

Reclaiming Genesis: Part III

By Greg Witherow

In our 1st article we established that Genesis presents a historical narrative about real people, not mythology or fables. Further, the Bible is to be understood in a literal sense (not to be confused with *literalism*), an understanding of what the inspired author meant when he wrote the Text. In our 2nd article we addressed human origins as recounted in Genesis. In doing so it was pointed out that while Darwinian evolution and its Natural Selection must be rejected by Catholics, evolution within set limits can be held by the faithful. While most Catholics today embrace some form of evolution, neither evolution nor Creationism is official Church teaching. The Church allows for both to some extent.

We know Scripture needs no Second Voice from Man¹ to make it credible or true. Putting the Sacred Host under a microscope will not show the effects of transubstantiation. Running a series of tests cannot reveal the human soul. The Virgin Birth cannot be explained by Chance. But these dogmas and Mysteries are at the core of our Faith. Our Faith is not based on lab results or math equations, as sometimes God does not explain it. Yet “amens” to the truths of our Faith are found in Creation. Here we review scientific views once thought improbable but now deemed *possible*. While confirming traditional Church teaching it also exhibits the hazard of basing our beliefs on shifting science.

The Problem Of Methuselah

To the Critic there is much that sounds ludicrous in Genesis. He looks at the life spans recorded in the genealogies and is tempted to laugh. No respectable person would ever go onto the Larry King Live Show and state he believed these figures were accurate. A sane man cannot believe in 900-year life spans he says. But a molecular biologist might.

A Washington Post article dated October 31, 2007 entitled “The Invincible Man” tells of how molecular biologist Aubrey de Grey (a Cambridge researcher) has proposed aging should be viewed as a disease - and that it can be cured². He asserts that people **are capable of living to be 1,000 years old**. A panel put together by MIT reviewed the data. The article states,

“The judges were formidable for that MIT Technology Review challenge prize. They included Rodney Brooks, then director of MIT's Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory; Nathan Myhrvold, former chief technology officer of Microsoft; and J. Craig Venter, who shares credit for first sequencing the human genome. In the end, they decided no scientist had succeeded in blowing de Grey out of the water.”

¹ The Church teaches there is a second and third authoritative voice found in Tradition and the Magisterium. We believe the truths of our faith because Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium teach us.
² De Grey has just published a book entitled “Ending Aging: The Rejuvenation Breakthroughs That Could Reverse Human Aging in Our Lifetime”. He is now working to develop a tissue-repair strategy that would rejuvenate the human body and thereby allow an indefinite lifespan -- a medical goal he calls engineered negligible senescence. To this end, he has identified seven tissue-damages caused by aging that need to be repaired before this can be done. He is the chairman and chief science officer of the Methuselah Foundation and the editor-in-chief of the academic journal Rejuvenation Research.

While controversial, de Grey seems to be taken seriously in the scientific community³. What catches the eye of a Christian is the number 1,000. The ages (minus the disease?) recounted in the Genesis genealogies fall within this number. Now the hypothesis may in the end prove to be false. But the point is that a group of intelligent people with no religious agenda is having a serious discussion on a subject once considered ludicrous. Today a team of molecular biologists is **promoting a hypothesis consistent with a traditional Genesis interpretation**, one the Modernist told us we could not accept⁴.

The Problem Of Adam And Eve

Scripture states that Eve is the universal mother of all mankind. This dogma has traditionally been in conflict with Darwinian evolution. But recent scientific discoveries have altered the landscape. In the 1990's the "Single Origin Hypothesis" entered the scientific mainstream. Included in the theory is a common descent from one woman.

"Mitochondrial Eve (mt-mrca) is the name given by researchers to the woman who is defined as the matrilineal most recent common ancestor (MRCA) for all currently living humans. Passed down from mothers to offspring for over a hundred thousand years, **her mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) is now found in all living humans: every mtDNA in every living person is derived from hers...** She is believed to have lived about 140,000 years ago in what is now Ethiopia, Kenya or Tanzania. The time she lived is calculated based on the molecular clock technique of correlating elapsed time with observed genetic drift.⁵"

And what about our descent from one man?

"In human genetics, Y-chromosomal Adam (Y-MRCA) is the patrilineal human most recent common ancestor (MRCA) from whom all Y chromosomes in living men are descended. Y-chromosomal Adam is thus the male counterpart of Mitochondrial Eve (the mt-MRCA), the matrilineal human most recent common ancestor, from whom all mitochondrial DNA in living humans is descended, although they lived at different times. By analyzing DNA from people in all regions of the world, geneticist Spencer Wells has concluded that all humans alive today **are descended from a single man who lived in Africa** around 60,000 years ago⁶."

In summary, **one** secular theory on evolution holds that:

- All people alive today can trace their lineage to one common woman.
- All people alive today can trace their lineage to one common man.
- Our ancestors originated in one location, possibly in northeast Africa⁷

³ Watch a presentation he makes at this site: <http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/view/id/39>

⁴ While there *may* be symbolism in the ages, *Modernist theologians* tell us the ages are based on myth.

⁵ This quote about Mitochondrial Eve is lifted verbatim from Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia.

⁶ Ibid. Note: the molecular clock ages of these individuals varies widely depending on the researcher.

⁷ While these two individuals are not placed in Mesopotamian (the location of Eden), they are not too far from it. It's not like they think these people are from China or Brazil.

Yes, parts of the hypothesis still disputes the Biblical account, but the existence of mitochondrial Eve is significant. While mitochondrion Eve does not *prove* the Biblical account, she is *consistent* with it. If there were more than one mitochondrial Eve, atheists would have something to crow about⁸. Instead, the mtDNA may be a clue of our Eve.

The Problem Of Noah's Ark

The story of Noah's Ark is described in Genesis chapters 6 through 9. The narrative tells of 8 people (4 men and 4 women) who entered an Ark with multiple pairs of other animals. Everyone in the Ark survived a great flood that wiped out all of mankind. But higher criticism has called into question the flood account and today many choose to relegate the tale to allegory.

But Anthropologists point out that similar flood stories were embedded in the ancient cultures of the Middle East and Europe. The most famous of these is found in Tablet XI (see picture) of the Epic of Gilgamesh. The ancient Babylonian tablets containing this epic story date from the 7th century B.C. The story speaks of a great flood where a man named Utanapishtim and his family builds a boat. The man and his family gather themselves in the boat with all the beasts of the field and are saved from the deluge.



A storm rages for 7 days and 7 nights with flood waters resulting. Utanapishtim releases 3 birds (a dove, swallow and raven) in search of dry land. He finally releases the animals and offers a sacrifice to the gods. While inconsistencies exist amid the Epic of Gilgamesh and Noah, there are amazing similarities. This epic (and legends found in other cultures) demonstrates a catastrophic event is embedded in the memory of mankind.

Summary

The 1947 discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls gave us manuscripts 1,000 years older than those used to transcribe our Old Testament. The newfound manuscripts were consistent with the existing manuscripts, proving Scripture had not been corrupted. Archeology verified a foundational tenant of our Faith, **yet LACKING such proof our Faith is still true**. But as Modernists do not view Scripture as wholly inspired they elevate the sciences as judge of Scripture's authenticity. As only the plausible is accepted, Modernists **relegate the implausible to myth UNLESS the sciences concur**. Pius X invoked the Oath Against Modernism in 1910⁹, yet today we find a Modernist drift in our Catholic thinking. While the sciences can add an "amen" to our Faith, the Sacred Text is never threatened by the latest archeological dig. The Critics are wrong to say otherwise.

⁸ Y-chrom Adam & mitochondrial Eve lineages must **both exist** to be *consistent* with Genesis—and they do!

⁹ On September 1, 1910 Pope Pius X mandated that "all clergy, pastors, confessors, preachers, religious superiors, and professors in philosophical-theological seminaries" should swear to it. The oath continued to be taken until July of 1967 when the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* rescinded it. It is however still taken before priestly ordination by most traditionalists' Roman Catholic clergy.