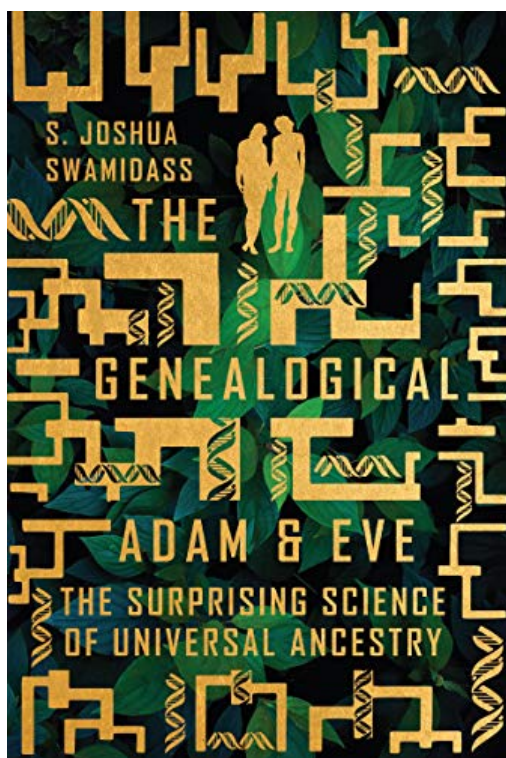


Book Review: The Genealogical Adam and Eve

Description



The Genealogical Adam & Eve: The Surprising Science of Universal Ancestry (Kindle Edition)

Author: S. Joshua Swamidass

Publisher: InterVarsity Press (2019)

247 pages

My rating: 5 of 5 stars

From the Publisher: In *The Genealogical Adam and Eve*, S. Joshua Swamidass tests a scientific hypothesis: What if the traditional account is somehow true, with the origins of Adam and Eve taking place *alongside* evolution? Building on well-established but overlooked science, Swamidass explains how it's possible for Adam and Eve to be rightly identified as the ancestors of everyone. His analysis opens up new possibilities for understanding Adam and Eve, consistent both with current scientific consensus and with traditional readings of Scripture. These new possibilities open a conversation about what it means to be human.

Some think Adam and Eve are a myth. Some think evolution is a myth. Either way, the best available science opens up space to engage larger questions together. In this bold exploration, Swamidass charts a new way forward for peace between mainstream science and the Christian faith.

Review

Scientist and physician, S. Joshua Swamidass, presents a relatively new viewpoint on how to view Adam as the common ancestor of all currently living humans. He notes that, while the Bible cites Adam and Eve as our first *genealogical* ancestors, it makes no comment about them being our *genetic* ancestors. According to Swamidass: “Scripture does not speak of genetics, but it does emphasize genealogy, presenting Adam as the genealogical ancestor of the human race” (p. 247). Thus, while the Bible has nothing to say about *genetics*, it has plenty to say about *genealogy*.

Swamidass states that the age of Adam (i.e., the first human) depends on how one defines *human*: “If we mean *Homo sapiens*, we arise sometime between 100,000 to 350,000 years ago. If we mean the genus *Homo*, we arise sometime between 2.5 and 1.8 million years ago” (p. 102). Based on population studies, Swamidass posits that Adam and Eve, as ancestors of us all, could have lived as recently as 6,000 years ago. However, this outcome would depend on their breeding with other biologically equivalent “humans” living outside of the Garden of Eden. In this case, God may have created Adam and Eve in the Garden as special creations, who then mated with other biologically equivalent beings (also created by God), who lived outside the Garden. In this view, Adam and Eve, while living in the Garden, may have represented all humankind (Rom. 5:12), but because they failed to resist temptation, sin and death entered the world of human experience.

Swamidass provides a compelling statistical argument that the minimum amount of time required for a specific pair to become universal ancestors is as little as 3,000 years, or as long as 5,000 years (p. 61). Based on published simulations of genealogical ancestry, Adam and Eve, if they existed as a specific pair, could have lived as recently as six thousand years ago, and could have been the ancestors of all those alive at the beginning of the first century AD, and beyond (p. 64).

Swamidass indicates that there exists “no [genetic] evidence for or against Adam and Eve, [as] ancestors of us all” (p. 81). Thus, in the absence of genetic evidence to the contrary, Swamidass has made a compelling scientific argument that a historical Adam and Eve may not only have been real people but could also be our universal genealogical ancestors.

I tend to read a lot of books (approximately 40-60 per year) and mostly read non-fiction historical or philosophical tomes. That said, *The Genealogical Adam and Eve* was perhaps the most important book I read in 2020. It charts a new path for understanding the Genesis account of Adam and Eve and how this view might fit into current biblical thought while also preserving scientific credibility. With so much division in the church today caused by the various interpretations of the book of Genesis (see my book, [The Genesis Labyrinth](#)), it is great to see a position that attempts to build bridges between Christians of various doctrinal persuasions. With this book, Swamidass has done a tremendous service for the Christian church. Hopefully, the members of the church will humbly acknowledge their interpretations may not be infallible and that there is room for variant interpretations of Genesis.