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Pre-Adamic man: were there human beings on Earth before Adam?

by **Russell Grigg**

Could there have been human creatures, commonly called 'pre-Adamites', living on Earth before God created Adam? Many readers, no doubt, will think this a foolish question, but it is, in fact, the belief of many evangelicals. And leading 'progressive creationist' Hugh Ross teaches something similar when he says that 'bipedal, tool-using, large-brained primates roamed Earth for hundreds of thousands (perhaps a million) years'.¹

Ross does not believe in biological evolution, although he accepts cosmic and geologic evolution and the evolutionary timescale. He also believes in the same general sequence of events and the same order of appearance as evolutionists. Although he believes that God made Adam from the dust, he also accepts the evolutionists' long-age interpretation of the fossil record. But human fossils are found 'dated' earlier than Adam's genealogies could possibly allow. This requires Ross to postulate the existence of creatures with human-like characteristics, but 'spiritless' (see *Skull Wars* p. 51 this issue).^{2,3} Ross says, '... these creatures went extinct before Adam and Eve came on the scene.'⁴

Why did they 'become extinct'? According to Ross, because the world was a place of death, violence and decay for hundreds of thousands/millions of years before the Curse recorded in [Genesis 3:14–19](#). He makes the extraordinary statement: 'The step-by-step approach to bipedal primate creation that we can see in the recent fossil record may reasonably reflect God's understanding of the difficulty other life-forms would encounter in adapting to sinful humans.'⁵

This is a classic example of the confusion that Christians get themselves into when they depart from the text of the Bible and allow outside influences, especially long-age naturalism, to dictate the meaning of Scripture.

Pre-Adamism has a long history

In 1655, Frenchman Isaac La Peyrère published his theory that not only did Adam come from pre-Adamic stock (rather than being formed by God from the dust of the ground), but also Cain's wife and the inhabitants of Cain's city came from *other* pre-Adamic stock.⁶ (See [bottom box](#).)

In the 18th and 19th centuries, because white and non-white people looked superficially different, a minority of Christians thought that God had created non-whites separately from Adam, and so they must have descended from pre-Adamic creatures. Hence pre-Adamism took the form of *polygenism*, or multiple creations of different races. Proponents of this idea often thought that non-whites were inferior beings who could be treated as slaves. Pre-Adamism thus became the scientific justification for slavery, and a defense for racism.

Pre-Adamites were also an integral part of the now-discredited gap theory.⁷ In this the pre-Adamites were soulless beings which all perished in a catastrophe called 'Lucifer's Flood', which allegedly occurred between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1 'in the far-distant dateless past'.⁸

Modern pre-Adamists

In the 20th century, with the rise of Darwinism and the continued discovery of allegedly very old human-like fossils, many evangelicals compromised by adopting theistic evolution. They accepted a relatively young age for the Biblical Adam (if they retained belief in him at all), but said that the 'old' human fossils came from pre-Adamite human-like creatures.

One such neo-evangelical is Londoner John R.W. Stott (who also compromises the Bible's teaching on eternal conscious punishment for the unsaved because it offends his sensibilities). He writes: '[M]y acceptance of Adam and Eve as historical is not incompatible with my belief that several forms of pre-Adamic 'hominid' seem to have existed for thousands of years previously. ... It is conceivable that God created Adam out of one of them. ... I think you may even call some of them *Homo sapiens* ...'.⁹

Pre-Adamism has thus been used by some Christians to try and harmonize science and the Bible. However, in doing this, Stott and his fellow-thinkers not only add something to Genesis that is not there (i.e. pre-Adamites), they also deny [Genesis 2:7](#), which specifically says: 'The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground'—the very dust to which Adam would return after God had pronounced the death penalty for sin ([Genesis 3:19](#)).

Pre-Adamism of this type is also starkly contrary to what Genesis tells us about Eve, namely that God made her from one of Adam's ribs ([Genesis 2:21](#)), not from some pre-existing creature; and that Adam named her Eve 'because she was the mother of all living' ([Genesis 3:20](#)).

Evangelicals who cannot accept the plain text of the Bible regarding the creation of the first man from the dust of the ground often do not accept what the Bible says about the Flood being global, because they accept the fossil layers as evidence for millions of years, not the result of the sequence of burial by a global flood. John Stott writes: 'The flood seems to have been a comparatively local—though widespread—disaster'.¹⁰

Christian creationist anthropologist Marvin Lubenow describes the evidence of a sin nature in the (allegedly pre-Adamic) human fossil record, including examples of cannibalism, and injury due to violence, scalping and disease, including syphilis. He writes: 'Most pre-Adamite and old-Earth advocates seem to be unfamiliar with the extent of this human fossil evidence and may not realize the full significance of what they are proposing when they place the bulk of the human fossils prior to the Fall of the Biblical Adam. ... The human fossil record reveals the pre-Adamite theory to be in error. ... We find in [the human fossils] the conditions we would expect to find after the Fall of Adam, not before.'¹¹

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Implications of pre-Adamism

The Bible says nothing about the existence and death of *any* pre-Adamite creatures, either spirited or spiritless. Some Christians say that Adam was the first man to be made in the image of God, though there were also human-like creatures before him. But they have assumed that the alleged Pre-Adamic fossils constitute a reliable record; i.e. the fossils have been interpreted correctly in both anatomy *and* age. They are also, in effect, saying:

1. that the first land animals and man were not created by God at the same time, namely during the 24 hours of Day Six of Creation Week, as Genesis 1 clearly states;
2. that the short age timescale in Genesis (obtained from the genealogies and other parts of the Bible, e.g. [Mark 10:6](#)) is not correct;
3. that the Curse of death in the created world was not the result of Adam's sin, as Genesis 3 states. If pre-Adamite creatures were living and dying for hundreds of thousands/millions of years before Adam, then the connection is lost between the first Adam, who brought physical death into the world, and the last Adam (the Lord Jesus Christ), who brought physical resurrection from the dead ([1 Corinthians 15:22, 45](#)).¹² As Adam was federal head of the entire creation, his Fall affected everything else ([Romans 8:20–22](#)). The fact is that, Biblically, all physical death has occurred *since* Adam's Fall, not before. 'As sincere as they may be, those [Christians] who espouse the pre-Adamite theory and its history of death before Adam are actually endangering the very doctrine of salvation they hold dear.'¹²
4. that the 'very good' world which God created included carnivory, despite the [Genesis 1:29–30](#) teaching that animals and humans were originally vegetarian.

The Bible tells us that Adam was the first biological man—in Genesis 1–5; [Deuteronomy 32:8](#); [1 Chronicles 1:1](#); [Luke 3:38](#); [Romans 5:14](#); [1 Corinthians 15:22, 45](#); [1 Timothy 2:13](#); and [Jude 14](#). So, how many parts of the Bible are they willing to concede as being 'errant', or in need of 'reinterpreting', in order to accommodate the evolutionary/uniformitarian interpretation of the fossil record?

The key issue

Hugh Ross and his fellow progressive creationists, along with the other pre-Adamite proponents, are trying to rescue the Bible from a perceived conflict with 'science' by reinterpreting the Bible rather than by questioning the 'science'. This is because they erroneously think that 'science' speaks with more authority than God's Word about origins and the age of the Earth. Such a mindset overlooks the fact that where modern science deals with origins, it is based on strict naturalism (the humanistic view that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural, not supernatural, causes and laws). Unfortunately compromise of this sort means having to continually change one's position to keep up with evolutionary pronouncements.

For example, Ross stated on his Web site in 1997: 'Starting about 2 to 4 million years ago God began creating man-like mammals or "hominids."? These creatures stood on two feet, had large brains, and used tools. Some even buried their dead and painted on cave walls. However, they were very different from us. They had no spirit. They did not have a conscience like we do. They did not worship God or establish religious practices. In time, all these man-like creatures went extinct. Then, about 10 to 25 thousand years ago, God replaced them with Adam and Eve.'¹³

Notice that Ross states that Adam and Eve lived 10–25 thousand years ago (he realizes that he can't push the genealogies too far). However, when the same dating methods in which he trusts said that the Australian Aborigines and American Indians lived 40–60,000 years ago, he changed the sentence in the above quote to read: 'Then about 10 to 60 thousand years ago, God replaced them with Adam and Eve.'¹⁴ Presumably the change was made because the 25,000 year limit would mean that the Aborigines and Indians could not have been descendants of Adam and Eve. However, his adjusted range of dates does not solve the problem. If it is *possible* that Adam and Eve lived 10,000 years ago, then this implies it is *possible* that such indigenous people are not descendants of Adam and Eve (which would mean that they could not be saved through Christ, our kinsman/redeemer—[Isaiah 59:20](#)).¹⁵

No doubt, further adjustments will appear should some evolutionist claim that Aborigines lived 80,000 or 100,000 years ago.

The same problem shows up in the writings of well-known Old Testament scholar Gleason Archer. He struggles with having human skeletons dated, by the secular methods he and Ross trust in, as older than could possibly fit into the genealogies in the Bible. Hence their need for soulless pre-Adamites. Gleason writes: 'To revert to the problem of the Pithecanthropus, the Swanscombe man, the Neanderthal and all the rest (possibly even the Cro-magnon man, who is apparently to be classed as Homo sapiens, but whose remains seem to date back at least to 20,000 B.C.) it seems best to regard these races as all prior to Adam's time, and not involved in the Adamic covenant. We must leave the question open, in view of the cultural remains, whether these pre-Adamic creatures had souls (or, to use the trichotomic terminology, spirits).'¹⁶

Gleason goes on to assert that only Adam and his descendants were infused with the breath of God and a spiritual nature corresponding to God himself, and to say that all mankind subsequent to Adam's time must have been literally descended from him. However, he retains the concept of pre-Adamic races (e.g. Cro-Magnon man), and says, 'They may have been exterminated by God for unknown reasons prior to the creation of the original parent of the present human race.'¹⁶

In reality, no scientific method exists for measuring the age of something directly. *All* dating methods rely on unprovable assumptions. The evidence suggests there is something radically wrong with the assumptions upon which radiometric dating rests (see [page 20](#) this issue). Christians, when opting for dates in the Earth's fossil record, should use the chronology of the Bible. This is because it is an accurate eye-witness account of history which bears within itself the evidence that it is the Word of God.¹⁷

Christians today have no mandate from God to reinterpret His infallible Word to make it fit any current fallible atheistic human opinions. As noted American evangelical theologian Dr John MacArthur says, 'Scripture, not science, is the ultimate test of all truth. **And the further evangelicalism gets from that conviction, the less evangelical and more humanistic it becomes** (emphasis added).'¹⁸

MacArthur also says: 'Evangelicals who accept an old-earth interpretation of Genesis have embraced a hermeneutic [i.e. interpretation] that is hostile to a high view of Scripture. They are bringing to the opening chapters of Scripture a method of biblical interpretation that has built-in antievangelical presuppositions. Those who adopt this approach have already embarked on a process that invariably overthrows faith. Churches and colleges that embrace this view will not remain evangelical long.'^{19,20}

Cain's wife's origin: why it matters!

In the 17th century, some Bible expositors, it seems, could not answer the question of where Cain got his wife.¹ One such was Isaac La Peyrère, a Jewish convert to Catholicism from Bordeaux.² To solve what he considered to be a problem, he proposed that Cain's wife

and the inhabitants of Cain's city all came not from Adam but from pre-Adamic stock—beings who had lived in 'the indefinite amount of time before Adam'.³

He said that Adam was the first Jew and the father of the Jews, but not the father of mankind, so it is not surprising that La Peyrère rejected the doctrine of Original Sin, i.e. that innate depravity is transmitted to all mankind because of Adam's sin. He said that in the world to come everyone would be saved (universalism). He also argued that Eve was not the first woman, but the first *Jewish* woman, wife and mother. To explain the presence of Gentiles post-Flood, and to avoid the conclusion that they were all descendants of Noah and his family, he said that the Flood was local, not global. The Gentiles were descended from various pre-Adamites, not from Adam. This polygenesis of the Gentiles was his method of explaining the existence of the Negroes, Chinese, Eskimos, American Indians, Malays and other people groups being discovered.

He also denied that Moses wrote the Pentateuch (i.e. Genesis to Deuteronomy), and he questioned both the accuracy of Genesis and the authenticity of the Biblical text. Although he was soundly refuted by Jewish and Protestant theologians, and declared to be a heretic by the Catholic Church, his questioning of the authority and accuracy of the Bible was the beginning of modern bibloscepticism. From it came the so-called modern 'higher criticism' of the Bible.

In the 20th century, the claim that other-colored people originated from pre-Adamites has been a key pillar for theistically inclined 'white' racists.⁴ These have included British Israelites, Christian Identity, and some factions of the Ku Klux Klan.⁵ What an incredible legacy of hate derives from the failure of the leaders of these organizations to correctly answer the matter of who Cain's wife was!

References and notes

1. For the answer, see our booklet *Where Did Cain Get his Wife?* available from the addresses on page 2. [Return to text.](#)
2. This section resourced from Popkin, R.H., *Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676) His Life, Work and Influence*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1987. [Return to text.](#)
3. Some modern pre-Adamitists believe that Cain was biologically fathered by the serpent, in contradiction of [Genesis 4:1](#). [Return to text.](#)
4. Some have even said that non-whites were included in the 'beasts of the earth' (which are listed before Adam in the Creation account ([Genesis 1:24](#))), and so escaped the Flood because they were included in the creatures that Noah and his sons took aboard the Ark! Such teaching, of course, attacks the image of God in all humanity ([Genesis 1:26–27](#)). See Larson, V., 'Identity: A "Christian"? religion for white racists', <[www.equip.org/free/DI100.htm](#)>, 19 June 2002. [Return to text.](#)
5. See for example 'Profile Christian Identity', <[www.watchman.org/profile/Identitypro.htm](#)>, 19 June 2002. [Return to text.](#)

References and notes

1. Ross, H., *The Genesis Question*, NavPress, Colorado, p. 55, 1998. See [refutation CEN Tech. J. 13\(2\):22–30, 1999](#). [Return to text.](#)
2. Elsewhere, Ross says: 'They're just like the primates. They're like the chimpanzees, orangutans, gorillas ...', Ross–Hovind Debate, John Ankerberg Show, October 2000, analysis by [Jonathan Sarfati](#), <[/ross_hovind](#)>, 7 January 2002. [Return to text.](#)
3. Note: we are not talking here about ape-men, which evolutionists postulate to be the forerunners of man, but beings which have the characteristics that scientists apply to true man, apart from spirituality, in Ross's view. [Return to text.](#)
4. Ref. 1, p. 30. [Return to text.](#)
5. Ref. 1, p. 56. [Return to text.](#)
6. *Prae-Adamitae*[Amsterdam], 1655. An English edition, *Men before Adam*, appeared in London in 1656. [Return to text.](#)
7. Proposed by Thomas Chalmers (c. 1814) and popularized by G.H. Pember in his 1876 work, *Earth's Earliest Ages*. The idea of a gap was 'canonized' for some Christians when C.I. Scofield included it in the footnotes of the *Scofield Reference Bible* in 1909. [Return to text.](#)
8. For a refutation of the gap theory see [Batten, D.](#) (Ed.), *The Answers Book, Answers in Genesis*, Queensland, Australia, chapter 3, What about the 'gap' and 'ruin-reconstruction' theories? 1999. [Return to text.](#)
9. Stott, J., *Understanding the Bible*, Scripture Union Publishing, Sydney, Revised Edition, p.49, 1984. [Return to text.](#)
10. Ref. 9, p. 50. Just why Noah would spend a hundred years building a monster ship instead of simply migrating to far-distant higher ground is usually not explained. Ross speculates that God commanded Noah to build the Ark because he needed a pulpit(!), but no other prophet needed an ocean-liner-sized pulpit, and the Bible explicitly states that the Ark was to save eight humans and representative animals. Nor is it clear why *any* animals would have been needed aboard, as there would have been lots of others living elsewhere to reproduce after their kind, and birds could easily have flown to safety—if the Flood had been local. See '[Noah's Flood covered the whole Earth](#)', *Creation* **21**(3):49, 1999. [Return to text.](#)
11. [Lubenow, Marvin L.](#), Pre-Adamites, Sin, Death and the Human Fossils, *CEN Tech. J.* **12**(2):230, 1998. [Return to text.](#)
12. Ref. 11, p. 225. See also [Grigg, R.](#), *First Adam—Last Adam*, *Creation* **21**(1):37–39, 2000. [Return to text.](#)
13. Hugh Ross, Reasons to Believe Web page, Genesis One, Dinosaurs and Cavemen, 20 May 1998. [Return to text.](#)
14. Hugh Ross, Reasons to Believe Web page, Genesis One, Dinosaurs and Cavemen, 26 June 2002. [Return to text.](#)
15. We presume that this is simple sloppiness, not racist in intent. [Return to text.](#)
16. Archer, G. Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Revised edition, Moody Press, Chicago, pp. 204–205, 1985. [Return to text.](#)
17. See [Batten D.](#), *Does Carbon Dating disprove the Bible? Answers in Genesis*, Brisbane, Australia, 2002. [Return to text.](#)
18. MacArthur, J., *The Battle for the Beginning*, W Publishing Group, [www.wpublishinggroup.com](#), p. 26, 2001. [Return to text.](#)
19. Ref. 18, p. 20. [Return to text.](#)
20. Cf. Ham, K. and Byers, S., *Slippery slide to unbelief: A famous evangelist [Charles Templeton] goes from hope to hopelessness*, *Creation* **22**(3):8–13, 2000. [Return to text.](#)

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