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An Exegetical Case for a Historical Adam and Eve Based on Romans 5

This article proposes an argument in support of an historical, individual Adam and Eve, drawing from the exegesis of Rom. 5:12ff. Within this passage, the apostle Paul employs a rhetorical structure comprising two premises and a conclusion. The first premise asserts that Adam's personal transgression ushered in the dominion of death over all of humanity (5:12ff). The second premise emphasises that God's grace is greater than Adam's trespass (5:15ff). It follows from these premises that Christ's individual obedience will more than cancel out the negative results of Adam's individual disobedience. Hence, Paul's audience can be confident in justification through Christ (5:18f), which leads to eternal life (5:21). Thus Paul's rhetoric within this passage falters if the assumption of a historical Adam and Eve is removed.

Keywords: Adam, Eve, Romans 5, Historical, Sin, Death, Eternal Life, Hope

One of the most crucial questions at the intersection of present scientific consensus and Christian faith is how the biblical material related to Adam and Eve can be squared with an evolutionary account of human origins. Adam and Eve have typically been regarded as the first and singular parents of all humanity, yet evolutionary science suggests that humanity evolved from prior species gradually as a population, and thus no first or singular forbears of all humanity can be found. Further, Adam and Eve and their 'fall' in Eden have generally been understood to be the cause of human sin and mortality (see Gen. 2:17; 3:3f; Rom. 5:12ff; 1 Cor. 15:21f), yet an evolutionary perspective implies that humans arose by a process to which death is intrinsic, and thus death must have been around long before humans. This tension between evolutionary science and a common understanding of scripture has led some to interpret the biblical accounts of Adam and Eve as mythical stories that reveal important truths about theology and/or the human experience, rather than accounts of real human individuals. Others have proposed that Adam and Eve could be real, historical individuals who lived at some point in the course of humanity's development, and whose actions had implications for the rest of the species.[1]

1 In this article, I use 'historical' to indicate that Adam and Eve represent real individual humans who lived at some point in the past. Scot McKnight constructs a much more detailed definition of the 'historical' Adam and Eve that includes claims like *de novo* creation and uni-

The historicity of Adam and Eve, i.e. the question of whether Adam and Eve were real individuals who lived in the past, is not a new issue by any means, but it remains a subject of considerable interest and ongoing debate. Significant recent contributions include S. Joshua Swamidass's *The Genealogical Adam and Eve* and William Lane Craig's *In Quest of the Historical Adam*, along with several 2022 articles published in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*.[2] Most of these treatments affirm that humanity arose through an evolutionary process. Some argue in favour of an historical Adam and Eve, whereas others reject the need for such an assumption. Evidently, consensus on this matter remains elusive.

Although discussion about the historical Adam and Eve tends to centre on the early chapters of Genesis, where the creation and fall of the primordial pair are narrated, scholarly treatments along these lines commonly acknowledge the significance of New Testament references to Adam and Eve. One key New Testament passage is Rom. 5:12ff, which is worth quoting in full:

[12] Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— [13] sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. [14] Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. [15] But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. [16] And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. [17] If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. [18] Therefore just as one man's trespass

versal human ancestry, and these are not claims for which I seek to argue. See Venema, D.R. & McKnight, S. *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science*, Grand Rapids: Brazos (2017), pp. 106–9. In my judgement, my definition of 'historical' in reference to Adam and Eve aligns more closely with how other scholars use this term.

2 Swamidass, S.J. *The Genealogical Adam & Eve: The Surprising Science of Universal Ancestry*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic (2019); Craig, W.L. *In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2021); Cannon, F.S. 'Acts 17:26: God Made *of One (Blood)*—Not *of One Man*—Every Ethnic Group of Humans', *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (2022) 74, 19–38; Franklin, P.S. 'Theodicy and the Historical Adam: Questioning a Central Assumption Motivating Historicist Readings', *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (2022) 74, 39–53; Horst, W. 'From One Person? Exegetical Alternatives to a Monogenetic Reading of Acts 17:26', *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (2022) 74, 77–91; Koenig, S.M. and Wall-Scheffler, C.M. 'Discussions about Dispersals: Questions Rising from the Search for Historical Adam', *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (2022) 74, 242–45.

led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. [19] For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. [20] But the law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, [21] so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5:12–21)[3]

This passage is salient because it is an especially lengthy discussion that prominently features Adam, and because Paul here connects Adam to the plight of human sin and death, which is the fundamental problem that Christ is said to solve.[4] Based on this latter consideration, some argue that to discard the notion of a historical Adam is to discard the gospel altogether.[5]

Although certain scholars contend that Rom. 5 necessitates a historical Adam, others understand Adam's role in this passage merely as an archetype of sinful humanity, and/or as a foil that serves to illustrate something about Christ. Under such an interpretation, the historicity of Adam is not important to the message of the passage, even though Paul presumably did imagine that Adam and Eve were historical individuals who were the singular progenitors of all humanity. James D.G. Dunn states that Paul's point about Adam and Christ does not necessitate Adam existing in history, since he principally serves as an example of one individual whose singular action affected many others, much as Christ's individual action enables redemption for many (see esp. 5:18f).[6] In Dunn's understanding, Paul's rhetoric only requires that his audience was familiar with a certain set of ideas about Adam and Eve, not that the pair actually existed.

Not unlike Dunn, Denis O. Lamoureux and Peter Enns treat the question of a historical Adam and Eve using a distinction between the central theological truths of Rom. 5 and the culturally-contingent aspects. Lamoureux employs the

3 All biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

4 Rom. 5:12ff shares much in common with 1 Cor. 15:21f (cf. 15:45ff), which is also important to discussions about Adam. For the sake of tidiness, my argument will focus on the exegesis of Romans, in particular, though one could potentially argue for a historical Adam from 1 Corinthians, as well. Adam material in Romans and 1 Corinthians should be treated separately based on the differing roles this material plays in each letter, on which see Horst, W. 'Death through Adam: Two Different Senses in Two Different Pauline Letters', *Science and Christian Belief* (2020) 32, 111–27.

5 E.g., Gaffin, R.B. Jr. *No Adam, No Gospel: Adam and the History of Redemption*, Philadelphia, PA: P&R Publishing (2015); Moo, D.J. '"The Type of the One to Come": Adam in Paul's Theology', *Trinity Journal* (2019) 2/40, 145–64.

6 Dunn, J.D.G. *Romans 1–8*, Dallas, TX: Word (1988) p. 289. Cf. Harlow, D.C. 'After Adam: Reading Genesis in an Age of Evolutionary Science', *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (2010) 62, 179–95 (p.190).

'Message-Incident' principle,[7] suggesting that the notions that sin and mortality stem from a single pair of humans in history, that all humanity is descended from this single pair of common progenitors, and that the woes of sin and mortality began to afflict humanity after a single, tragic, primordial incident, are part of the standard assumptions of Paul's day, and are thus 'incidental' to the passage. Modern Christians can understand Adam simply as an archetype of all humans who live as sinful mortals under the judgment of God, and who therefore need the salvation and eternal life that are available through Christ. Lamoureux bolsters his argument further by pointing out that Paul himself refers to Adam as a 'type' of Christ (5:14), which suggests that Paul's intention is not to address the question of whether or not a historical Adam existed, but rather to use Adam as a figure to remind sinful humans of their problematic state.[8] Ultimately, the authoritative theological 'message' of the passage is 'the reality of sin and the fact that Jesus frees men and women from their sinfulness and offers them resurrection from death and eternal life'.[9]

Peter Enns similarly characterises the inception of sin and death through Adam as an incidental aspect of Paul's writings. According to Enns, Paul, like his fellow Jewish interpreters of Genesis, calls upon Adam to address his particular theological concerns. In Paul's case, his concern centres on the death and resurrection of Christ, and his unique interpretation of Adam follows from his convictions about Christ.[10] Enns evokes the notion, popularised by E. P. Sanders, that Paul reasoned 'from solution to plight', meaning that Paul first came to understand that Christ sets Jews and Gentiles free from sin and death, and this led him to conclude that both Jews and Gentiles need saving from sin and death.[11] Enns argues that the inception of death through Adam was a readily-available category in Paul's milieu, and so it would make sense for Paul to connect the 'solution' universally available in Christ to the 'plight' that many in his day assumed stemmed from Adam and Eve. Scientifically-informed readers can reasonably discard a historical Adam and Eve, but still maintain the three core elements of Paul's gospel, which Enns identifies as universal mortality, universal sin, and the historical death and resurrection of Christ.[12]

Scot McKnight likewise de-emphasises the question of a historical Adam in favour of a *literary* Adam. In other words, Adam as he appears in passages like

7 The 'Message-Incident' principle is elaborated at length in Lamoureux, D.O. *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution*, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock (2008).

8 *ibid.,* pp. 317–18. On this concept of 'type', see below.

9 *ibid.*, p. 274.

10 Enns, P. *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins*, Grand Rapids: Brazos (2021), pp. 178–83.

11 Sanders, E.P. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, Philadelphia: Fortress (1977), pp. 474–510.

12 *op.cit.,* Enns (ref. 10), pp. 168–74.

Rom. 5:12ff is, first and foremost, a figure from Genesis who Paul interprets in accordance with his particular theological perspective. McKnight does seem to acknowledge that Paul understood Adam and Eve to be real human progenitors whose disobedience had some sort of effect on their descendants, but he places greater emphasis on the paradigmatic role that Adam plays in Paul's text as figures who chose disobedience and died as a result. This paradigmatic role does not require a 'historical' Adam and Eve as this term is conventionally understood, since the point is that everyone has in effect become their own Adam by choosing disobedience in turn (cf. *2 Baruch* 54:19).[13]

Scholars like Dunn, Lamoureux, Enns, and McKnight build their cases on particular constructions of the core theological convictions Paul asserts about Christ in Rom. 5:12ff. In the cases of Enns and Lamoureux, whose treatments explicitly consider biblical authority, this is also a question of what aspects of a biblical text must be maintained as authoritative, and what if any elements faithful Christians can reasonably discard in response to updated scientific knowledge.

In considering the extent to which Adam and Eve should be understood as real individuals who lived in a real past, it must be born in mind that Paul wrote from within a Jewish milieu that included many other interpretations of the biblical figures of Adam and Eve. These interpretations show a great deal of diversity, and particular authors adapt the biblical material about the primordial couple to their particular authorial aims.[14] For my purposes, it is most important to note that some of these interpretations rest on the idea that the disobedience of Adam and Eve had a real effect on subsequent generations of humanity, whereas other texts treat Adam and Eve simply as literary figures whose existence in the past is beside the point. For example, in Josephus' account of the Torah, Adam and Eve essentially serve as the first in a long series of examples of the principle that those who follow God's will are rewarded, and those who disobey God experience calamity (*Antiquities* 1:14). The account of the couple's disobedience and subsequent punishment does not make them the cause of human mortality (cf. 1:46). Furthermore, whereas their son Cain and his descendants descend into vice (1:60ff), their subsequent son, Seth, and seven generations of his line engage in virtue and live peaceful, prosperous lives as a result (1:68f, 72), which implies that depravity and destruction are

13 *op.cit.,* Venema and McKnight (ref. 1), pp. 183–91.

14 On second-temple Jewish interpretations of Adam and Eve, see Levison, J.R. *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch*, Sheffield Academic (1988); de Boer, M.C. *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5*, JSOT Press (1988); Legarreta-Castillo, F.J. *The Figure of Adam in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15: The New Creation and Its Ethical and Social Reconfiguration*, Fortress (2014); *op.cit.,* Venema & McKnight (ref. 1); *op.cit.,* Enns (ref. 10); Horst, W. 'Formed from the Earth: Adam and Created Mortality in Second Temple Literature', *Jewish Quarterly Review* (2022) 112, 645–69.

not understood as an inevitable result of a 'fall' in Eden. Rather, like Adam, Eve, and their descendants, humans are able to choose obedience or disobedience. Jewish writers like Josephus do not focus on a present-day condition that was caused by Adam and Eve.[15] In such cases, Adam and Eve work just as well as moral examples whether or not they ever actually lived in the past.

In contrast to Jewish authors like Josephus who use Adam and Eve as timeless moral examples, other texts identify Adam and Eve as the cause of subsequent human calamity, especially human death. For example, *Apocalypse of Moses* asserts that death gained rule over the human race as a result of Eve's actions (14:2). Other writings, including *Biblical Antiquities* (13:8), *4 Ezra* (3:7), and *2 Baruch* (54:15), likewise blame Adam and/or Eve for the death of subsequent human generations.[16] In *Apocalypse of Moses*, Eve also confesses that 'every sin in creation has come about through me' (32:2), which seems to make Eve the cause of human sinfulness in some way, as well, though this is not explained in any detail. The point is, these writings claim that Adam and Eve's 'fall' in Eden produced results that continue to the present. So then, Jewish interpretation of Adam and Eve in the second temple period includes authors who treat the primordial couple as an archetypal example of the human condition, as well as authors who identify them as the historical cause of a persistent human plight.

In this article, I propose an argument in support of a historical, individual Adam and Eve, drawing from the exegesis of Rom. 5:12ff. According to my reading of this passage, the logical structure of Paul's comparison between Adam and Christ relies on Adam's historical existence as an individual human agent responsible for humanity's plight. Thus, Adam is not simply a foil Paul uses to talk about Christ.

Specifically, I will argue the following points: first, that contrary to the majority view, Rom. 5:13–17 should not be understood as a digression that is peripheral to Paul's main point; second, that Rom. 5:14 does not show that Adam primarily functions in this passage as a 'type' of Christ, but rather likens Adam's transgression to the later disobedience of Israel, and thus this typological statement does not characterise the Adam-Christ comparisons in general; third, that Paul's argument in our passage overall rests on the premise that Adam's individual action brought about widespread consequences for humanity, and thus that Paul's argument in this passage breaks down if one does not accept the premise that Adam was a real individual in human history.

Although my argument is strictly exegetical, I suggest that my analysis potentially has relevance for the ongoing scholarly discourse around whether the

15 Thomas H. Tobin ('The Jewish Context of Rom 5:12–14', *Studia Philonica Annual* (2001) 13, 159–75 (pp. 161–64)) discusses Jewish writings in which Adam and Eve serve as (negative) moral examples, particularly writings of Josephus and Philo. Cf. 2 Cor. 11:3.

16 *ibid.*, pp. 164–70.

notion of a historical Adam can be discarded as an incidental, culturally-contingent Pauline assumption. Many contributors to this discourse base their cases in part on interpretations of Rom. 5 according to which Adam is peripheral to Paul's argument, whereas, if my analysis is found to be convincing, the logic of this passage is significantly undermined if the assumption of a historical Adam is removed.

Rom. 5:12ff is a passage with a particularly large number of ambiguities. It is also one of the most theologically consequential passages of the New Testament. For these reasons, the literature covering this passage is vast, and interpretive variations abound. Although I will refer to contrasting views as much as is practical, I will not be able to address the exegetical issues pertinent to this passage comprehensively. The account I offer here should be taken as a proposal rather than a definitive interpretation to silence all others.

The Question of a Digression in Rom. 5:13–17

Before discussing Paul's argument in Rom. 5:12ff broadly, I must begin by addressing a particular grammatical issue. A widespread scholarly tradition understands that Paul begins a grammatical construction in 5:12 that he never actually completes.[17] This sort of incomplete construction, which does occur on rare occasion in biblical texts, is referred to in scholarly literature as an *anacoluthon*. The NRSV aptly captures this interpretation: 'Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—'. The hyphen signals that Paul breaks off mid-sentence. This sentence fragment, as it stands, leaves one expecting that the 'just as…' should be complemented by a 'so also…'. Based on the tidy parallelism between Adam and Christ in 5:18f, we might expect Adam's negative effect to be mirrored by a positive effect set in motion by Christ, for example, '—so also righteousness came into the world through one man, and life came through righteousness, and so life spread to all because all have been made righteous'.

Scholars who identify an anacoluthon in 5:12 normally understand it to initiate a digression spanning 5:13–17. According to this view, Paul diverges to clarify certain matters before returning to the Adam/Christ comparison proper in 5:18f. This has the effect of making 5:13–17 peripheral to the passage, which is chiefly concerned with contrasting sin and condemnation through Adam with

17 See esp. Bornkamm, G. 'Paulinische Anakoluthe', In *Das Ende des Gesetzes: Paulusstudien*, Munich: Kaiser (1952), pp. 76–92; also Käsemann, E. *Commentary on Romans*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1980), p. 147; Byrne, B. *Romans*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical (1996), pp. 173–74; Jewett, R. *Romans: A Commentary,* Minneapolis: Fortress (2007), pp. 373–85; Kruse, C.G. *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2012), pp. 239–50; *op.cit.,* Moo, (ref. 5), pp. 145–64.

justification and righteousness through Christ (5:12, 18f). Such an account of the passage obscures a crucial rhetorical relationship between the various sections, which I will explicate in due course. Simply put, if the Adam-Christ material in Romans is fundamentally about expressing the contrasts made in 5:18f, it becomes easier for interpreters to take this comparison as simply conceptual (i.e., Christ is the mirror image of Adam), and thus easier to allow that Paul's main point stands if Adam is simply a literary figure and not a historical figure. By contrast, if 5:13–17 are understood as part of the rhetorical argument that I here propose, the historicity of Adam will not be so expendable.[18] Thus, the question of whether 5:13–17 is a digression introduced by an anacoluthon in 5:12 has important interpretive implications.

Although scholarly literature often repeats the claim that 5:12 contains an anacoluthon, the verse can be read as a complete grammatical construction, and a significant minority of scholars interpret the passage accordingly. The argument in favour of an anacoluthon is based on the notion that this verse expresses the first half of a comparison (in grammatical terms, the *protasis*) without expressing the second half (the *apodosis*). The first clause of the verse is introduced by the conjunction *hōsper* ('just as'), which normally introduces the protasis of a comparison. Such a construction would typically be followed by an apodosis introduced by the conjunction *houtōs* ('so'), or the phrase *houtōs kai* ('so also'). This pattern can be found in 5:19: 'For just as (*hōsper*) by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so (*houtōs kai*) by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous' (cf. 5:21). By contrast, 5:12 contains a second clause that is introduced by the phrase *kai houtōs*, which most commonly expresses a result of what precedes it,[19] and might thus be translated, 'and so'. A rendering along these lines, like the one found in the NRSV (see above), leaves the sentence feeling incomplete.

Although the interpretation just outlined is popular among scholars, James W. Haring has recently and rightly argued in favour of understanding 5:12 as a complete sentence with no anacoluthon.[20] Haring catalogues a number of

18 See esp. the historical claims about Adam in 5:13f, discussed further below.

19 *Kai houtōs* often expresses result in the New Testament (Acts 7:8; 27:44; 28:14; 1 Cor. 14:25; 1 Thess. 4:17; Heb. 6:15), though it occurs with other senses (Rom. 11:26; 1 Cor. 7:17, 36; 11:28; 15:11; Gal. 6:2; Heb. 6:9; 12:21; Jam. 2:12; Rev. 9:17).

20 Haring, J.W. 'Romans 5:12, Once Again: Is It a Grammatical Comparison?', *Journal of Biblical Literature* (2018) 137, 733–41. Haring's article expands on Kirby, J.T. 'The Syntax of Romans 5:12: A Rhetorical Approach', *New Testament Studies* (1987) 33, 283–86. Others who read 5:12 as a complete sentence include Scroggs, R. *The Last Adam: A Study in Pauline Anthropology*, Philadelphia: Fortress (1966), pp. 79–80; Biju-Duval, D. 'La traduzione di Rm 5,12–14', *Rivista biblica italiana* (1990) 38, 353–73 (p. 361); Barrett, C.K. *The Epistle to the Romans*, London: Hendrickson (1991) p. 103; Erickson, R.J. 'The Damned and the Justified in Romans 5.12–21: An Analysis of Semantic Structure', In Porter, S.E. & Reed, J.T. (eds) *Discourse Analysis and the New Testament: Approaches and Results*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic (1999), pp. 282–307 (p.290);

examples of Greek texts in which *kai houtōs* has the sense 'in this way' rather than 'and so'. He further notes that a number of ancient translations of Romans from Greek to other languages (such as Syriac and Latin) render Rom. 5:12 as a complete sentence rather than as a protasis lacking an apodosis.

Haring and others also point out that verse 5:12 evidences a tightly crafted structure that makes more sense if the verse is a complete sentence, rather than a sentence fragment that Paul abandoned in favour of a lengthy digression. The verse is commonly identified as a *chiastic* arrangement—a well-known device in biblical literature, in which a pair of elements are repeated in the reverse order (i.e., A-B-B'-A'). In this case, the first and fourth parts of the verse (i.e., A and A') focus on sin, and the second and third parts (i.e., B and B') focus on death:

A. Just as *sin* came into the world through one man,

B. and *death* came through sin,

B'. in the same way *death* spread to all

A'. because all have *sinned*

In addition to this basic chiastic arrangement, the first and second halves of the verse (i.e., A–B and B'–A' are further symmetrical in that parts A and B' both refer to humans (*anthrōpos*) and use a compound verb built on the same root verb (i.e., 'entered' [*eiserchomai*] and 'spread' [*dierchomai*], which are both built on *erchomai*). This tidy structure supports taking 5:12 as a complete and well-thought-out utterance that Paul uses quite deliberately to introduce his discussion of Adam vis-à-vis Christ.[21]

Ultimately, it is possible to interpret 5:12 as either a complete sentence or a sentence fragment that never resumes. However, an anacoluthon is by definition a departure from grammatical conventions, and is thus inherently unusual. If the verse can reasonably be read as a grammatically complete sentence, that reading is to be preferred over one that leaves the sentence awkwardly incomplete. It is much more probable that Paul employed one of the less common senses of *kai houtōs* than that he dropped a sentence halfway through only to come back to the same thought a handful of sentences later.

If 5:12 is a tightly-crafted and complete sentence, not an incomplete sen-

Tobin, T.H. *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts: The Argument of Romans*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson (2004), pp. 177–78; Leithart, P.J. 'Adam, Moses, and Jesus: A Reading of Romans 5:12–14', *Calvin Theological Journal* (2008) 42, 257–73 (p. 264); Hultgren, A.J. *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2011), pp. 223–24; Vickers, B. 'Grammar and Theology in the Interpretation of Rom 5:12', *Trinity Journal* (2006) 2/27, 271–88; Schreiner, T.R. *Romans*, Grand Rapids: Baker (2018), p. 279.

21 *op.cit.,* Haring, (ref. 20), pp. 738–39; *op.cit.,* Biju-Duval, (ref. 20), p.362; *op.cit.,* Schreiner, (ref. 20), p.279.

tence, there remains little reason to think that 5:13–17 constitutes a digression that is peripheral to Paul's main point about Adam and Christ. The possibility should be examined that this material is also part of a deliberately constructed line of argumentation which is all important to Paul's rhetorical purpose in this passage. I will argue for exactly such an understanding below.

Adam as a 'Type' in Rom. 5:14

Some of those who consider Adam's historicity to be incidental to Rom. 5:12ff base their argument in part on Paul's claim that Adam is 'a type of the one who was to come' (5:14). Paul and other New Testament authors commonly identify figures or events in the Jewish Scriptures (i.e., the Old Testament) that prefigure and thus anticipate aspects of Christ or the church in some way.[22] For instance, Jesus compares his death and resurrection to the biblical figure of Jonah spending three days in the belly of a great fish before returning to life on dry land (Mt. 12:39ff; 16:4). Likewise, Paul points to Israel's disobedience in the wilderness as a 'type' that can help followers of Christ avoid making similar errors (1 Cor. 10:6). The underlying concept is that Christians can look to the Old Testament to find lessons and illustrations that anticipate Christ and the gospel. Some scholars thus take the claim that Adam is a 'type' of Christ to show that Paul's main purpose in comparing Adam and Christ is to show that the familiar biblical figure of Adam can be used as an analogy for understanding Christ.[23] If the Adam-Christ comparisons of Rom. 5:15ff are understood in this way, then Adam does not necessarily need to be historical for Paul's fundamental argument to hold up.

Although the position that Rom. 5:14 identifies Adam as a 'type' of Christ is widespread, the phrase in question is ambiguous as to its reference. A significant minority of scholars understand this phrase to indicate that Adam prefigures Israel's subsequent disobedience to the Mosaic Law. Under this reading, Paul likens Adam's violation of the explicit, divine prohibition against eating the forbidden fruit of Eden (Gen. 2:17; 3:1ff) to Israel's violation of the explicit commands of God included in the Mosaic covenant (cf. Rom. 2:21ff; 9:31), and Christ does not enter into Paul's discussion of Adam until Paul mentions, 'the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ' (5:15). Likewise, 'those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam' (5:14) refers to people who lived prior to the time of Moses, and thus did not sin in violation of a direct, divine command, since the law was not yet in the world (5:13; cf. 4:15). Some of

22 On typology in biblical hermeneutics, see Goppelt, L. *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1982).

23 E.g., *op.cit.,* Käsemann, (ref. 17), p. 151; Moo, D.J. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1996), pp. 333–34; *op.cit.,* Jewett, (ref. 17), pp. 378–79; *op.cit.,* Lamoureux, (ref. 7), pp. 317–18; *op.cit.,* Harlow, (ref. 6), pp. 189–91; Longenecker, R.N. *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2016), p. 593.

these scholars propose that 'him who was to come' refers to Moses rather than Christ. Others notice that the Greek phrase typically translated 'him who was to come' (*typos tou mellontos*) can also be read as grammatically neuter rather than masculine, i.e., 'that which was to come', and understand this in reference to Israel's disobedience.[24]

The Adam/Israel reading is preferable to the Adam/Christ reading for a number of reasons. The Adam/Israel reading better fits the verses that immediately precede it. First, Paul likens Adam's sin to subsequent human sin (5:12). He then mentions Moses and the law: 'sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned where there is no law' (5:13). He then mentions Moses again: 'Death reigned from Adam to Moses' (5:14). Thus, if Paul likens Adam's transgression to Israel's violation of the Mosaic law at the end of 5:14, this is consistent with and primed for by several elements of the preceding sentences (5:12–14).

Immediately before the claim that Adam is a 'type', Paul further states that death reigned 'over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam' (5:14). Since the significance of the time between Adam and Moses, mentioned in the previous verse, is evidently that the law had not yet come into the world, and thus sin was not 'reckoned' in its absence (5:13), those whose sins were not like Adam's transgression (5:14) probably refers to people who, unlike Adam, did not disobey an explicit 'law' from God.[25] This is corroborated by the word 'transgression' (*parabasis*), which normally connotes 'overstepping an established boundary or norm',[26] and which Paul elsewhere uses only in explicit connection to violation of the law (Rom. 2:23; 4:15; Gal. 3:19). By contrast, 'trespass' *(paraptōma,* 5:15, 16, 17, 18, 20) and 'sin' (*hamartia*, etc., 5:12, 13, 16, 19, 20, 21), which occur elsewhere in the passage, do not have this specific connotation in Paul's writings.[27] Paul makes a contrast between Adam, who

24 See Robinson, J.A.T. *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology*, London: SCM (1952), p. 35; *idem*., *Wrestling with Romans*, Philadelphia: Westminster (1979), pp. 80–81; Bengel, J.A. *New Testament Word Studies*, Grand Rapids: Kregel (1971), p. 2.66; *op.cit.,* Scroggs, (ref. 20), pp. 80–81; Haacker, K. 'Exegetische Probleme des Römerbriefs', *Novum Testamentum* (1978) 20, 1–21 (pp. 16–19); *op.cit.,* Biju–Duval, (ref. 20), pp. 353–73; Schellenberg, R.S. 'Does Paul call Adam a "Type" of Christ? An Exegetical Note on Romans 5,14', *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* (2014) 105, 54–63. The Adam/Moses typology gets at the basic issue with which I am interested here, but I see no good reason to prefer this over the neuter reading.

25 So, e.g., *op.cit.,* Byrne, (ref. 17), p. 178; *op.cit.,* Hultgren, (ref. 20), p. 224; Gathercole, S. '"Sins" in Paul', *New Testament Studies* (2018) 64, 143–61 (p.155).

26 Danker, F.W., Bauer, W. Arndt, W.F. & Gingrich, F.W. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2000), p. 758.

27 Although this assessment is not a matter of the mere collocation of words, it is noteworthy that, with the exception of 1 Tim. 2:14 (which has to do with Adam and Eve, who lived before the Mosaic law), 'transgression' (*parabasis*) always appears in close proximity to 'law' (*nomos*)

transgressed, and those who were in the world before the Mosaic law, who did not sin in the likeness of Adam, then immediately identifies Adam as a 'type' of someone or something that came later. If this 'type' statement refers to Israel's transgression of the Mosaic Law, it makes good sense that this phrase would follow a reference to Adam's violation of an explicit command, since Israel's transgression of the Mosaic Law also involves the violation of explicit divine commands.

Ryan S. Schellenberg further notes that the Adam/Israel reading also creates a meaningful connection between the word 'type' (*typos*) and the word 'likeness' (*homoiōma*), which appears in the phrase, 'in the likeness of the transgression of Adam' (5:14).[28] Those who lived before the Mosaic Law did not sin in the likeness of Adam, whereas Adam sinned in the likeness (i.e., 'type' or pattern) of those who lived after the institution of the law. This is another way in which the Adam/Israel reading of Paul's 'type' comment fits smoothly and easily within the discussion already underway. By contrast, if the phrase sets up an Adam/Christ typology, this is not rhetorically prepared for by anything that precedes it.

The Adam/Israel reading of 5:14 also better fits what immediately follows it than does the Adam/Christ reading. If Paul introduces an Adam/Christ typology in 5:14, and for that matter, here introduces Christ (i.e., 'the one who was to come') into his discourse about Adam for the first time, we might expect him to follow this with some further comment related to Christ. To the contrary, Paul makes his 'type' comment, then immediately follows this by saying, 'But the trespass is not like the free gift' (5:15).[29] This assertion makes no direct reference to Christ, nor, for that matter, to Adam, so if Paul establishes an Adam/Christ typology in 5:14, this typological statement is immediately followed by an assertion that is not clearly related to it. By contrast, if Paul likens Adam's transgression to that of Israel under the law, then this statement flows quite easily with both what precedes and follows it: Paul mentions Adam's transgression of God's command, then says that Adam's transgression can be likened to Israel's (5:14), then refers to 'the trespass' (5:15), which alludes back to the transgression of Adam just mentioned.

In sum, substantial reason exists to understand Paul to liken Adam's transgression of divine instruction to Israel's, rather than to present Adam as a prefiguration of Christ. Under this interpretation, the typological statement becomes more of a peripheral comment, and ceases to be a description of

in the Pauline letters (Rom. 4:25; 11:11f; 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 1:7; 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13), whereas 'law' appears in close proximity to 'trespass' (*paraptōma*) only in Rom. 5:20.

28 *op.cit.,* Schellenberg, (ref. 24), p. 60.

29 The NRSV puts 'free gift' before 'trespass,' but 'trespass' occurs first in the Greek word order.

Adam's role in the Adam/Christ comparisons of 5:15ff overall. So, compelling arguments in favour of the Adam/Israel interpretation weaken the argument of those who suggest Adam's historicity is incidental to our passage because Adam here fundamentally serves as a 'type' of Christ.

The Rhetorical Structure of Rom. 5:12ff

If Adam does not fundamentally serve as an illustrative foil for Christ, what purpose does he serve in our passage? Paul shows that Adam's individual disobedience brought about the widespread human plight of sin and death in order to argue that Christ's individual obedience will surely secure justification and eternal life. In other words, if Adam had such a definitive negative impact on the rest of humanity, how much more will Christ have a definitive positive impact on humanity?

Paul draws his conclusion about the sufficiency of Christ's obedience from two premises. The conclusion and each premise is articulated in a section of our passage, as follows:

Premise 1: Adam's individual transgression caused death and sin to reign over subsequent humanity (5:12–14)

Premise 2: God's grace through Christ exceeds Adam's transgression (5:15–17)

Conclusion:[30] Christ's individual obedience will effect justification (and thus eternal life) for the many (5:18f)

The first premise establishes that the plight of death is the result of Adam's transgression, not the result of each individual's own transgression. Adam is thus an individual whose action produced far-reaching results for humanity.

The second premise establishes that God's grace through Christ is greater in measure than Adam's transgression. If Adam's negative impact on the many is definitive, God's grace will be all the more definitive. Divine grace is thus ample to counteract judgment through Adam.

It follows from these premises that Christ's definitive act of obedience (i.e., his obedience unto death on a cross, cf. Phil. 2:8) will certainly produce justification, and as a result, eternal life, for Paul and his Roman audience. Ultimately, this passage is aimed at establishing the assurance of eternal life. This aim is consistent with the preceding section (5:1ff), in which Paul expresses the assurance of future glory (i.e., 'our hope of sharing the glory of God', 5:2; cf. 5:10).

30 Rom. 5:18 begins with the phrase *ara oun*, which commonly indicates inference. *op.cit.,* Bauer, (ref. 26), p. 127.

My point in explicating this structure is that the confidence that the Romans should hold in the sufficiency of Christ's obedient sacrifice to secure eternal life is predicated on the widespread plight of human slavery to death and sin that Adam produced through his individual transgression. If Adam is not an individual who produced this plight for subsequent humanity, then Paul's argument in this passage falls apart. The question of a historical Adam is thus not peripheral to our passage, but rather essential to it.

In order to validate the structure just proposed, some brief exegetical comments are in order to specify how each respective section (5:12–14; 5:15–17; 5:18f) contributes to it.

Adam as the Cause of Human Plight in Rom. 5:12–14 (Premise 1)

The opening section of our passage presents the first premise, namely that Adam's initial sin caused the reign of death over subsequent humanity. This is most evident in Paul's claim that death reigned in the period between Adam and Moses, even though sin is not reckoned in the absence of a law (5:13–14). Paul contrasts Adam's *transgression*, which is a violation of an explicit command of God (see above), with those humans who lived between Adam and Moses, whose sins were *not like* Adam's transgression (5:14). Since this comment immediately follows the claim that sin is not reckoned in the absence of a law (5:13), the idea in view is presumably that those who lived before the time of the Mosaic law experienced the dominion of death even though their own sins were not in direct violation of a command of God, and thus were not counted against them in a manner analogous to Adam before them or Israel after them. The point then is that the reign of death is not a penalty for each individual's sins, but is rather the result of Adam's sin. Adam himself must be causally responsible for the reign of death, because nobody else in the epoch immediately following Adam could have brought the penalty of death upon themselves.

The notion that Adam himself is the cause of the human plight of death is supported by Paul's emphasis on Adam as 'one man' throughout our passage. For instance, the first claim Paul makes is that it was 'through one man' that sin (and as a result, death) entered the world (5:12). Indeed, in the original Greek, Paul places the phrase 'through one man' ahead of the subject and verb of the clause, which highlights it, and thus calls attention to the agency of the one individual, Adam.[31] Numerous additional comments likewise attribute

31 On prominence in Greek word order, see Porter, S.E. 'Word Order and Clause Structure in New Testament Greek: An Unexplored Area of Greek Linguistics Using Philippians as a Test Case', *Filologia Neotestamentaria* (1993) 6, 177–206; Larsen, I. 'Word Order and Relative Prominence in New Testament Greek: A New Look', *Notes on Translation* (2001) 15, 13–27; Pitts, A.W. 'Greek Word Order and Clause Structure: A Comparative Study of Some New Testament

widespread death, judgment, and condemnation to Adam's singular trespass. For example, 'because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion' (5:17; cf. 5:15, 16, 18, 19). The picture here is not of a paradigmatic Adam who simply illustrates how every individual human violates God's will to their own detriment. Rather, Adam is a singular human whose action as an individual produced a widespread result for other humans. If this is not essentially what Paul has in mind, then it is bizarre that he would reiterate the singularity of Adam's trespass and its far-reaching effects so many times in Rom 5:12ff.

Paul's portrait of Adamic plight is analogous to Jewish writings like *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*, *Biblical Antiquities*, and *Apocalypse of Moses*, at least where the reign of death is concerned (see above). Each of these texts attributes human death to Adam's initial sin, even though they ultimately place ongoing moral responsibility on individual humans.[32] For example, *2 Baruch* is often cited for the notion that each individual has 'become (their) own Adam' (54:19), suggesting that Adam serves simply as an archetype of the moral decision each individual must make to obey or disobey God's will, but in *2 Baruch* this responsibility applies specifically to eschatological judgment. In other words, a person's own actions determine whether they will participate in the coming glory or the coming torment (54:14–15). But, the text repeatedly makes Adam, and not each individual human, responsible for death (17:1; 23:4; 54:15; 56:6). The same understanding of the inception of death can be found in the other writings, as well (*4 Ezra* 3:7; *Biblical Antiquities* 13:8; *Apocalypse of Moses* 14:2). With respect to the reign of death, Adam is not an example of the human condition, but rather an explanation for how things came to be the way they are.

This brings us to the claim that death spread to all humanity 'because all have sinned' (5:12), which has been a subject of scholarly debate. The Greek phrase commonly translated 'because' (*eph' hōi*) can be interpreted as a marker of cause (as this rendering implies), in which case death spread to all humans because, like Adam, they have all sinned, and sin leads to death. This reading potentially takes emphasis off of Adam as the cause of subsequent human sin, and makes him into an archetypical example of a human sinner, whose sin, like all sin, brings about death,[33] though some commentators who hold to this majority translation maintain that Adam is in some sense the root cause of all sin.[34] In contrast, a minority of scholars argue that *eph' hōi* should here not be

Corpora', In Porter, S.E. & Pitts, A.W. (eds) *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Development*, Leiden: Brill (2013) pp. 311–46.

32 *op.cit.,* Tobin, (ref. 15), pp. 164–70.

33 E.g. *op.cit.,* Moo (ref. 5), p. 154; *op.cit.,* Byrne, (ref. 17), pp. 173–74.

34 E.g. *op.cit.,* Dunn (ref. 6), pp. 273–74; *op.cit.,* Byrne (ref. 17), p. 177; *op.cit.,* Jewett (ref. 17), p. 376; *op.cit.,* Kruse (ref. 17), p. 242; *op.cit.,* Schreiner (ref. 20), pp. 279–83. In the first edition of his commentary, Schreiner affirmed the *result* translation of *eph' hōi* (*Romans*, Grand Rapids: Baker (1998), pp. 270–80), but reversed his position in the second edition. His lengthy

understood as a marker of cause, but as a marker of result (so, '*with the result that* all sinned').[35] Under this interpretation, the spread of death to all people in some way produced sin, and Adam is thus the cause of widespread human sin and death, though some scholars in this camp speak of 'dual causality' in order to acknowledge that individuals still play a role in their own sinful acts.[36]

The causal interpretation of Rom. 5:12 seems to contradict the explanation that immediately follows (i.e., Rom. 5:13–14), since these verses specifically make the point that humans after Adam are not dying due to their own sins (which are not counted as transgressions in the absence of a law) but rather due to Adam's sin. It would not make sense for Paul to say that all humans died *because* they each sinned (and thus incurred that death), and then immediately describe death reigning over people who did not transgress divine commands like Adam did. For that matter, the pervasive emphasis on the effect of Adam's individual trespass on the many in the rest of our passage (5:15–19) likewise favours identifying Adam, not each individual, as the cause of death (see above). This makes the 'result' interpretation much more consistent with the surrounding material.[37] So, widespread human sin, in addition to widespread human death, was set in motion by Adam's particular transgression (cf. 5:19). Paul does not explain exactly how it is that death would lead to sin, but I propose a possible solution below.[38]

So then, in Rom. 5:12–14 Paul argues that Adam's individual transgression

discussion of this change is worth reviewing in detail.

35 See Zahn, T. *Der Briefe des Paulus an die Römer*, Leipzig: Deichert (1910), p. 267; Nygren, A. *Commentary on Romans*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg (1949), pp. 214–15; Fitzmyer, J.A. 'The Consecutive Meaning of ἐφ' ᾧ in Romans 5.12', *New Testament Studies* (1993) 39, 321–39; *op.cit.,* Longenecker (ref. 23), pp. 587–93.
Scholars commonly note that some important early Latin interpreters of Romans understood 5:12 to indicate that all sinned *in* Adam (i.e., '*in whom* all sinned'), though this interpretation of the Greek is widely seen as implausible by modern exegetes. See Weaver, D. 'From Paul to Augustine: Romans 5:12 in Early Christian Exegesis', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (1983) 27, 187–206.
Op.cit., Jewett (ref. 17), p. 376 proposes that *hōi* should be understood as a reference back to *kosmos* ('world'), which leads to the translation, 'on which (world) all sinned'. This translation would be congenial to my argument, but it is implausible for the same reason as the 'in whom' interpretation, namely because *kosmos* appears so far ahead of the relative pronoun.

36 *op.cit.,* Fitzmyer (ref. 35); cf. Lyonnet, S. 'Le sens de ἐφ' ᾧ en Rom 5,12 et l'exegèse des Pères grecs', *Biblica* (1955) 36, 436–56.

37 Ultimately, my argument in this article can be sustained even if one interprets *eph' hōi* as a marker of cause in Rom. 5:12, as long as Adam is understood as having some causal role in setting in motion the plight of sin and death.

38 Certain early interpreters in the Eastern tradition understand Rom. 5:12 to indicate that sin stems from the corruption of mortality, or from the fear of death (see *op.cit.,* Weaver (ref. 35)). Alternatively, 'death' could be understood to cause humans to sin if 'death' is understood metaphorically as *spiritual* death (see below).

in Eden brought the plight of death and sin upon subsequent humanity. This claim does not require denying individual participation in sinful behaviour, but it does seem to imply that Adam must be a historical cause rather than a mere example or archetype of sinful behaviour, since a mere archetype cannot impose a plight on an epoch of humans. Paul's argument in this passage thus implies the historicity of Adam.

The Disproportion of Divine Grace to Adamic Trespass in Rom. 5:15–17 (Premise 2)

If the purpose of Rom. 5:12–14 is to show that Adam, as an individual, brought about pervasive human plight, then the purpose of the section that follows (5:15–17) is to argue that God's grace through Christ is disproportionally greater than this plight. Three aspects of this passage emphasise the disproportion of divine grace to Adamic plight. First, Paul twice uses the phrase 'much more' (5:15, 17) in order to show that if his readers accept that Adam's individual action brought death to all humanity, they should be all the more confident that God's grace will lead to abundant life (e.g., 'If, because of one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, *much more surely* will those who receive the abundance of grace … exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ' (5:17).[39] Second, in each of these instances where Paul expresses the certainty of the effectiveness of God's grace, he 'piles the gift-language into an overflowing heap',[40] using the excessive phrases, 'the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of … Jesus Christ' (5:15) and 'the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness' (5:17). This awkward piling of gift-language further highlights that the disproportion of grace to trespass, in particular, is Paul's focus here. Third, Paul uses the language of 'abounding' in each of these sentences to further highlight the excessive measure of grace in comparison to the trespass of Adam (5:15, 17).[41] Given these indications of Paul's emphasis on the greater measure of divine grace over Adamic trespass, Paul's two assertions that the grace is *not like* the trespass (5:15, 16) presumably also have to do with a difference in measure.[42] So, God's grace through Christ exceeds Adam's trespass.

It is worth noting that in this section, although post-Adamic human sins are mentioned (5:16), the key comparisons are between God's grace and *Adam's* sin ('the one man's trespass', 5:15; 'the one man's sin', 5:16; 'one man's trespass',

39 *op.cit.,* Goppelt (ref. 22), pp. 130, 220; Fitzmyer, J. A. *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33, New York: Doubleday (1993), pp. 419–20; *op.cit.,* Jewett (ref. 17), p. 370.

40 Barclay, J.M.G. *Paul and the Gift*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (2015), p. 450.

41 *ibid*., p. 450. Cf. Rom. 5:20.

42 *ibid*., p. 495.

5:17). Paul strives to show that God's grace is out of balance with this initial sin, which ensures a positive result for subsequent sinners. In other words, the issue under consideration here is not how God's grace addresses each individual 'becoming their own Adam' (cf. *2 Baruch* 54:19) and disobeying God *like* Adam did, but rather how God's grace addresses the plight that Adam's singular sin introduced. This further underscores the fact that Adam does not here function merely as an archetypical sinner whose real historical existence is irrelevant.

Adam's Trespass and Christ's Obedient Death in Rom. 5:18f (Conclusion)

Based on the two premises just discussed, Paul draws the conclusion that just as Adam's singular disobedience led multitudes into condemnation, so will Christ's singular obedience lead multitudes into justification and life (5:18f). Although Paul does here mention the negative effects of Adam, everything he says about Adam has essentially already been established earlier in the passage. However, he has previously contrasted the Adamic plight with the positive effects of God's grace (5:15–17, see above), without reference to any specific action done by Christ. In this new section, he shows that Christ's obedience is the mirror image of Adam's disobedience, and the positive outcomes for humanity that Christ produced are the mirror image of the negative outcomes for humanity that Adam produced. In other words, the salvific effect of Christ's obedience is the novel element that Paul introduces at this point in his discourse,[43] and thus seems to be the emphasis at this point in his argument.

Paul summarises the key take-away of the passage in 5:21: 'just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord'. Paul's ultimate aim is to show that justification, and as a result, eternal life, are ensured by the agency of Jesus Christ. Before this point, Paul has made oblique references to 'life' through Christ (5:17, 18), but here he specifies more clearly that Christ's individual obedience leads to eternal life. We could say that the thrust of 5:12ff is that grace through Christ supplies ample provision for eternal life, even in spite of the reign of death and sin that Paul attributes to Adam.

I have enumerated the logical sections of our passage here in order to establish the shape of Paul's argument. This is relevant because, based on my account, Paul's rhetoric rests on the assumption that Adam existed in the real past. The assurance that Christ's individual action will secure justification and

43 This is especially apparent in the first comparison, in which Paul likens Christ's righteous act to Adam's trespass (5:18), since all of the language related to Adamic plight also occurs earlier in the passage (5:12–17). The only novel linguistic elements in this sentence are the references to the 'justification and life' that results from Christ's act of righteousness.

eternal life for many other humans (5:18ff) relies on the acceptance of the premise that Adam was an individual whose action brought about sin, death, and condemnation for many other humans (5:12–14). Given that one individual's actions can bring about a pervasive result for other humans, and given that God's grace through Christ is surely greater than Adam's trespass (5:15–17), Christ's individual obedience will surely more than cancel out the effects of Adam's disobedience. If Adam is merely a literary figure who exemplifies the human condition, he does not serve the purpose for which Paul uses him in this passage. A historical Adam is necessary for Paul's argument to hold up.

Conclusion

The interpretation of Rom. 5:12ff for which I have argued challenges the notion that Adam's historicity is incidental to Paul's argument. A number of existing theological treatments in favour of discarding a historical, individual Adam and Eve depend in part on this notion, so I submit that if my exegetical case is found to be persuasive, it warrants a reconsideration of these treatments. Romans does not lend itself to the elimination of a historical, individual Adam and Eve as readily as some have supposed.

If my reading of Rom. 5:12ff is accepted, what models of human origins would be most congenial to it? Although I favour understanding Adam and Eve as historical individuals based on my exegesis, my interpretation does not necessarily imply that Adam and Eve were the sole progenitors of all other humans. Our passage has commonly been read with the understanding that Adam and Eve were the original two humans, created *de novo*, from whom all other humans have descended. The introduction of evolutionary science, and particularly an evolutionary account of human origins, has complicated this picture because, according to the scientific consensus, humans evolved from more primitive species gradually over millions of years. Furthermore, humans are understood to have evolved as a substantial population that never had a bottleneck smaller than perhaps 10,000 individuals at a given time. According to such an understanding, there would be no point in the evolutionary process at which a singular pair served as the exclusive progenitors of all subsequent humans.[44] In order to account for the inception of human sin through Adam and Eve under an evolutionary understanding of human origins, scholars have proposed a number of different strategies, which Loren Haarsma groups into four major categories:[45]

44 On the notion of a population bottleneck in human evolution, see *op.cit.*, Venema & McKnight, (ref. 1), pp. 43–66. Craig (*op.cit.* (ref. 2)) has recently argued alternatively that a population bottleneck of one single pair is possible if they lived perhaps 500,000 years ago, which works perfectly well with my interpretation of Romans.

45 Haarsma, L. *When Did Sin Begin?: Human Evolution and the Doctrine of Original Sin*, Grand

1. Adam and Eve as particular historical individuals acting as representatives of humanity.
2. Adam and Eve as particular historical individuals; sin spread through culture or genealogy.
3. Adam and Eve as a highly compressed history referring to many individuals over a long period of time who received special revelation.
4. Adam and Eve as symbolic figures referring to many individuals over a long period of time, all who became ready to be held accountable and chose sin.

Categories 1 and 2 imagine that Adam and Eve were historical individuals who lived at some point in the past, as part of a population of (at least) thousands of humans. The idea is that God selected a particular pair, who we could call 'Adam and Eve', and gave them special revelation that they did not properly heed. Thus, they fell into sin, which spread to subsequent humans. At a basic level, interpretations in these categories are congenial to my account of Rom. 5:12ff. By contrast, interpretations in categories 3 and 4 treat Adam and Eve as something other than historical individuals, and thus these categories are not consistent with Rom. 5:12ff as I have presented it. One could potentially read the early chapters of Genesis as a stylised account of one of these scenarios, but Paul's emphasis on Adam's impact as 'one man' is not easily adapted to understanding these figures as mere literary representations of many individuals over time.

If ones takes the inception of death through Adam to be a historical reality (rather than a mythologisation of the universality of death à la Lamoureux and Enns), the question remains how this would map onto an evolutionary understanding of humanity. Up to this point, I have not made any assumptions as to whether the 'death' that entered the world and reigned over humanity through Adam involves physical mortality, some construal of 'spiritual death', or a combination of these.[46] A common understanding of our passage is that Adam and Eve existed in an immortal state in Eden prior to their 'fall', and that they and their descendants became mortal as a punishment for their transgression. Thus, death 'entered the world' through them. However, if Adam and Eve were descendants of earlier generations of humans whose lives ended in physical death, and they lived alongside other humans who likewise lived and died, then it is difficult to see how Paul's picture of death entering the world through Adam and then spreading to the rest of humanity (Rom. 5:12) could reasonably be understood in reference to physical death. Granted, the Eden narrative of Genesis can potentially be read as 'a story of how human immortality was

Rapids: Baker Academic (2021), pp. 20–21. See Haarsma for specific works aligned with each category.

46 Thomas Barosse interprets 'death' in Romans as 'total death', which includes a variety of dimensions of diminished existence ('Death and Sin in Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (1953) 15, 438–59). Cf. *op.cit.,* Kruse, (ref. 17), 242–44.

almost gained, but in fact was lost',[47] and such a reading would even harmonise easily with categories 1 and 2 above, but Paul's description of death 'entering the world' through Adam, and his focus on the impact Adam's individual transgression had on others (e.g., 'death exercised dominion through that one', 5:17), do not seem to fit this scenario. In our passage, death is something that *spread* to all because of Adam, not a problem that Adam failed to correct.

Some have sought to square evolutionary science with biblical material about Adam and Eve by proposing that the 'death' that came about as a consequence of transgression in Eden is *spiritual* death—understood as separation from God or some other form of relational or moral corruption—rather than physical death.[48] Craig has recently argued for such an understanding of death through Adam in Rom. 5, in particular.[49] If 'death' is understood as a metaphor involving moral corruption, it aligns well with (1) the language of subjection to death that appears in our passage (5:14, 17; cf. 5:21), (2) the image of slavery to sin that occurs repeatedly in Rom. 6, and (3) the anguished state of moral self-contradiction which Paul describes as a state of 'death' (Rom. 7:10–11, 13, 24).[50] Further, it helps to make sense of the 'result' interpretation of *eph' hōi* in Rom. 5:12 (see above), since moral corruption (i.e., spiritual death) spreading to all people would cause all to sin as a result. If we understand 'death' through Adam as spiritual death in Rom. 5:12ff, then the passage harmonises much more readily with an evolutionary understanding of human origins, and also aligns well with the chapters of Romans that follow. So, such an interpretation has a number of advantages over one attributing physical death to Adam.

If one interprets 'death' in Rom. 5 as spiritual death, I do not see a clear exegetical reason to favour either category 1 (i.e., death was imposed upon all of humanity because humanity's representatives, Adam and Eve, fell into sin) or category 2 (i.e., death spread gradually from Adam and Eve to the rest of humanity through descent or social influence).[51] Our passage is not specific about the exact mechanisms by which death spread to all humans, as this is not Paul's central concern. Such a decision would need to be made on other grounds, whether scientific or theological.

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47 Barr, J. *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, Minneapolis: Fortress (1992), p. 4; see also *op.cit.,* Horst (ref. 14), pp. 648–50.

48 E.g., Alexander, D.R. *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?*, Oxford: Monarch (2008), pp. 260–67; Harrell, D.M. *Nature's Witness: How Evolution Can Inspire Faith*, Nashville: Abingdon (2008), pp. 111–26; *op.cit.,* Harlow (ref. 6), p. 190.

49 *op.cit.,* Craig (ref. 2), pp. 235–38.

50 For detailed discussion, see also Horst, W. *Morality, Not Mortality: Moral Psychology and the Language of Death in Romans 5–8*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield (2022).

51 *op.cit.,* Swamidass (ref. 2) argues that Adam and Eve would likely be universal (or nearly universal) human ancestors by the time Paul wrote Romans, even if they were not singular human ancestors, and even if they lived as recently as 10,000 years ago.