



# Response to Madueme: Are People Outside the Garden Ruled Out?

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**T**raditionally, Scripture is understood to teach that all humanity descended from Adam and Eve, who were created by God and placed in the Garden of Eden. Does this tradition rule out people outside the Garden of Eden? If they did exist, how would we think of them? This is the central question of human origins in *The Genealogical Adam and Eve*.

*The Gospel Coalition* (TGC) is a conservative evangelical organization that figures prominently in the book. Theological concerns about human origins expressed by TGC-associated authors are discussed in several places, such as Tim Keller's [statements](#) about the importance of a *de novo* Adam and Eve (pp. 8-9, 80).<sup>1</sup> Swamidass' hypothesis about Adam and Eve is also shaped by the [same theological concerns](#) articulated by TGC authors.

The first response to *The Genealogical Adam and Eve* from TGC was recently [published](#) by Hans Madueme of Covenant College. Madueme's review is gracious and charitable. He understands the key points of the book, and explains them well. He acknowledges that it is a "substantive contribution to the dialogue" and much can be learned from it. But he also advances many objections to Swamidass' thesis. Some of his objections point to parts of the book that do need expansion. However, his objections do not, in my view, successfully challenge Swamidass' key thesis: a traditional, literal reading of Scripture does not *rule out* the existence of people outside the Garden.

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1. See also these online articles and discussions on Keller's views by Swamidass: [In Defense of Tim Keller](#), [Keller on Adam and Eve](#), and [Biologos Edits Their Response to Keller](#).

## A Minimalist Project

*The Genealogical Adam and Eve* is a minimalist project, just as Madueme notes in his review. This is an important point to keep in mind. Swamidass is making space for a large range of views, so he does not commit to a hyper-specific, narrow model of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve could have been created *de novo* or refurbished from the existing hominid population. They could have lived around 6,000 years ago, or 20,000, or even much older than that.<sup>2</sup> Neither does the book commit to a specific position on what made them distinctive from the people outside the Garden, though it does propose one approach in Chapter 14.

The Scriptural case made in the book is also minimalist: Scripture *allows* for people outside the garden, and might even hint at their existence. In his review, Madueme repeatedly claims that this is not well-supported by Scripture. But Swamidass does not claim nor require that Scripture proves the existence of people outside the garden.

Thus, it is not much of a rebuttal merely to argue that Scripture does not prove their existence. For Swamidass' case to work, he only needs to show that their existence is not ruled out. Madueme does claim that people outside the Garden are directly contradicted. In my view, he does not make his case.

## Science, Methodology, and Hermeneutics

Before we discuss his specific arguments, let us respond to some methodological issues raised by Madueme. First, Madueme accuses Swamidass of being too driven by science:

Second, evolutionary biology dictates the rules of engagement in *The Genealogical Adam and Eve*. Swamidass's task is then to offer multiple interpretations of Adam and Scripture that don't violate those rules. The asymmetry is telling—he's confident about evolutionary science, meanwhile the relevant biblical texts have no fixed meaning. If Swamidass thinks that his many options are all

2. It is true that on page 25, Swamidass lists a recent Adam and Eve living only several thousand years ago as one of the criteria for his hypothesis. But there, Swamidass is clearly intending to subject his hypothesis to the strongest traditional constraints (apart from the issue of people outside the Garden). He later mentions other related models of Adam and Eve, including that of [Reasons to Believe](#), which place Adam and Eve tens or hundreds of thousands of years before (pp. 160, 202).

equally defensible exegetically, then I disagree. Scripture is not so opaque.

This is a misleading impression of the book. While Swamidass does extensively utilize mainstream population genetics and statistics to argue for his scientific conclusions, most of the book actually emphasizes how many evolution-friendly theologians and Christian scientists have frequently gotten the science *wrong* in the past (e.g. p. 80). Swamidass is also very careful to point out matters where the science is unknown, such as whether there are any populations which have been fully genealogically isolated for thousands of years (pp. 76-78). In fact, as we shall revisit later, major parts of Swamidass' hypothesis are directly motivated by biblical concerns.

Next, Madueme raises an important issue regarding hermeneutic methodology:

In any case, the explicit passages of Scripture should guide our interpretation of less clear texts; they should delimit the significance of the alleged "clues" in early Genesis. The idea of people outside the garden is only plausible if one interprets Scripture atomistically, focusing on ambiguities in the text. Pressures from science prompt new interpretations gleaned from textual silences, interpretations that contradict what the text states explicitly elsewhere.

I agree with Madueme that clearer passages of Scripture should guide the interpretation of less clear passages. I also agree that the text should control our interpretation, not science. I am sure Swamidass also would agree.

But Swamidass does *not* appeal to science in his interpretation of Scripture (Ch. 11). Swamidass addresses Scriptural objections to people outside the Garden (pp. 145-147) *without* any reference to science. For example, Swamidass correctly points out that nothing in the words of the text states directly that Cain's city was the first city (p. 145). He also argues from Hebrews 11:12 that when the Bible points out "one man" (Abraham) from which a nation (Israel) originates, it does not rule out the existence of interbreeding with non-Israelite nations, which we know happened from biblical witness.<sup>3</sup> Neither of these examples contain any appeal to science to undermine a traditional interpretation.

So how exactly is science influencing exegesis in Swamidass' book? Furthermore, is any influence impermissible? In fact, *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics* encourages hermeneutics to take questions from science seriously.

In fact, interrogating biblical statements concerning nature in the light of scientific knowledge about their subject matter may help toward attaining a more precise exegesis of them. For though exegesis must be controlled by the text itself, not shaped by extraneous considerations, the exegetical process is constantly stimulated by questioning the text as to whether it means this or that.

Are people outside the Garden ruled out by Scripture? This is a legitimate question to ask and answering this question can bring light to precisely what it is that Scripture does and does not say. At question here is whether or not people outside the Garden explicitly

contradict the biblical text. As we will see, Madueme has not shown any such contradiction.

## An Unbiblical Adam?

Let us now dive into Madueme's objections. First, Madueme states that a "biblical Adam and Eve" conceives of Adam and Eve as the genealogical ancestors of all human beings, not merely those alive today. Somehow, this is dissonant with the genealogical hypothesis.

Nevertheless, the genealogical hypothesis itself is still dissonant with the biblical Adam and Eve. In that latter picture, Adam and Eve are genealogical ancestors of all human beings who have ever lived, not merely the ones alive today. This judgment has ample biblical witness, including [Genesis 1-3](#), the biblical genealogies across the two Testaments ([Gen. 1-11](#); [Luke 3:23-38](#); see also [1 Chron. 1](#); [Jude 14](#)), Paul who believed Adam and Eve were exclusive progenitors of the human race ([Rom. 5:12-21](#); [1 Cor. 15:21-22](#); [Acts 17:26](#)), and so on.

First, Madueme might have missed that Swamidass explains precisely how Adam and Eve can be the parents of all humans in history, not merely those alive today (Chs. 8-11). Swamidass defines "human" within Scripture as "Adam and Eve and their descendants" (pp. 133-136). With this textual definition of human, all humans in history, not merely those alive today, descend from Adam and Eve. While there are biological humans outside the Garden, they are not humans within the discourse of Scripture. In contrast, Madueme implicitly equates *human* with *biological human* without engaging substantially with Swamidass' definition. As we shall return to later, his own position on the definition of *human* is unclear.

Second, it is strange to see Madueme contrast Swamidass's proposal with the "biblical Adam." Throughout the book, Swamidass' biblical concerns clearly echo those of Madueme. It is readily apparent that his hypothesis is strongly motivated by the *precise* passages quoted by Madueme. Swamidass makes a detailed explanation in Chapter 11 ("Humans of the Text") that people outside the Garden (the core idea Madueme disputes) are not in contradiction with a so-called "plain" reading of these passages. The reason is that they do not descend from Adam and Eve, so they are not the people to whom Scripture refers.

Likewise, motivated by the biblical witness in Genesis 2:7, 21-22, Swamidass includes the *de novo* creation of Adam and Eve in the hypothesis (p. 25). The requirement that Adam and Eve be the ancestors of all humans living in AD 1 is motivated by Acts 17:26, namely that by then, the descendants of Adam and Eve must have spread out widely throughout the earth (p. 139). Swamidass also takes seriously the centrality of the Adam and Eve narrative to traditional Christian theology, such as universal sin and monogenesis (Romans 5:12-18, p. 114). Hence, citing these verses alone does not substantiate Madueme's objections. It is far from obvious that any of these passages rule out people outside the Garden.

## The Weightiest Objection

Madueme calls this his "weightiest objection", also motivated by Scripture, but also traditional theology:

3. See David Opderbeck's article [A "Historical" Adam?](#) for more elaboration on this point.

This becomes evident in light of the analogy of Scripture. Swamidass repeatedly says things like: “Looking at Genesis alone, we cannot conclude that all people descend from Adam and Eve” (138, and *passim*). My weightiest objection to this claim, and my main objection to the book as a whole, is that Swamidass is almost certainly wrong in *canonical* context. In brief, God’s creation of humanity in [Genesis 1:26–28](#) ostensibly depicts Adam and Eve as the sole original pair, hence Eve’s designation as “the mother of all the living” ([Gen. 3:20](#)). In biblical discourse, men and women are “sons of Adam” (e.g., [Ps. 11:4](#); [1 Kings 8:39](#)), while “Adam” is often translated as the generic term for humanity (“sons of mankind”). However, that linguistic nuance—the same Hebrew word for *Adam* and *humanity*—itself reflects the biblical mindset that the human race derives from Adam the first man.

Against the backdrop of a global flood ([2 Pet. 2:5](#); [3:5–6](#)), Adam as father of humanity foreshadows Noah as the second Adam and father of post-flood humanity. In the New Testament, Luke’s genealogy extends all the way back to Adam ([Luke 3:23–38](#)), Jesus in his discussion of divorce mentions the creation of Adam and Eve and their union ([Matt. 19:4–5](#)), and Paul sees him as the font of humanity ([Acts 17:26](#); see also [1 Tim. 2:11–14](#); [1 Cor. 11:8–9](#)). Indeed, the biblical story of sin and redemption makes little sense without Adam as first human being ([Rom. 5:12–21](#); [1 Cor. 15:21–22](#)). The unity of the human race is rooted in him; although we sinned in the first Adam, God’s Son came down from heaven, in human flesh, as the last Adam—and therefore, astonishingly, Jesus is Savior of *all* people ([John 4:42](#); [1 Tim. 4:10](#)).

Let us keep in mind that Swamidass proposes we define *human* in Scripture as “Adam and Eve and their descendants” (pp. 133–136). With this in mind, Madueme’s interpretations of the biblical passages above do *not* force us to reject the existence of *people* outside the Garden, the key premise of *The Genealogical Adam and Eve*. At most, these passages force us to recognize more unique theological and/or spiritual significance to the descendants of Adam and Eve, adding weight to the idea that Adam is the *fount* of humanity in a substantive sense.

Such proposals are possible, as shown in Swamidass’ presentation of the five possible origins of Adam and Eve (p. 83). Some models referenced in the book, like those proposed by [Kenneth Kemp](#) and [Andrew Loke](#), have Adam as the first rational soul or *homo divinus* and might fulfill this criterion. Likewise, in the “Narrative Experiment” (Chapter 14), Swamidass explores several qualities that may make Adam and Eve and their descendants different from the people outside the Garden. Once again, these are only a few examples of models which incorporate Swamidass’ minimalist hypothesis of people outside the Garden.

## Genesis is Not The Whole Story

Ironically, some of Madueme’s textual arguments against people outside the garden actually make space for them. For example, Madueme rightly notes that Genesis is not the whole story:

For example, while Genesis doesn’t tell us whom Cain married, [Genesis 1–11](#) is a highly compressed, selective narrative that omits many other descendants of Adam and Eve. Cain would have married one of his sisters (and, presumably, incest had a different moral quality at this early stage of the human story). This traditional

solution, whatever its defects, approaches Scripture as a unified, single-yet-polyphonic Word of God rather than conjuring up other non-Adamic humans, a move that negates explicit monogenetic texts. Scripture isn’t concerned with “biological humans of antiquity” (140) because that category itself is foreign to the redemptive-historical narrative and, indeed, is antithetical to its very structure.

Indeed, Genesis 1–11 is a very highly compressed, selective narrative primarily concerning redemptive history. Unsurprisingly, it does not talk about the people outside of the Garden, as the redemption narrative of Scripture is primarily concerned with the descendants of Adam and Eve. But the fact Scripture does not address something directly does not mean it does not exist. Of course, Scripture does not rule out Madueme’s idea of Cain marrying his sister, but this is not the only possible reading. The Genesis tradition, in fact, includes speculation about Cain’s wife.

## No “Adam” To Till The Garden

After all, their direct creation finds support in [Genesis 2](#) (especially [Gen. 2:7](#)) and implies a particular hermeneutical approach to Scripture, one that some would deride as “conservative” or “literalistic.” That interpretative stance denies any people outside the garden, given texts like [Genesis 2:18](#) and the logic of the traditional understanding of the biblical story, a logic in which a sole original couple and their *de novo* creation go hand in hand.

Let’s take the reference to Genesis 2:18: “Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (ESV). There is nothing here that rules out people outside the Garden. There are plenty of animals on Earth at this time, yet man is still said to be alone because none are fit to help him (v. 20). As Swamidass explains in Chapter 11, there could be plenty of people outside the Garden, but none are suitable to accompany Adam as being the special representative in a covenant relationship with God.<sup>4</sup> The same reasoning undermines Madueme’s reasoning on Genesis 2:7.

Now, to give a bit of balance, I do grant that there is *one* text that gives me pause about the existence of people outside the Garden, namely Genesis 3:20, where Eve is named as the mother of all the living. If becoming a universal genealogical ancestor is something biologically and genealogically unremarkable, then why did Adam (or the author of Genesis) felt important to point out the origin of Eve’s name, given that there are many people outside the Garden who are also universal ancestors of the same set of people as Adam and Eve’s descendants? Swamidass only mentions this text once (p. 114), and I feel that more attention could have been given to this in the book.<sup>5</sup>

4. See also Swamidass’ take on Genesis 2:22 on page 146.

5. I also do not think this problem is fatal or unresolvable. Whom does “all living” refer to? We know from Scripture that there are many other living beings outside the Garden besides Adam and Eve, which rules out the universal scope of the qualifier “living”. It is also not clear whether the author of Genesis is referring to “all” in his present day (for example, during the time of Moses) or in the moment when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden. In the case of the former, the problem is resolved, as by that moment Adam and Eve might have already become genealogical ancestors of everyone on earth. In the case of the latter, then the statement is even more confusing, given that it is likely that Eve did not become a mother until afterwards (Gen. 4:1). There are just some of the interesting issues with this text that could be an avenue for deeper analysis.

Swamidass, however, did later explain his reasoning in response to Madueme's article. Apart from this issue, as I have discussed, Madueme's Scriptural arguments rule out people outside the Garden only if one already assumes that to be the default position, which is begging the question.

## Speculating About Nephilim

Swamidass points to speculation about Nephilim in Genesis 6 as reason to be open about people outside the Garden (pp. 144-145). Here, he is claiming a certain equivalence between angels interbreeding with Adam and Eve's lineage and people outside the Garden. But Madueme misses the point:

Whatever we might think of human beings interbreeding with fallen angels, it has a solid textual basis and presupposes all humans as descendants of Adam. Swamidass's thesis about others outside the garden rests on a thin exegetical reed and presupposes that not all humans descend from Adam. Regardless of your convictions on origins, his equivalency move seems to be a big red herring.

It is true that angels are not biological humans outside the garden. However, regarding Nephilim, Swamidass is merely claiming exegetical space, not exegetical support. The "equivalency move" does show that even conservative YECs do not have *absolute theological objections* against Adam and Eve interbreeding with biologically compatible beings that do not descend from Adam and Eve. No major planks of traditional theology (such as the historical reality of the Fall and the universality of sin) are threatened if Adam's descendants did interbreed with fallen angels. So, why would it be a problem for them to be breeding with people outside the garden?

The Nephilim exhibition at Ken Ham's *Ark Encounter* is an example of a long tradition of Christians (including YECs) speculating about reproductively-compatible beings outside the Garden.

## The Importance of Defining "Human"

Madueme's objections show a repeated pattern. They miss their target because he neglects how Swamidass is defining *humans* in Scripture and theology. To refute Swamidass' key thesis, Madueme has to show that the existence of biological humans outside the garden conflicts with Scripture given a textual definition of *human* as "Adam and Eve and their descendents."<sup>6</sup> As noted above, this definition affirms explicitly the doctrine that all humans, past and

present, descend from Adam and Eve. Madueme seems clearly aware of this distinction, but he perplexingly does not explain why Swamidass' proposal fails to resolve his objections.

Moreover, Madueme does not give a clear articulation of his own position as to what defines humanity in Scripture. What does Paul mean by "all men" in Romans 5:12? Is it defined by biological reproductive compatibility, DNA, or other characteristics? Are other members of the *homo* genus included in "all men"? How about the Nephilim? It is insufficient to object that "all men" refers to the sons of Adam (which is the traditional answer), because this is exactly the definition that Swamidass uses! Either way, as noted by Jon Garvey, one must also grapple with the theological status of other hominids that we know existed from physical fossil evidence.

As said by the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Scripture is "true and reliable in all the matters it addresses." Does Scripture rule out people outside the Garden? Madueme has not shown that it does. Swamidass argues convincingly (pp. 143-145) that Scripture mostly doesn't address them. After all, there has been a long history of speculation about people outside the Garden even before the advent of modern science. There are even some passages that might hint at their existence.

Swamidass' book makes a minimal case, only arguing that people outside the Garden are not ruled out. First, Madueme's textual objections fail to rule out this model. None of the texts explicitly rule out the existence of people outside the garden, except if one begs the question by already assuming that they must. Second, Madueme also does not substantively engage with Swamidass' distinction between textual and biological humans, which is key to his thesis.

In fact, this is one of Swamidass's most important contributions to the debate: a non-intuitive reminder that the definition of "human" used by scientists is not the same as that used by the authors of Scripture. Theologians and exegetes have legitimate autonomy to understand *human* in different ways. There is an invitation here. The most interesting engagement with Swamidass' work would include thoughtful reflections on what it means to be "human." Engaging this grand question is what Swamidass' book invites, and I hope Madueme and other readers of Swamidass' book will join that conversation with us.

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6. Madueme can also take the route of arguing why the textual definition of *human* must be equal with the modern scientific definition of a *biological human*.

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