

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript
Episode 356
The Genealogical Adam and Eve, Part 1
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Guest: Dr. S. Joshua Swamidass (JS)

Episode Summary

Were Adam and Eve historical people? Is their historicity compatible with genetic science's findings about human origins? This episode is the first of a two-part interview with Dr. S. Joshua Swamidass. Dr. Swamidass is an M.D. and Ph.D. research scientist. His recent book, published by InterVarsity Press, is entitled, *The Genealogical Adam and Eve: The Surprising Science of Universal Ancestry*. Contrary to other Christian biologists, whose research in the last twenty years has led some apologetics ministries to deny the historicity of Adam and Eve, Dr. Swamidass argues that a historical Adam and Eve is quite possible and not in conflict with genetic science. His book proposes that the information gleaned from the study of our biology via the tools of science be allowed to tell one story of humanity, a genetic ancestry, while Scripture be allowed to tell its own human story, one that knows only genealogical ancestry. The two stories follow similar trajectories and ultimately entwine, but they are nonetheless different. In Part 1 of our conversation, we learn about Dr. Swamidass and his background, faith, and the path that led to his fascinating book.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 356: The Genealogical Adam and Eve, Part 1. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! What in the world are we going to talk about today?

MH: [laughs] We're going to talk about the genealogical Adam and Eve. Now, you know, in more "market" terms, we could've titled this something like "Were Adam and Eve Real?" or "Did Adam and Eve Exist: What Does Science Have to Say About That?" So we're going to have a discussion with a scientist (specifically biology and genetics) about that question.

TS: Yeah. We're also going to have a link on the NakedBiblePodcast.com episode page to his book, where you can get it for 40% off and free shipping until January 15th.

MH: That's a good deal.

TS: Yeah. So go to NakedBiblePodcast.com and get that link and discount code where you can get 40% off and free shipping. And also, Mike, we have a few copies to give away! So just use the hashtag #NakedBible out there through social media. I'll find you, I promise. [MH laughs] I don't care where you are, what you're doing. If you want to write a blog post...

MH: That sounded so sinister, Trey. [laughter]

TS: Just whatever you want to do to promote the podcast. I would love to see people out there promoting the podcast. So whatever platform you're on, just use the hashtag #NakedBible, and please promote the podcast, and I will pick a few winners and I will send you this book. And Merry Christmas, Mike! I hope you had a good Christmas. It's the day after Christmas. So this will be a late Christmas gift for a few people out there who get the book for free. I hope you had a good Christmas, too. Did you have a good Christmas?

MH: Yeah, absolutely. If you got somebody something they didn't like, maybe this'll make up for it. [laughs]

TS: Yeah. And was your Christmas good? Everything good?

MH: Oh yeah, yeah, absolutely. The pugs got what they want. Everybody got what they wanted. The kids are adults now, so they kind of know what they're getting. But I always get something for each one that they have no idea what it is. So that went well again. I'm pleased with myself.

TS: Alright, well let's not prolong this anymore, because I think this is an interesting topic. So let's just get right into it.

MH: Well, we are excited to have Josh... Should I just call you Josh? Let's make that clear up front. Or should I call you by your full name on the cover, S. Joshua Swamidass? [JS laughs] We're thrilled to have... I use "Josh" in email, but I just want to get the approval here to use "Josh Swamidass" on the show today.

JS: Yeah, that's great.

MH: Alright, well, let's go with that, then. Now part of the reason that I want to even bring that up is because I'm going to ask you to give our audience to give your credentials. I mean, you're a highly credentialed scientist. And you'd pretty much have to be to write the book you wrote and to stand up to the criticisms of it, really on either side. Our subject today should be evident to the audience already: Genealogical Adam and Eve. And the book that you've written is trying to show that there's a path here to follow between scientific evidence (in this

case, genetic ancestry) and what the Scripture says. So why don't you tell the audience a little bit about who you are, what your credentials are, where you teach, and what you do.

JS: Yeah, thanks for the invitation. It's great to talk to you, too, Mike! So I'm a medical doctor and I'm also a scientist. I have a medical degree and a PhD. I'm at Washington University in Saint Louis, which is a leading science university here in the United States. And I do interdisciplinary scientific research as a computational scientist. One way I describe myself is as a computational biologist, but it's a bit more complicated than that. I'm employing artificial intelligence to look at problems in medicine, biology, and chemistry. That's really fun work for me. And that's what I really thought my career was going to be, and what most of my work during most of the time is, just going and exploring and trying to understand nature (which God has created, right?).

MH: Mm hmm.

5:00

JS: I became a Christian a lot younger in my life. My family is Christian. They were Young Earth creationists. [JS laughs] And I remember when I was just two or three years old... Well, I don't remember. I remember *hearing* that [laughter] when I was two or three years old, my mom told me about Jesus, and I accepted. And I believed because my mom did. But then as I kind of was drawn more and more to science, I felt the conflict over and over again. I felt it very personally, about "How do I make sense of this?" Just in the very simple sense of watching the Discovery Channel and hearing about billions of years, and hearing about that gap, on face value, from the way I was raised and from what I was reading in Genesis. I mean, I really trusted Scripture. I really trusted my parents. And I didn't know how to make sense of that. And it really just led to a very unconfident or insecure sort of faith.

MH: Mm hmm.

JS: And it was only, I think, much later over several events (you could either call it several events or a process) where I really came to realize that the core of the foundation of our faith isn't Genesis, it's actually Jesus. He's the cornerstone. And the way I could have a confident faith is by seeing what God had done in history to reveal himself, and that was by raising this man, Jesus, from the dead. And that's how I really came to have confidence that God exists and that he's good and that he wants to be known, independent of my parents. So though I think I inherited my faith initially in some ways from my parents, it became my own as I really came to see what God had really done by raising this man, Jesus, from the dead. But that still left a lot of uncertainty, really, about origins.

MH: Mm hmm, sure.

JS: So you can be *confident* about Jesus. And I kind of came to real experiences with him, but didn't know how to make sense of Scripture and what I was being

told about science initially, and then what I started to see for myself as I got deeper into it.

MH: Yeah. So this must have happened, obviously, in stages. As you're going through college and graduate school, I'm sure you did a lot of thinking on how these things might be reconciled. I don't know. What I'd like you to do is just tell our audience, did you find yourself more comfortable or aligned with certain apologetics positions—concordism, or something else? How did you work through that? And then, ultimately, what led up to the discovery or the realization of what you were looking at in terms of Adam and Eve as far as genealogy versus genetics? And what led up to writing the book?

JS: It starts very personal, but then it starts to become much more public in the very end, right? So initially, it was all a very personal struggle. And I think what I was initially drawn to was creation science (Young Earth creationism and creation science). That was a place where I went to for confidence. I was really threatened by the scientific world, and [creation science] really promised clear scientific evidence that a young earth was really true, and I went there. And it really seemed to work. It really did increase my confidence. But the problem is, it was a very fragile confidence. Because any evidence that seemed to not really fit with that, anyone smarter or more knowledgeable than me, would just destabilize it all. It was a very uncomfortable place. And I came across a book by Hugh Ross when I was in high school which was really helpful in showing that, "Oh, there are people out there that really take Scripture as seriously as me and are thinking about it differently." And that really had me wondering. And for me, a lot of this really started first at Scripture. I don't think I ever actually adopted any position before I could see very clearly how it was coherent with what Scripture really taught.

MH: Mm hmm.

JS: In that sense I was then a revelationist. I'm very scriptural in that sense. And I think that, actually, is the best of creationism—the extent to which they're committed to Scripture. And that's what drew me to it. And what concerned me about some Old Earth creationists and many theistic evolutionists is what seemed to be a flippant attitude towards it.

MH: You're talking about towards Scripture?

JS: Yeah, yeah. And they would often talk about how beautiful science was, but just something didn't sit right with me about that. I mean, I agree that science is beautiful, but I think I knew already that there were things that were more beautiful than science and things that were worthwhile. And I would say right now, I mean, I've looked all over science now. I'm a career scientist now. I've looked all over science, and it's a beautiful place. I've devoted my life to it. But there's nothing I've found here that compares to the beauty I've found in Jesus.

He's greater. And I just didn't hear that message from a lot of people moving away from creationism. And that concerned me, and it made me very cautious.

MH: Mm hmm.

10:00

JS: But still, I did see, actually when you look back at what a "literal" interpretation is, there's actually multiple types of literal interpretations. And this was actually a really key point for me, when I looked at this, is when I was talking to the creationists, they had an unblinkered certainty that their interpretation was very correct. But then when I looked at historical interpretations, there was far more variability. And I couldn't really reconcile, honestly, the church's tradition with Young Earth creationism. It just...

MH: Yeah, you know, a lot of listeners will already know this... We'll put something in the episode webpage about more of the context for this interview. But part of the context (just to mention it here) is I was introduced to your work by a listener, Doug Kump, whom we've had on the podcast at one point before, maybe even more than once [Episode 326], just talking about *Unseen Realm* and how he uses the content and whatnot. So he contacted me one day and said, "Hey, you should read this book." And then he looped us together. And that led to you inviting me to be part of an American Academy of Religion panel that was reviewing your book, which from the timing of this interview right now was just a few days ago. And I was struck by something you said in that, in your response during that panel, was that you went out and read Augustine's *Literal Reading of the Genesis Account*, or something like that. And your comment was, "Well, his literal reading didn't sound anything like the literal reading of Young Earth creationism." And I've not read that, but I was struck by it, because if that's what he's titling it and it's dramatically different, what you just said here a few moments ago about, "I don't really know how to reconcile what I'm seeing out of the young earth creationist community as being *the* literal reading of Scripture." And then you go over here and look at Augustine, and it's like, "Well, he's not sounding like these guys over here," how that would sort of rattle your cage a little bit. I don't know if you want to get into some of that. You could point out one or two instances.

JS: Well, what it did was revealing. I think it kind of exposed what was really happening. Because they do actually have a hermeneutical principle, but it's not literalism that I saw. It was anti-evolutionism. [laughs] A reading that would make space for evolution by definition was a bad reading. [laughs] That's what they did. [laughs] Or a space for an old earth, or whatever.

MH: Yeah.

JS: And it started to raise tons of red flags, like, "Oh, wow! This is *control* that's going on here. This is more about..."

MH: Controlling the discussion of what a literal meaning means, and all that sort of thing.

JS: Yeah, it seemed like it was far more important for them to tell me... Look, I have no problem with *God's Word*. The issue was that I started to see they were trying to pass off *man's word* as *God's Word*. And *that's* where I had a departure. So *maybe* a Young Earth creationist reading is a plausible hermeneutical reading of Genesis. That's fine. I'm not an exegete. But what I'm certain about is that choosing a reading for the purpose of rejecting an old earth and for the *purpose* of rejecting evolution – that's not literalism. That's anti-evolutionism. And that can't be found in Scripture, because Scripture doesn't talk about evolution.

MH: Yeah.

JS: And so that... Honestly, it really just... It was, like, "Wait a minute. I have no problem with Scripture. I actually am very committed to Scripture. But I have a problem with you trying to pretend like *your* opinion is Scripture."

MH: Yeah. Of course, Augustine doesn't have anything like evolution in his head. But I've read enough Warfield and Calvin to know and to have seen Augustine referenced in some of his observations about the earth bringing forth life forms. And so since Warfield was right in the middle of the Darwinistic battle, he would refer to things like that and say, "Look, Augustine is seeing something here that we could apply and come out with this or that view," and whatever.

But you know, I bring that up to say, "Sure, I see the distinction that you're drawing here—that you have some Young Earth apologists that that is a good way to describe their hermeneutic. It's an anti-fill-in-the-blank. Anti-something. Anti-evolution hermeneutic, as opposed to Augustine looking at the text and saying, "Wow! Look at what it says here." He's taking the text at face value. The earth, the created thing, giving birth or producing other life forms. He's reading that literally. It's just a face-value reading. But he's not reading it in such a way to steer you away from something, because that just isn't part of the playing field for his time and what he was doing.

15:00

JS: That's exactly right. And I'd say that as a Protestant, we tend to be disconnected from history. And we tend to be disconnected from tradition. But I tell you that it was really looking at historical interpretations (or historical theology as some people call it) that really brought a lot of clarity about what actually is the core of the faith. What is the central thing? And these are things that there's been an immense amount of debate over 2,000 years over this. And it's not wise to just try to reinvent the wheel from scratch. You just want to at least be part of the conversation to all these people who have done it if you're going to disagree with them, right? And what was so... I think what held me back a lot is I actually thought that Young Earth creationism was a traditional view (meaning Young Earth creationism as we see it now—the Henry Morris style...

MH: Right, as it's articulated currently, yeah.

JS: ... with geologists, scientific creationism). It is a very deeply concordist view in the sense that it reads a lot of science into Scripture where it can't rightly be found. While on face value, a lot of the Church Fathers probably did believe the earth was young, they also didn't believe there were people on the other side of the earth, either. [laughs] You know?

MH: Mm hmm.

JS: They didn't think that antipodeans (people on the other side of the earth) existed either. And they just hadn't seen the same information. But they weren't reasoning by the same logic, either—the logic of Young Earth creationism, which is totally different. But I didn't know that. So I actually *believed* that it was a traditional view. And the idea of having science challenge the traditional view was really disconcerting for me. That's probably the reason why I was really slow to move away from Young Earth creationism, or just the intention about it. I'm not really sure. But then when I saw that, "Wait a minute, that's not even the traditional view. It's not how the church has historically engaged with these tensions," that really changed things for me.

And the big question for me from a very early on point is, "How do I deal with the authority of science alongside of the authority of Scripture?" And what I came to in high school when, really, I moved out of Young Earth creationism was, "Well, I can see that there are plausible interpretations that allow for an old earth. And there are plausible ones that have a young earth. So from a scriptural point of view, I think it's not clear. And it seems like it's legitimate, then, to just go to science and see what it shows. And if there really was strong evidence for a young earth, then I should see a lot of non-Christians arguing for a young earth. Because it shouldn't require a presupposition of a young earth to demonstrate that there's a young earth. And I didn't see anyone who wasn't a Christian arguing for a young earth. So it just became very clear very quickly, "Well, the evidence really does seem to show, unless you have that presupposition, that the earth at the very least *looks* really old, so... And I don't see any scriptural objection to it, so why not?" So that's how I became an old earth creationist. [laughs]

MH: Yeah, and as you go through graduate school, I'm sure you could tell us that you ran into this or that or saw this or that or understood this and that to be reinforcing an old earth position, and evolution and whatnot. So I think one of the questions that's going to be in somebody's head in this audience is, "Does Josh Swamidass affirm evolution and simultaneously affirm the miraculous stuff in the Bible? Is he both an evolutionist and a supernaturalist? Or is he one of these guys (this is the caricature which probably has a lot of basis in reality) who talks Christian stuff as an evolutionary scientist but isn't really serious about the

supernatural, that everything has to conform to a scientific worldview here?" So how would you poke around at that?

JS: Well, what I would say is that that's a legitimate fear, because maybe the majority of Christians that have affirmed evolution in the public square, that would be a fair description of them.

MH: Mm hmm.

JS: I'm speaking historically here, too. There's a whole modernist fundamentalist vibe, where that's really how it divided. But that's just not who I am. I wouldn't call myself an evolutionist. I don't build my worldview off of evolution. That's not central to my identity. I'm a Christian. I follow Jesus. I really believe that he rose from the dead. I think that God governs all things. He providentially governs all things, including the casting of dice. So of course he governs so-called random mutations. I mean, they might be random from our point of view in the same way rolling dice looks random. But God governs all things.

20:00

What really brought me over to evolution is... I think it's probably a three-part thing, to give you some clarity on how it happened. Part of it was really trying to understand from Scripture whether I see a conflict. And the biggest sticking point (which was true for me and I also found out it turns out to be historically true) is not the age of the earth. It's not speciation. It's not randomness. That's not what the historical conflict has been about. It's always been about Adam and Eve. Because it seemed that if the evolution story is true about human origins... I mean, no one cared about the Cambrian explosion. No one cared about the origin of life. The really fundamental issue was humans and how humans got here, from a theological point of view.

MH: Mm hmm.

JS: And even B. B. Warfield, that was a sticking point as he thought about evolution. The Scopes Trial—you have William Jennings Bryan. He affirmed an old earth and had no problem with evolution in the animal and plant world. But it was *human* evolution that the Scopes Trial was about. And for me, that's a place where I couldn't really see a full reconciliation. But then I really remembered also times when I was... You're not going to like this, but it's the fact. [laughs] I remembered wondering about Nephilim as they are Creationist, right [laughter] And I know you have a particular view of that, which might even be correct, right?

MH: Of course it's correct [laughing].

JS: But you know, I've wondered also if they were angels. What?

MH: Of course it's correct. [laughs]

JS: Well, yeah, I'm not trying to argue with that. [MH laughs] The idea is that from a purely... Even within the creationist worldview, right, we know that Adam and Eve's lineage isn't hermetically sealed. There was input into it potentially. There's questions. There's mystery there, right? And I think there's big questions at that point about how it all fit together. And I figured some of that (the details) out later. And when I did, that was pretty mind-blowing. And I'll get to that later. But I could see why... I can hold it in tension and say that I think there's going to be some reconciliation. I don't know precisely how. So I should be at least open to considering it because I think that it can resolve on a scriptural side.

The second thing was actually seeing the evidence in our genomes for myself. As a computational biologist, as a PhD student in my third year of my PhD, fifth year of graduate school, when the human... The human genome had been sequenced right when I started graduate school in 2000. But then in 2005, the same year of the Dover trial, the chimpanzee genome was sequenced. And I remember reading that paper and just saw in this paper that had nothing to do with evolution—it wasn't being written as an apologetic for evolution—I just saw in figure after figure evidence for evolution that there were mathematical theories in evolution that explained the data I was seeing in a very simple way. It explained not just the similarities, but also the differences that I saw. And it was one of those things where I said, "Well, I'm kind of holding out here, but God could've created humans in a way that made it very obvious that we don't share common ancestors with the great apes, but he didn't. So whatever God's concerns are, giving me evidence in genetics is not one of them." [laughs]

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah. For XYZ point. Yeah.

JS: And that still wasn't enough, though. Because I would say... I told you there were three things. The first thing was Scripture. The second thing was seeing the evidence for myself. The third thing was harder, actually. It was a question of authority. It was a question of where I was looking for confidence. Because I think I thought that the role of the Christian... Like, my role was to actually oppose evolution. I still had that anti-evolution idol. And it was a question of authority in where I was looking for confidence. And there's a point where I had to lay that idol down, and I had to return to what... To say, "You know, yeah, I want to find some human scientific argument to support my faith. And maybe if evolution's false, that would support it. But God doesn't seem to be very collaborative with me in this in the way that I would expect him to." [MH laughs] And when I looked... And man, I think what really... There was this verse that Jesus... There were these words that Jesus said that had haunted me for over a decade [laughs] when I first got into scientific apologetics, where Jesus says that he's going to give only one sign to a skeptical, unbelieving generation. Only one sign. And a sign is a miracle of evidence. So I think that God does miracles all the time, but signs are few. So miracles are common, but signs are few. Signs are places where it's a miracle plus evidence, where it's something that's made visible to all people. And he goes on to say that, "You're going to see the sign of

Jonah, of the son of man entering the belly of the earth and rising again,” right? He’s talking about his death and resurrection. And he’s saying that Nineveh will stand in judgment over this generation. Because if you would’ve seen the resurrection and not believed... But they believed not having had a chance to see the son. And he says that the Queen of Sheba will stand in judgment against this generation, because, “You keep on coming here asking for a sign. They didn’t get the sign that you’re going to get. And they believed but you didn’t.” And what was interesting is how that made sense relationally. You know, God gave up his Son to die. He moved mountains. He rose this man from the dead. He put physical evidence into the historical record. That should be enough for me.

MH: Mm hmm.

25:00

JS: That should be a point where I’m saying, “I know. I’m confident.” That is what it is. And when you look at actually what the gospel is in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, it says that according to Scripture, Jesus died; he rose again on the third day; and he was seen by many.

MH: Mm hmm.

JS: And then it concludes with Paul saying, “He was also seen by me, the least of the apostles.” And I think... I just realized that it’s actually so fundamentally simple how God makes himself known to the world. It doesn’t rely on science. He doesn’t need science. It’s almost like, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.” It doesn’t matter what science says because God made a statement in history.

MH: Yeah. And just to summarize all that, if the resurrection doesn’t validate your faith, then why in the world would something lesser, like winning this or that debate over the language of Genesis, or something like that? Why do you need this thing when you have the other? Is essentially what it came down to.

JS: *That is exactly it!* And so for me, at least... Maybe there are other people out there, but for me at least, it just became very clearly and obviously an issue of idolatry. I’d encountered the Living God and turned to worship a human-made argument instead. [laughs] And I just needed to lay that down. Now I can tell you, that was probably the hardest part, where I just had to realize that maybe opposing evolution should not be what controls my life. And instead I should follow Jesus. And so I chose to follow him.

MH: Now that didn’t make what happens down the road any less bumpy.

JS: Oh, no, it did not.

MH: Can you... Tell us a little bit about... Because you allude to this in the book. Tell a little bit about what happened as you moved toward this position, even before it became a book. We’re going to be getting into the book, and then we’ll

probably have a second part at some point with you. But I know there's a whole history to this and I don't want anybody in the audience to miss this. So you started toward what would become a book in shorter form. And that did or didn't go well? [laughter]

JS: Well, it went well in some ways and others... The story really in a lot of ways maybe privately starts in 2016, when I started talking to other... I joined a speakers' bureau. It's called Voices Program at BioLogos, which is a leading theistic evolution organization. And to be clear, I kind of became a person that affirms evolution very differently (I found out) than many Christians that have. I found out that a lot of the Christians that I was talking to at BioLogos and evolutionary creationists... And not to pick on them. It's not everyone over there. That was just kind of the culture over there. Is that a lot of them, just like me, honestly, had had some difficult experiences with Fundamentalism.

MH: Mm hmm.

JS: And they had come to reject Young Earth creationism and were affirming evolution, which is fine. I don't have a problem with that, obviously. But they didn't have the same path that I did. A lot of times it came through a very strong rejection of reading Scripture in a way that I was familiar with. [laughs]

MH: So they had... Basically would you say that they had an ax to grind? Or their work for God became destroying the view that they rejected? [laughs]

JS: I think for some people, yeah, that was the case. To be clear, I think there was a lot of injury over there, too. I think Fundamentalism has done a lot of damage, right? And so I personally have been damaged by that. I experienced a lot of rejection in the Church because I have affirmed evolution. And I think they've experienced that too. And it's really hard not to get defensive in that context and to maintain empathy and compassion for people that have injured you.

MH: Mm hmm.

JS: So I mean, it's a complex mess. It's a complex group of people. But I would just say that I was very much an outlier over there. I was never really comfortable with the term "evolutionary creation." I've never been really comfortable with the term "theistic evolution." I would prefer to just say that I'm a *Christian* that affirms evolutionary science and put my identity on being a Christian, then have the secondary thing be that I see some legitimacy to evolution.

MH: Right. The nouns become important less so than the adjectives. [laughs]

JS: Right. I actually think that... I would prefer to be called CAES, a Christian that Affirms Evolutionary Science, or [CASE] the Science of Evolution. But I really do

30:00

think it was a very large conceptual difference. I mean, for many of them, I would say, a lot of them come to a mythical reading of Genesis. And I say literal, but maybe a better way to put it is, I think most Christians over history have read Genesis and read Scripture from a realist point of view. So they were scriptural *realists*. That might be better than literalists. Does that make sense to you, Mike?

MH: To me it does. Everybody sort of approaches it and fits it into their own conception of reality, which can be helpful, but other ways it's not helpful. But nah, I follow where you're going there.

JS: Yeah, so I think that is part, I would say, even of *Mere Christianity*, in the sense that we believe, yes, there's a sacred history and that sacred history is connected somehow to the actual physical world. It's not like it's merely in the spiritual realm. That there's actual physical events that Scripture is talking about that are actually critical. I mean, obviously the resurrection is a central one. But also just historically, a lot of people thought Adam and Eve were important, too. So there's, like, something real about them. But I just found out a lot of evolutionists really were very willing to just abandon that entirely. And I think that they really are Christian, to be clear. That's probably the reason why I started to work with them. They're really Christians. They're Christians that I don't fully understand and I don't always fully agree with. But that's what it is. And I can accept that they're followers of Jesus. And there's a lot of people that are going to be wrong about this, that, and the other important thing, but still I'm going to be family with them in heaven, so might as well get used to dealing with them now, right?

MH: Right. They're believers, they're Christians, but you wish they wouldn't just throw this out.

JS: Yeah, and to be clear, I learned a lot from them, too. I don't think I knew the term "concordism" before I met them, for example. [laughs] But I will also say that my biggest concern wasn't even about theology; it was about the science. There's a large number of claims they've been making since at least 2010...

MH: You're talking BioLogos now?

JS: Yeah, BioLogos, including the *Christianity Today* cover article where they were just making really wild overstatements, and even false statements, about what the evidence showed. And this isn't coming from an Intelligent Design or creationist point of view. This is coming from a mainstream scientist's point of view—that what they said about the scientific evidence just wasn't true. [laughter] And I was concerned about that. I kind of privately started talking to people about that, just hoping that as I lent my expertise, they would resolve that and fix it. And then I was kind of surprised that they didn't. [laughs] And there was a point where I realized, "You know, I need to probably start putting some of this stuff in writing

myself. And so in early 2017, I was invited to write a review for *Sapientia of Adam and the Genome* by Dennis Venema.

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah, Venema's work was the one that really started this brouhaha. [laughs]

JS: Yeah, there's the article he wrote in 2011. Yeah.

MH: Yeah, I remember that, yep.

JS: And so that article was really, really unfortunate. [laughs] Especially for the...

MH: You would say that there was an overreach of the data on his part in that article, or later on down the line by him or somebody else?

JS: Yes, yes, and yes. [laughter]

MH: Okay. Alright. [laughter] Well, I got three for three there. I didn't realize I was doing that. [laughs]

JS: And to be clear, people make mistakes. It's entirely possible that that was a significant but honest error. That happens, right?

MH: Sure.

JS: I think what is concerning is that even when it was pointed out, it was not corrected and it was repeated. And that's a community with a large number of scientists who eventually came to know that, but not to be really willing to correct it. And so that really concerned me a great deal. And one of the things...

35:00 **MH:** You start down this path. And you're recognizing that in basically the research that has led to BioLogos staking out this position on Adam and Eve, that there's just... There are points of error here. And points of error not just in terms of, "Oh, I don't like that," but that are actually in conflict with mainstream scientific understanding of the genetic material.

JS: Yeah, and just so you know I'm not bluffing, I'll give you one example. [laughs]

MH: Okay. It'll probably go right over my head. But go ahead. We should get it on record. [laughs]

JS: So Dennis and BioLogos would really appeal to a lot of population genetic studies which looked at past population sizes to show that it's always been above a single couple, right?

MH: Mm hmm.

JS: Well, all the studies they were citing were relying on this thing... It's a technical term that's called "effective population size." And they just summarized it and they defined it as the minimum population. However, that's just not what it is. It's the *average* population over a time. And so for example, to give you a sense of what that means is if I tell you there's ten people in the room and the minimum height is 6', that's one thing. If I tell you the average height is 6' that's another.

MH: Sure.

JS: So if the average height is 6' is it possible that there are people less than 6' tall there? Well, of course there is, right? Actually, in fact, you'd say you could almost be entirely certain that there's going to be people in the room that are less than 6'. But they knew that, I think. At some point down the line they knew that. But they were still representing it as a minimum. They were taking the average and calling it a minimum.

MH: Yeah, the minimum was important in that argument because they're basically saying the data hit a wall here at a certain number of population that can't be two. It can't be a single couple.

JS: Yeah, and then the other way that I think they did actually a great deal of harm to the conversation was how they really tried to impose a scientific understanding of the term *human* on everyone else, meaning the term *homo sapiens*. The scientific definition of *homo sapiens*, they said that's what human is. And really that was the underlying claim across all of their work. And everyone knows that *homo sapiens* don't start with a single couple. But there were several equivocations on this. But the main point I want to get at... And that actually... That particular decision ends up really undermining almost every single one of their claims. But...

MH: Yeah, because in your book, you talk about there's no scientific consensus... This is my one big science takeaway from your book. That scientists can't agree on how to define human.

JS: Exactly.

MH: Like there's no consensus.

JS: It's bizarre actually. [MH laughs] We just don't have a way of doing it. We don't even have a methodology, which is interesting. There's always been a debate about it. And that's okay. But what's really, I think, critical is that even if scientists *did* have a defined definition of what human was... Let's say we all got together as scientists and just voted and came to a definition. Scientists don't have a right to tell theologians what they mean by it, right?

MH: [laughter] Right, right.

JS: And this is the fundamental problem. Because if you're... There's kind of like this... Science doesn't have a normative role over theology. It just doesn't. It's trying to describe what we see in nature, but you can't then turn around and say, "Well, this is what the theologian *has* to mean when they say human." [laughs]

MH: Right. "This is how we talk about this nonmaterial thing called God. You know?" [laughs] "Based upon our look at the date of the material world, here's how you're supposed to talk about the spiritual world." It just doesn't make any sense.

JS: Yeah. So Dennis actually in 2011 was interviewed on NPR because of that article at BioLogos. And they asked him, "How likely is it that we all descend from Adam and Eve?" And he said (this is an approximate quote), "Well, that would be against all of the genetic evidence we've collected. So not very likely." And I think the really critical thing to note is that that's just not true. That was the wrong answer. The right answer is that if Adam and Eve were real—if they were real people in a real past—our best science tells us that they most likely would be ancestors of everyone.

MH: Yeah, so it's 180° away. [laughs]

JS: 180° away. Now the other thing that comes up, too (and this is important when you start talking about the supernatural worldview and such), is that there has been a deeply embedded (and this is bigger than BioLogos and it's going to come up, really, in what I think almost forced me into writing the book) is there's been a general assumption that if common descent is true, *de novo* creation is false. Let me put that a different way. If humans share common ancestors with the great apes, then Adam and Eve could not have been *de novo* created without parents. Those two affirmations are in diametric opposition. They cannot be true at the same time, right?

MH: Mm hmm. And that's... You're objecting to that in your book entirely.

40:00

JS: Oh, yeah. I say that that's just nonsense. And that it's entirely possible... And what I throw out there is the idea (as you know) that maybe God specially creates *de novo* without parents Adam and Eve outside the Garden. Adam. Puts him in there. Out of the rib makes Eve. Right?

MH: Mm hmm.

JS: Essentially how it's been understood by most Christians over the last 2,000 years. But he also created people outside the Garden a different way. So there's

maybe sacred or covenantal or textual humans inside the Garden that go out and they start mixing with the people outside. In that case...

MH: This gets us into your thesis.

JS: Yeah, yeah. And so the thing about it is that a lot of people... It's interesting to see how it's been responded to. Like there is no evidence against that or for that. There's actually good evidence to show that we wouldn't be able to tell scientifically. And that was known... So basically in early 2017, I actually wrote a draft of the article responding to Venema's book, where I really laid out all the core components of the thesis. And I put that there and I circulated it within BioLogos. They all knew about it. It didn't go well. [MH laughs] In a complex story, I ended up being kicked out of the speakers' bureau. And that was okay, sort of, because I was already not really sure if I trusted what was happening there and if I wanted to continue to associate with them. I mean, it is what it is. But what really was a major event, I think, is after this was well-known for over six months... I think it was close to eight months they'd known this. In early October I think it was, they published... Deborah Haarsma, who's the president of BioLogos, published an article responding to the Gospel Coalition that had (I think) Russell Moore, Clay Duncan, and Tim Keller explaining what they think the three essential doctrines are from the creation. Right? They talked about that God created everything good. That... I'm forgetting what two of them are, because there was agreement on them. [laughter] One was God created everything good. Oh! I think it was that God created everything. Second that God created everything good. And then also that of the *de novo* creation of Adam and Eve. And I was really struck by how Tim Keller talks about it. So Tim Keller is not an anti-evolutionist. He's a well-known pastor. As I understand it, he's actually working through some cancer right now. I really hope he gets better. He's actually been very friendly and very kind to evolutionary creationists at BioLogos. He's friends with Francis Collins. He's been a real statesman and a diplomat. And he's not an extremist, right? This isn't Ken Hamm we're talking about. This isn't someone who's out there. But when he read... He actually says in the thing that he can kind of take Genesis 1 as poetic language. When he reads Genesis 2, it really, really seems like it's talking about Adam and Eve being created without ancestors. Or they're special creation. And before him and God, even though his scientist friends are telling him that this is in conflict with science, this is just where he stands. And it just seemed like such an honest and difficult and legitimate thing to say. And the response from BioLogos just completely floored me. They responded by saying that they were risking turning a generation away from the faith, and really reciting all the evidence for common descent as evidence against...

MH: So they did not embrace what Keller... They didn't say, "Thank you, Dr. Keller." [laughs] I mean...

JS: You know, they didn't even have to *agree* with him. All they have to say is, "You know, we just want you to know that evolution isn't in conflict with your core beliefs." That would've been the truthful thing to say. Right? And at this point, too... It's been about eight months of internal conversation with key leaders at BioLogos. So they *knew* that it wasn't in conflict, but they just decided to put a stake in the ground anyways against that. And so I published a blog in defense of Tim Keller and really hoped that they would retract it. Because once again, people make mistakes. We really should have grace and forgiveness in the Church, you know? But at that point it was an open secret in BioLogos that there was no evidence against *de novo* creation and they were still opposing it. And I was really concerned about that. To give you a little bit of a sense of the context here, too, I didn't have tenure at the time, in fact my tenure letters were out, which is a very vulnerable time.

MH: Sure, absolutely.

45:00

JS: And I remember talking to my wife about it, too, and just thinking, you know, "What do I do? This is definitely not a safe time. This is not the time to be picking a fight with the foundation of the director of the NIH."

MH: [laughs] Right.

JS: You know, I'm not in a Christian institution where people are going to cheer me for this. They might think I'm a bad scientist because of this. This could end up in my letters. This is not safe. But there was also this real urgency about it. And so probably at the worst time imaginable I could, I ended up going public with that. And I mean, man, it's been a wild ride since. So that, basically, I think got me blacklisted at BioLogos. I'm not really welcome there anymore. And that's fine...

MH: Hmm. Well, that's good for me to know. [laughter] Because if the academic meetings ever resume, you know, I have friends in BioLogos. So they'll probably hear you were on the podcast. Hopefully it's not going to make any difference. But if it does, I'll know why. [laughs]

JS: Well, I hope that... You know, like I said, I think that... We believe in grace, that people make mistakes, right?

MH: Sure.

JS: I mean, my hope was honestly that they would retract...

MH: They would say, "Mike, you made a mistake by having him on your podcast." [laughter]

JS: I'll be clear. You actually asked me to talk about what happened at BioLogos. I didn't push this. [laughter]

MH: Right.

JS: But ultimately what it really came down to for me is I don't care what people believe about origins. I mean, a lot of people at BioLogos (probably the vast majority, if not all of them) don't think that it makes sense to read Genesis as teaching *de novo* creation of Adam and Eve. Fine. I'm okay with that. I don't care. Believe what you want to about that. [laughs] I haven't even really revealed publicly what I think about it, because I don't really think it matters. But when a pastor in the Church comes saying, "This is my honest reading," I think that we have to be honest with them. We can't make up evidence that's not there. And...

MH: "You're wrong. You're wrong because of this evidence that really doesn't exist, but we're going to pretend it does."

JS: Yeah, *that's* the issue. And yes, we can make mistakes. But then we should be clear about those mistakes and correct them. And they haven't done that. So what happened is that they didn't actually fix it then, but what they did was... It's called a stealth edit. [laughs] Seven months later they made the change—deleted some of the offending text without actually telling anyone. [laughs] And then over two years later they made some more stealth edits similar to this. And along with that... And I think this is actually a pretty important example. This is something that scientists don't do, Mike. And this is actually really important. When we look at this... I mean, there's a real problem with distrusting experts and scientists. And I think it's just really critical as I make this criticism that BioLogos in doing this is really departing from well-established standards within the scientific world about how you're supposed to handle stuff. But remember that article from 2011 from Dennis Venema that started all this?

MH: Yeah, I linked to it in a post on my blog.

JS: Yeah, yeah. And that created a big debate in the Church. That post they silently deleted without explaining why. [laughs]

MH: Mm hmm.

JS: Now I have private emails that explain that they think that it was in total error, but they have not said that publicly. And I asked them at the beginning of this year, "Would you please put that back online with a note saying it's an error and explaining what the error is?" And they have not been willing to do that.

MH: Yeah, that's just not good. [laughs]

JS: Yeah. In the end, I agree with them on many things. I agree with them, actually, that I don't think the core of our faith is Adam and Eve. I think it's Jesus. And I get actually some flack from people about that, ironically. But we have to do better in the Church on these sorts of things. We have to at the minimum be honest and rigorous on the science. And I really do hope, even as I'm making this criticism, that this doesn't metastasize into something that would make people distrust science. I would just say that even when certain spokespeople of science have not always been trustworthy, science actually is not okay with this sort of stuff. That's not how scientists act in general.

MH: Yeah. Well, this is a good set-up for a second part of our interview and our discussion. But before we end this episode, I want you to state as simply as you can your hypothesis. This will be our teaser for people to listen to Part 2. You know, people who listen to this podcast, they know where I'm at on all this sort of thing because I've said it a number of times. Look, when it comes to science stuff, I'm going to let the scientists fight that battle. And when we have scientists who are believers and they're doing their thing in the scientific world, I'm going to presume that they're doing the best they can. They're being as honest as they can. I'm going to let them fight that out. And I only ask as a biblical scholar, "What can the text sustain?" Right? That's all I'm interested in. What can the text sustain? And I think I was drawn into this at Doug Kump's recommendation. And we're going to talk about your thesis, the details, and sort of my take on it, in the next part of our discussion. But again, as a teaser, what is the thesis? When you wound up taking all this history and starting off with this paper and how that went (we just heard)... When that becomes a book, what is specifically what you are arguing in the book?

JS: Well, the book has many layers, but I'll give you the big starting point. If you keep in mind that there's multiple understandings of ancestry (genetic and genealogical), Scripture is talking about genealogical ancestry. And if that's what we care about, that's important. Second, the term "human" is multivalent. That means that there's multiple legitimate definitions attached to it. And science has one way of talking about that, but that's different than how Scripture talks about it and it's different than how theologians talk about it. And so there's allowed to be legitimate autonomy between how different fields talk about it. From those two starting points, just that, and clarifying that and what that means, we get to this pretty surprising finding. We find out that entirely consistent with all of the genetic evidence... And I mean this from a mainstream scientific point of view, to the point that even atheist biologists have endorsed my book. Even scientists that don't believe in Adam and Eve at all have really agreed. Even BioLogos has agreed that the science is correct. It's entirely consistent with the evidence that Adam and Eve, ancestors of us all, could have been specially created without parents as recently as just 6,000 years ago, and that as they exited the Garden, they would have encountered people there. And as their offspring interbred within just a few thousand years, before AD 1 when Jesus walks the earth, before the ascension, before Paul writes Romans, everyone across the entire globe would

descend from them. So we find out that basically Adam and Eve, if they existed 6,000 years ago or any time more ancient, our best science tells us that they would be ancestors of all of us. And so it means that the only way that evolutionary science is really pressing on the traditional reading of Genesis in is this very, very limited way—merely by suggesting that there's people outside the Garden that God created another way.

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah. And that is the lynchpin to the idea (to the hypothesis). But again, I'm hoping people catch this, that Dr. Swamidass is saying that the idea of a historical Adam and Eve is entirely consistent with the genetic evidence. That you can have these two things and they can both be simultaneously true. They do not cancel out one another. So when we get together again, we'll repeat the hypothesis at the beginning of that episode. And then we're going to get into it. We're going to get into the specifics, like how this works. And what... We've already tipped the hand here that you need a population outside the Garden to tell these two separate stories and how that might be possible. But we'll interact a little bit more about the specifics as we move on in the discussion. Because again, the goal here is not to make you adopt a view or even buy the book or anything like that. But I want people in this audience to know... Because I get asked all the time, "Do you think that historical Adam and Eve is nonsense? Or do you think this is legit or real?" You know? And it's like, "Look, all I'm concerned about is what can the text sustain. Let's try to rightly read the text." And I'm going to defer the science discussion to people who are actually scientists. I'm not going to pretend to be one, and I don't play one on TV. I'm just not going to do that. So here we have work from someone who's a legitimate scientist in the right fields. Okay? This is not arguing it from some disparate field that doesn't really immediately pertain to where the discussion is today. This is smack-dab right in the center of all of it. And again, suggesting that you can have both of these things be simultaneously true—essentially two stories... They can both be true at the same time. But granted, you have to think about it this in particular way.

And so just to front where we're going here, I think yeah, I've said this before. Genesis 4 can be read to have people outside the Garden. That's possible. I don't know that that is explicitly the way we're supposed to read it, but I wouldn't know. Because there are textual uncertainties here that allow it but also prevent an explicit affirmation of it. And I'm content to just leave it there, and then the discussion can be fun at that point. You can entertain all sorts of possibilities, which is what Josh is trying to do from the scientific side. So Josh, thanks for spending this part of your day with us. But we will come back and hit the rest of this, more specifics.

JS: Looking forward to it. Thanks for having me.

55:00

TS: Alright, Mike, I still don't know what we're talking about here. Um... [MH laughs] You're going to have to wrap this up for me or summarize it. Because I was too busy paying attention to this, that... We had some technical problems before it started. So that got me rattled. I'm trying to listen and pay attention. But you're going to have to give me a quick summary, if you will, for me and probably some of the audience out there as well.

MH: Yeah, kind of sort of, and I hope the teaser at the end answers that question as well. But all this is good and necessary backdrop. What Josh is going to propose, what he does propose in his book, is that the Bible is concerned with the genealogical history of Adam and Eve and all humanity, not genetics. And so the genetics tells one story... And again, the crucial element to his thought experiment is that you have people outside the Garden (that's where the evolutionary genetic history is tracking and trackable) and then there's this whole other issue of Adam and Eve being specially created by God and their own genealogical descendants. So both of those stories, he says, are true. That's the hypothesis. So in the next episode, we're going to get into the guts of that.

TS: Okay. And what was BioLogos' problem with all that? Why did he have a falling out?

MH: BioLogos doesn't want to affirm the historicity of Adam and Eve. For many years they had on their website content to the nature that the genetic evidence cannot be reduced to a single pair of humans to explain all other humans. And so that led them to reject the notion of a historical Adam and Eve. And what Josh is going to get into in the next episode is that, look, that data that was used to make that claim is not based on good science, and therefore we don't need to dismiss a historical Adam and Eve.

TS: Hmm. Okay, gotcha. Alright, again, go to NakedBiblePodcast.com, get that link and discount code so you can get 40% off his book and free shipping until January 15th. And with that, Mike, I'm going to be listening... I'm going to be anticipating Part 2 very anxiously in the new year. So Part 2 will be in 2021. Hopefully Covid and everything else will be done by the end of this week.

MH: Yeah, wouldn't that be nice? [laughter] Wrap it up.

TS: Yeah, absolutely. Alright, Mike, I hope everybody out there had a good Christmas. And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.