was more than just archetype in Scripture. Collins posits long periods of time in between the six days of Genesis, but it is hard to justify that from a clear exposition of the text. He seems more motivated by the discoveries of science than by the discoveries made through a study of Scripture. Barrick assumes that Adam and Eve existed, and he lays out some of the theological reasons why belief in the historical Adam and Eve are important. But he merely assumes his case without providing evidence. He spends most of his time responding to (and misrepresenting) others. In my opinion, the two best articles were the ones written by the pastors! Gregory Boyd shows why even though he believes that Adam existed, he doesn't see it as essential to being a Christian. Philip Ryken in the best article of all, shows why so many historic theological positions hinge on the existence of the historical Adam. His essay is like William Barrick's, except it is better supported by Scripture, free from harsh rhetoric, and very encouraging.

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