

# The Creation and the Fall of Adam and Eve: Literal, Symbolic, or Myth?

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to explain the deeper meaning determined in the reference to Adam and Eve, the two trees, and the serpent found in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. The intention is to demonstrate that these characters and events were not mythological anecdotes, but concrete descriptions of factual events and characters, which have a deeper and added significance and spiritual importance now. The optimism of this paper is to reach a conclusion which will appeal to many as a favourable counter to the quandary and mystification arising from the questions asked.

## Introduction

The view that the book of Genesis is myth or allegory will most likely influence how one interprets associated passages of scripture. For example, how can one comprehend the significance of John 3:16 if one were to construe the narrative of the fall in Genesis 3:1–24 as myth or allegory? As the federal head, Adam symbolized all humankind before God in the Garden of Eden. When he sinned, it affected humanity for all future generations. Accordingly, interpreting this narrative as non-literal significantly dilutes the coming of Christ and his redemption of *all* humankind as the second *federal head* of the human race. This

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

would affect related scriptural references that follow this imperative narrative, hence, presenting a distorted picture of redemption.

Consequently, one would likewise view hell as mythological. According to Kennedy (2006:57), Christianity's Augustinian orthodoxy persuaded many people—over more than a millennia—that hell awaits any person not saved by Jesus Christ. For Kennedy, this was based on the second chapter of Genesis imaginatively describing the rebellion of Adam and Eve. He goes on to say that those scholars who reject the view of hell and the first primordial humans as fact, are to be admired for their insight and honesty.

The ramifications of decreeing the first two chapters of Genesis as myth has grave implications for believing the rest of the Bible. How would one distinguish which parts of the Bible are myth, and which parts describe factual events? Who has the authority to make such significant judgements?

According to Mitchell (1897:913–914), before one can attempt to answer these questions, one must first answer the question of whether the story of the fall, and the events that led up to it, is literal history or an allegory? Did the author of Genesis endeavour to describe the factual occurrence of a primary man and woman, or, simply hold a mirror up to human experience in general? However, before answering the propounded questions, it is necessary to present a brief synopsis of the emergent hermeneutical predispositions of Genesis, and specifically, the events surrounding the Garden of Eden.

## **1. Genesis as Narrative Fiction**

Regrettably, it appears that numerous biblical scholars are becoming passive in their attitude against the proposal that the creation story is an

allegory or mythological.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, some have now embraced the view conjectured by (chiefly) evolutionists—that the creation narrative is nothing but fiction. Marcus Borg (2003:49–50), for example, contends that,

the Genesis stories of creation, the Garden of Eden, the expulsion of Adam and Eve, Cain's murder of Abel, Noah and the flood, and the Tower of Babel are what might be called 'purely metaphorical narratives.' They are not reporting the early history of the earth and humankind; they are not history remembered. Yet as metaphorical narratives, they can be profoundly true, even though not literally factual.

Borg (2003:52) further deliberates:

A metaphorical approach leads to a very different result. The Genesis stories of creation are seen as Israel's stories of creation, not as God's stories of creation. They therefore have no more of a divine guarantee to be true in a literal-factual sense than do the creation stories of other cultures. When they are seen as metaphorical narratives, not factual accounts, they are 'myths' in Thomas Mann's sense of the word: stories about the way things never were, but always are. They are thus true, even though not literally true.

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<sup>2</sup> The author is aware that one could (and many scholars do) consider the events of Genesis through the lens of the *Literary Framework Theory*, accordingly affirming the creation week structure and the events surrounding the fall to be more figurative than literal. Mortenson and Ury (2008:212) as an illustration, state that the creation week and similar events is intended to present Gods activities of creation, rather than a literal sequential one. The problem is, when applying this to the rest of Genesis 2 and 3 it may leave the narrative open to speculation, thus giving credence to the events as myth.

When referring to doctrinal complexities (e.g. the fall of man), some scholars likewise consider such doctrines fictional anecdotes among many originating in Genesis. Spangenberg (2007:274), for example, thinks that the fall of man is mythical narrative, not history. He further contends that there was an Adam; he was simply a character in a chronicle, like the serpent that tempted him.

Before expositing such views any further, it is important to define briefly the term 'myth', since it seems that the usage of the term by theologians is inconsistent.

According to Hamilton (1990:57), many scholars would be quite content to interpret the creation story and the fall as neither history nor myth. According to them, it is not history, in the sense that Genesis 1–3 describes past events that actually happened. But neither are they myth, at least in the historical-philosophical definition of the term 'myth'. The following explanations by Eliade (1967:1), Kirk (1973:57), and Dundes (1984:45) will suffice. They define the term 'myth' as (a) a sacred narrative explaining how the world and humankind came to be in their present form, or, (b) a traditional story of purportedly historical events, serving to unfold part of the worldview of a people, or explain a practice. Subsequently, one may well interpret these scholarly views of Genesis from this perspective, instead of events as a fabricated narrative.

On this, noted scientist and theologian, Ian Barbour (2000:133), has likewise expressed his reservations on the Genesis account of events being literal. He remarks:

Because of evolutionary history, the fall of Adam cannot be taken literally. There was no Garden of Eden, no original state of innocence, free of death and suffering, from which humanity fell.

The fall can be taken as a powerful symbolic expression of human sinfulness, where sin is understood as self-centeredness and estrangement from God and other people, and, one might add, from the world of nature.

Unfortunately, the views that the first eleven chapters of 1–11 are mythological narratives, is prevalent in many evangelical, Presbyterian, and Reformed scholarly writings (e.g. Gunkel 1997; Jewett 1991; Lever 1970; Van Till, Snow, Stek, Davis and Young 1990; and Waltke 1988).<sup>3</sup> The most prominent and influential scholar advocating this view of Genesis was Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1956; 1997). One may infer that for Bonhoeffer, the activities surrounding Genesis 1–3 can be perceived as an *aetiological narrative*, that is, a language of origins unfettered from the constrictions of history and science (see Mettinger 2006:68).

However, in defence of these scholarly views specifically pertaining to 'the fall', none of the other biblical books refer to the narrative to explain the origin of sin and mortality. Hence, it is not atypical that there is a growing number of biblical scholars emphasising that *original sin* does not form part of Jesus' message. Nonetheless, this does not connote the creation story of original sin as fictitious, as shall be illustrated by the events leading to the deed.

Conversely, those who study creation from a purely scientific and naturalistic perspective have put forth theories about the origin of life which are speculative, at best. As indicated by Hartley (2000:57), some of these theories are, to varying degrees, in greater conflict with the specific narrative of Genesis 1–2. Only as scientific research continues

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<sup>3</sup> The rationale behind mentioning these scholarly works is simply to acknowledge that the ideas surrounding the interpretation of Genesis is still fragmentary, and open to much debate in varied religious assembles.

to aid better understanding of the mystery of the origin of life, will the continuity between the Genesis account of creation, and scientific theories of origins potentially increase. Ultimately, there can be no principal conflict between the two approaches—the theological approach and the scientific naturalist approach—for the world studied through the scientific method is the world created by God.

Furthermore, Hartley (2000:57) rightly expresses that given the tension between the biblical account of origin and those of science, biblical theology has preferably centred its exposition on God's saving deeds, spurning substantially references to creation.

In the next segment, a systemised biblical and scientific elucidation of Adam and Eve (as literal beings) follows. This will make it possible to elucidate the various difficulties shrouding the narrative of the fall.

## **2. The Creation of Adam and Eve**

Over and above the scriptural references to a literal creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis (1:26–28; 2:5–7, 15–4:1 and 4:25) new data from *Mitochondrial DNA* sampling yielded some curious results. The most compelling evidence to date for explaining the origin of humanity comes from collective research conducted by anthropologists, geneticists, and geochemists. This mitochondrial DNA evidence establishes that humans descended from one woman in a single location (cf. Horai et al 1995:532–36; Ruvulo et al 1993:111–535; Sherry et al 1994:761–75; Vigilant et al 1991:1503–7). Likewise, Y-chromosomal evidence confirms that humanity descended from one man, from the same location (cf. Pritchard et al 1999: 7360–65; Underhill et al 2000:358–61; Whitfield et al 1995:379–80). With obvious biblical overtones, according to Ross (2009:186), geneticists refer to humanity's mitochondrial DNA ancestors as mitochondria Eve, and to the Y-

chromosomal ancestor as Adam. Further to this, scientists call the location from where they originated, the Garden of Eden.

Expanding on this, one of the world's leading scientists, Dr Francis Collins, head of the *Human Genome Project*, stated the following (2007:126): 'Population geneticists, whose discipline involves the use of mathematical tools to reconstruct the history of populations of animals, plants or bacteria, look at these facts about the human genome and conclude that they point to all members of our species having descended from a common set of founders.' To further cement this idea, Lioy (2011:31) rightly declares that everyone is organically connected, or ontologically united, to Adam (that is, biologically, spiritually, morally, and legally; [cf. Gen 2:24; 3:16–19; Ps 51:5; Rom 5:12–14; 1 Cor 15:21–22]). Lioy (2011:31) advances this suggestion when he expresses that Jesus, in quoting from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 to emphasize the sanctity and inviolability of marriage, premised his argument on the fact that Adam and Eve were a real couple who lived at a distinct point in space-time history. This idea of a literal Adam and Eve is explored further in section 6. The question now is this: what took place in this garden, which led to the fall of humanity, as experienced today?

### **3. The Palistrophic Pattern**

The recital of this narrative in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 is intriguing, as it is in seven sections, set in a palistrophic pattern.

- A. God forms the man and places him in Eden (2–4b–17)
  - B. God makes a woman to complement the man (2:18–23)
    - C. The serpent and the woman talk (3:1–5)
      - D. The couple eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (3:6–8)
    - C. God interrogates the man and the woman (3: 9–13)
  - B. God pronounces punishment (3:14–21)
- A. God expels the couple from the garden (3:22–24)

At the centre (D), as indicated by Hartley (2000:58), stands the report of these archetype humans electing to disobey God. The interchange between the man, woman, and the serpent provides dramatic movement, which primarily captures how motivation to disobey God rises from an inversion of the order of responsibility that God has established.<sup>4</sup>

From this palistrophic pattern, one gleans that God gave the first humans the ability to make choices. What constitutes choice is important, as it goes to show how sin emerged. In its most basic form, for any person to make a choice, the person's act must be free, that is, it must not be determined causally Wellum (2002:259). Hence, a person could have always chosen otherwise. Basinger (1993:416) puts it this way: for a person to be free with respect to performing an action, they must have it within their power 'to choose to perform action A or choose not to perform action A. Both A and not A could actually occur. However, which will actually occur has not yet been determined' (see also Hasker 1983:32–44). God infused Adam with the ability to choose, and Adam chose wrong, as illustrated by his choice in D, the climax of the palistrophic pattern.

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<sup>4</sup> This will be revisited at the end of the paper to exemplify how the principles extracted from this narrative connect with modern human nature today.

It is unwise to undervalue the significance of this unfolding pattern, as it substantiates a cogent illustration originating in Genesis 2–3 leading to the ruinous event, the banishment of the primary humans, and climaxing in the emerging Christ and his redemptive deed on the cross. However, one needs to delve deeper into what constituted the fall. This will require the careful consideration of connected scriptural references, references that cannot be disregarded by rendering the preceding events myth.

#### **4. Adams Choice and the Fall**

God gave Adam a choice. He could eat from every tree in the Garden of Eden, except one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 'And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die"' (Gen 2:16–17). Adam had a choice, and he chose not to obey God.

This narrative is developed further in Genesis 3:1–6 and 23–24; two additional voices are introduced to the narrative:

Now the serpent was craftier than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?"' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, "You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die."' 'You will not surely die', the serpent said to the woman, 'for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'. When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also

gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it (Gen 3:1–6).

The immediate consequences of eating from the tree of knowledge become obvious. Their act of self-assertion shattered the harmony humans had enjoyed with God, each other, the animals, and the environment. This led to the following decisive pronouncement by God: 'So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life' (Gen 3:23–24).

The narrative evidently presupposes that Adam and Eve only had virtuous thoughts prior to the sin, even though it was not clear to them. In other words, they never understood anything contrary to good. According to Larkin (2010:34), however, Adam and Eve perceptibly developed a conscience upon partaking of the tree of good and evil. One could infer that it was the origin of dualistic thinking, that is, the origin of an evil conscience *vis-à-vis* a pure conscience. Thus, materialisation of dualistic thinking immediately begets additional difficulties. Adam and Eve now understood fear (a fear of God firstly), which led to remorse and an attempt to cover their sin.

It seems reasonable to assume the author of Genesis was proposing to give readers a literal explanation of the origin of sin. The rationale may be twofold, namely, (a) it lines up with his habit as observed in the rest of his work, and (b) the close relation between this narrative, and subsequent passages (intended for literal interpretation) warrant the standpoint taken.

To expand on this, it is necessary to explain the significance of the trees and the serpent, as they now emerge as key players in the narrative of the fall.

## 5. Literal, Symbolic or Myth?

To assume that the narrative of the fall is mythological, one would be forced, by default, to accept the entire creation story as myth. If one contests one portion of the Bible, is it not reasonable to question other portions too? How would one know which portions are true, and which are not, and what criteria is applied to make such a judgement? Furthermore, who sets the criteria? One cannot be selective in which portions are mythological and which are not. This inevitably leads to Bultmannian methodology (see Bultmann 1961, 1984), in which the criteria for demythologising the Bible become predetermined views of what is and is not reasonable to modern man.

Nevertheless, there are hermeneutical approaches that assist to bring out the sense behind the literal writing. This by no means diminishes the truth of Scripture, but rather, brings forth the veiled implications found in these sacred writings. Thus, in interpreting whether the trees in Genesis were factual or not, one has to respond with a 'yes'.

This solicits several questions. Firstly, if the trees were factual, they appear to possess power to give eternal life, and impart death, depending from which tree one ate? A literal reading of Genesis 2:9 and 17 and 3:2–7 necessitate this.

But, this leads to additional questions. Logically, it seems these trees had the power that scripture ascribes to God alone. An impasse

therefore becomes obvious: who had the power to give Adam life or take it away; a tree or God?<sup>5</sup> Evidently, something is amiss, or is it?

In the subsequent sections, I hope to elucidate on this professed dilemma, and clarify questions often asked on this 'mystery'. The following four points provide the interpretive key:

1. One would need to accept the story of two trees in the Garden of Eden and the temptation Adam and Eve faced by the serpent's lies as factual truth (properly understood), not myth.
2. The trees had no intrinsic power; they were merely visible symbols of God's power.
3. The trees also symbolised God's power of choice given to Adam and Eve; a choice to exercise their free will.
4. For their free will to be rightly free, the choices offered had to have the same appeal for it to be a fair choice. Thus, although both trees brought forth a desire to eat (as both were pleasing to the eye), they were forbidden to eat from the one.

To consolidate further the rationale for literal trees and a literal serpent, it is essential to reinforce the reasoning for a literal Adam, for he is the principal character in the narrative of the fall.

According to Duffield and Van Cleave (1983:140), liberal and neo-orthodox theologians generally interpret the first eleven chapters of Genesis as myth. However, the following elements make the literal interpretation more feasible:

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<sup>5</sup> *Elohim* is the generic term for God in Hebrew and emphasizes the power and creative aspects of God. God alone has this power.

- a) Nowhere in the Bible is the narrative of Adam interpreted symbolically. If the creation and fall stories were allegories, the spiritualised interpretations would have been numerous.
- b) There is no indication in the book of Genesis (between chapters eleven and twelve) that suggests a change from allegory to history. Noah is as much a real character as Abraham and Adam.
- c) Parallels between Adam and Christ are made by the Apostle Paul. Since Christ is an historical person, it is not likely that he would be an antitype of a non-historical character (see Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:22–45.)
- d) In two genealogies recorded in later books of the Bible, the name of Adam is listed alongside obvious historical characters (see 1 Chr 1–2; Luke 3:23–38). Adam is additionally included in the genealogy of Christ alongside others, like David, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- e) Real geographical locations are included in the story of Adam, such as Assyria and the river Euphrates.
- f) The fallen condition of man is very literal. An actual fallen state can hardly be attributed to a mythical event. Furthermore, the fact that humanity has made remarkable progress scientifically while simultaneously making no progress morally, ethically, and socially, clearly points out humanity's sinful nature.

One should observe that, for the Apostle Paul, the primary human disobedience is a key element in his theology of redemption (Rom 5:12–14). One can reasonably conclude that Adam was a factual being, in a factual garden, having faced an actual test.

Considering all the evidence put forward hitherto, alternative options of a mythological Adam appear fairly diminished. It additionally initiates

ideas that the rest of the story is also literal, but with symbolic and metaphorical meanings.

## 6. The Serpent: Fact or Myth?

The character of the serpent presents another potential theological complexity.<sup>6</sup> If the serpent was factual, did it symbolise something other than a creature which spoke and tempted?

If Adam was a literal being (as proposed in §5), one may conjecture reasonably that the trees were literal yet with a symbolic meaning. If one concludes this, then logic dictates the serpent was real—the context of the story compels this. But why does the narrative include a serpent, and not some other creature? What was the significance of God making use of a serpent?

Firstly, Moses (the implied author of Genesis and the Pentateuch) was born in Egypt and grew up in the royal household of Pharaoh. The first part of Acts 7:22 states: 'And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians.' According to Currid (1997:155) the author of Exodus and Numbers was familiar with Egyptian practices and beliefs. The Exodus and Numbers accounts, dealing with serpents, properly reflect ancient Egyptian customs of the New Kingdom Period. Thus, one can rightly perceive that the Hebrew people, who left Egypt with Moses in the exodus, were also accustomed to Egyptian culture and life.

Secondly, it is not a coincidence that the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures incorporate several references to serpents, or to creatures

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<sup>6</sup> There have been many proposals to identify the serpent, but the most common one is Satan. The idea of Satan as God's cosmic foe, however, did not develop until much later, sometime in the postexilic era (see 1 Chr 21:1 and Zech 3:1–2). It must be noted that the author of Genesis did not connect the serpent and Satan (Hartley 2000:73).

frequently interpreted as serpents, using disparate Hebrew terms. For the Hebrew people in Egypt, surrounded by people who worshipped snakes as the attributes or personifications of various gods, the serpent would have been a prominent character, according to the *Encyclopaedia Americana* (1988:25, 100). It was a common phallic representation of pagan practices often used symbolically in parts of scripture. Thus, for the Hebrews, the serpent required no introduction.

Furthermore, God used this paganistic culture (of the Egyptians) against them (Exod 7:8–12). For example, the role of magic was significant in Egypt. This cannot be overlooked, especially in connection to their beliefs in serpents, and particularly, to the Exodus passage of Aaron's rod and the magician's serpents (Mircea 1987:49–50). Again, because the snake was significant to Pharaoh, his people, and the Hebrews, it required no introduction—it was a powerful symbol to them.

Although the symbol of a snake is predominantly associated with evil, there are occurrences where the symbol was a depiction for good. An example of this is the narrative of the Hebrew people, in which God sent fiery serpents among the people, in response to their criticism of the manna he provided (Num 21:6). Once the people of Israel repented, God told Moses to make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole. In this narrative, the serpent represented deliverance from sin, for anyone that looked upon this 'statue' lived. As stated in the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (1988:185), the significance of looking on the bronze serpent and living, has a similar connotation. Healing is based on faith, not on the copper serpent itself. This is also emphasised in John 3:14–15, where Jesus refers to this incident, reflecting that the Son of Man must be uplifted, that all who believe on him will have everlasting life.

According to Cooper (1978:146–148), the serpent symbolized both good and bad—life energy, resurrection, wisdom, power, cunning,

death, darkness, evil, and corruption. One can observe the power of their paganistic culture exhibited clearly here, which presumably God turned and used for the Hebrews' good (Num 21:9). In subsequent scriptural passages, it becomes apparent that the serpent is not just a snake, but customarily used to symbolise many types, especially the devil (e.g. Rev 20:2, 12:9, Luke 10:18; John 8:44). It may be tempting to conjecture this as the reason that God, when narrating the story to Moses, used the serpent symbolically. Equally, nothing here implies the serpent is non-literal. However, it certainly illustrates that, from the Israelites' experience in pagan Egypt and its relation to snakes, the Hebrews would have readily understood the evil significance of the devil materializing in the form of a serpent, in order to tempt.

Furthermore, Genesis 3:1 clearly teaches that the serpent was a beast of the field which God had created. This implies that the serpent is not a supernatural being, further strengthening the case of a factual, rather than mythological serpent. One should also reflect on the following. Why would the narrator change from history to myth in a few sentences? When considering God and man in the narrative, the literality, as maintained by Murphy (1863:142–143), has never been questioned by those who acknowledge the event to be factual. Therefore, why would one now question the literality of the serpent?

It is therefore possible to infer that the serpent 'who' tempted Adam and Eve was factual, but also, symbolic of the devil himself. However, this poses another question: did the serpent have the power to tempt Adam and Eve to the point of them disobeying God? This is significant, as it demonstrates God's character and willingness to help Adam and Eve to overcome their temptation. Since God is omniscient, God knew that Adam and Eve would disobey. This also raised a further question: if God is omnipotent and omniscient, why did he not prohibit the serpent, as the devil in the form of a serpent is no match for an omniscient and

omnipotent God? Although this is a complex question to answer, the scriptures allude to God sanctioning sin to beget his providential design. This included permitting the serpent to persuade Adam and Eve to sin.

## 7. God's Providence and the Sinful Acts of Humanity

The preceding statement necessitates the engagement of the following difficulty: the relationship between God's work and the committing of sinful acts by humans. Consequently, it is necessary to distinguish between God's normal working, in relation to human actions, and his working in relation to sinful acts. The scriptures make it clear that God is not the cause of sin. James records, 'When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me". For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed' (Jas 1:14). John declares: 'For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does, comes not from the Father but from the world' (1 John 2:16).

But, if God does not cause the sinful actions of humans, what does it mean to say that humanity is under God's influential providence? Strong (1907:423–425) declares that there are several ways in which God can, and does, relate to sin within his providence. He can prevent it, allow it, direct it, or limit it. In each case, God is not the cause of human sin, but acts in relation to it. The following illustration is helpful.

*God does not always prevent sin.* At times, he simply wills to allow it. Although it is not what he would desire to occur, he acquiesces in it. By not preventing the wilful sinning of humans, God essentially makes certain that humanity will indeed commit sin. Nonetheless, he does not cause them to sin, or render it necessary that they act in that fashion (see Acts 14:16, Rom 1:24–28).

*God can also direct sin.* While permitting certain sins to occur, God nevertheless directs them in such a way that good comes out of them. This is what Stauffer (1955:207) calls the law of reversal. Probably, the most dramatic recorded occurrence of this is the story of Joseph. Throughout the narrative of Joseph's life, one sees the providential hand of God on him. When he did come face to face with his brothers, who had previously tried to kill him, he was able to declare: 'So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh; lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt' (Gen 45:8). Moreover, after the death of Jacob, he reiterated to them: 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives' (Gen 50:20). One should recognise here the remarkable nature of divine omnipotence. God often permits humans to do their worst, and still carry out his purposes. However, even when God permits sin to occur, he imposes limits beyond which it cannot go. This leads to the question, why God permitted the fall?

Although this paper specifically focuses on the literality of the characters in Genesis 2 and 3, the question, *why God allowed the fall*, requires succinct mention. This is a controversial question indeed. The momentous works of Calvin (Gerrish 2004), Luther (Tappert 1959), Augustine (Taylor 1982), or Barth (1969) testify to this fact. Of all the proposed solutions to the question, the answer of Williams (2007:229–230) seems most plausible. It is only through God permitting Adam to sin that he revealed specific attributes of his person. For example, there would have been no Calvary or demonstration of his unparalleled love, absolute holiness, mercy, and grace. Since deep love is only manifest under extreme conditions, it seems that God allowed this extreme condition (the fall) in order to manifest the full depth of his love towards humanity. Thus, God permitted the serpent to tempt Adam and

Eve, much in the same way individuals are tempted today. To believe otherwise would surely be a criticism of God's character as an omniscient, omnipotent being, and ascribe to the serpent more power than to God.

Certainly, human nature desires independence, power, and choice, as graphically illustrated by Adam and Eve. This is especially true in light of God decision to endow human beings with the power to make choices. The question, therefore, is this: from which tree do we choose to eat? The tree of good and evil that leads to banishment and death, or the tree of life found in Christ which leads to eternal life?

To illustrate this further, those who receive Christ as Saviour and Lord, are no longer in Adam but in Christ, the Last Adam, God's new federal representative.

'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My Word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death into life' (John 5:24).

'And so it is written, the first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit' (1 Cor 15:45).

The events described in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are not mythological. It is important for each Christian to understand and believe this, for such truth forms the foundation of other essential doctrines Without a proper understanding of the nature of God, the literal fall of the man Adam, the inability of man to win salvation through good works, and the principle of substitutionary sacrifice, one can never fully understand salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

Many theologians and biblical scholars share the view that the Bible should be taken seriously, but not literally. The consequence of such sentiments is the view that Genesis is most likely mythological, or at best, an aetiological narrative which really only witnesses to a fundamental and enduring relationship between God and the world. However, such a view is incorrect, for scripture conveys religious ideas that one may accept independent of any cosmology, ancient or modern. In fact, current research on mitochondrial DNA confirms the existence of common descent (i.e. a literal first human couple).

The history of the fall recorded in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 is, for all intent and purpose, a literal history. It records facts which underlie the entire system of revealed truths. The Lord and the Apostles make references to the fall and Adam, not only as revealed truth, but also, as furnishing grounds for all God's subsequent dispensations and dealings with humanity.

A correct theological understanding of the fall of Adam and Eve makes plain the fact that the characters in the narrative of the fall are literal characters, and not mythological. The subtlety of a humanistic view of sin, as argued by some professing to be Christians, is merely a veiled denial of original sin inherited by Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden.

Any view which is in conflict with the impact of sin in a fallen world is not an option. The fallen condition of man is literal, and devastating. Man cannot take care of himself. God had to intervene through the coming of Christ.

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