

Humans before Adam and Eve?

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The media announcement on 10th September 2015 that 15 partial skeletons of a new human-like species have been found in a deep cave system in South Africa, is the latest find relating to creatures that pre-dated modern mankind but nevertheless have anatomical features indicating their relationship to the Genus *Homo* to which modern humans belong.

These discoveries inevitably challenge belief systems of some people who have interpreted the Bible creation account as stating that the first humans were Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Before I discuss how the existence of pre-Adamic people should not challenge our understanding of the Bible Genesis account, it is helpful to first summarise some scientific evidence relating to modern humanity and other creatures who are thought to be somewhere on the ancestry of modern humanity.

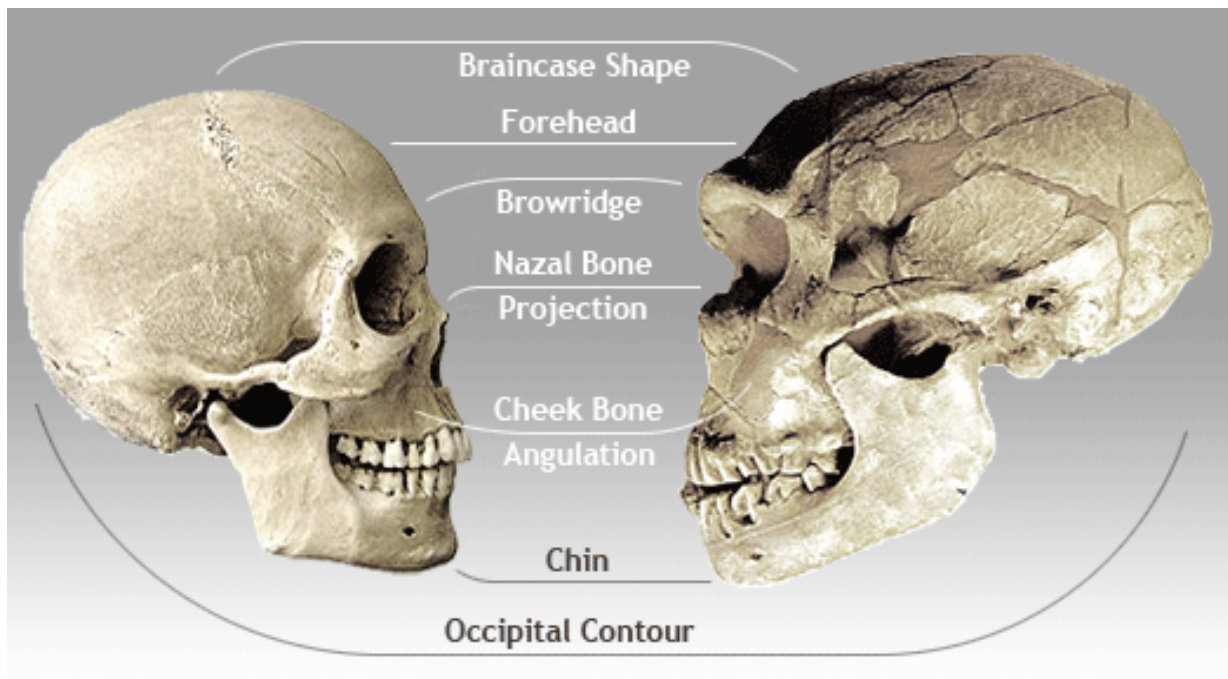
Below we have Professor Lee Burger of the University of the Witwatersrand holding a reconstructed skull of this most recent discovery, now called by science **Naledi**.



This picture well illustrates the small size of these hominid creatures and the smallness of the brain as a percentage of skull size. Also note the jaws protruding below where the nose would be situated.

This Naledi race clearly still had anatomy that was far from that of modern humanity. However, aspects of the anatomy place this race as part of the Hominid genus to which modern humans belong. Science now has many skeletal remains belonging to other species of Hominids and including Neanderthals who actually had slightly larger brains than modern humans. Below we see a comparison between an average human skull on the left and an average Neanderthal skull on the right.

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It is important to emphasise that these skulls are of average dimensions since within each species we find considerable variability. This variability is well illustrated from a study of modern humans, as shown below;

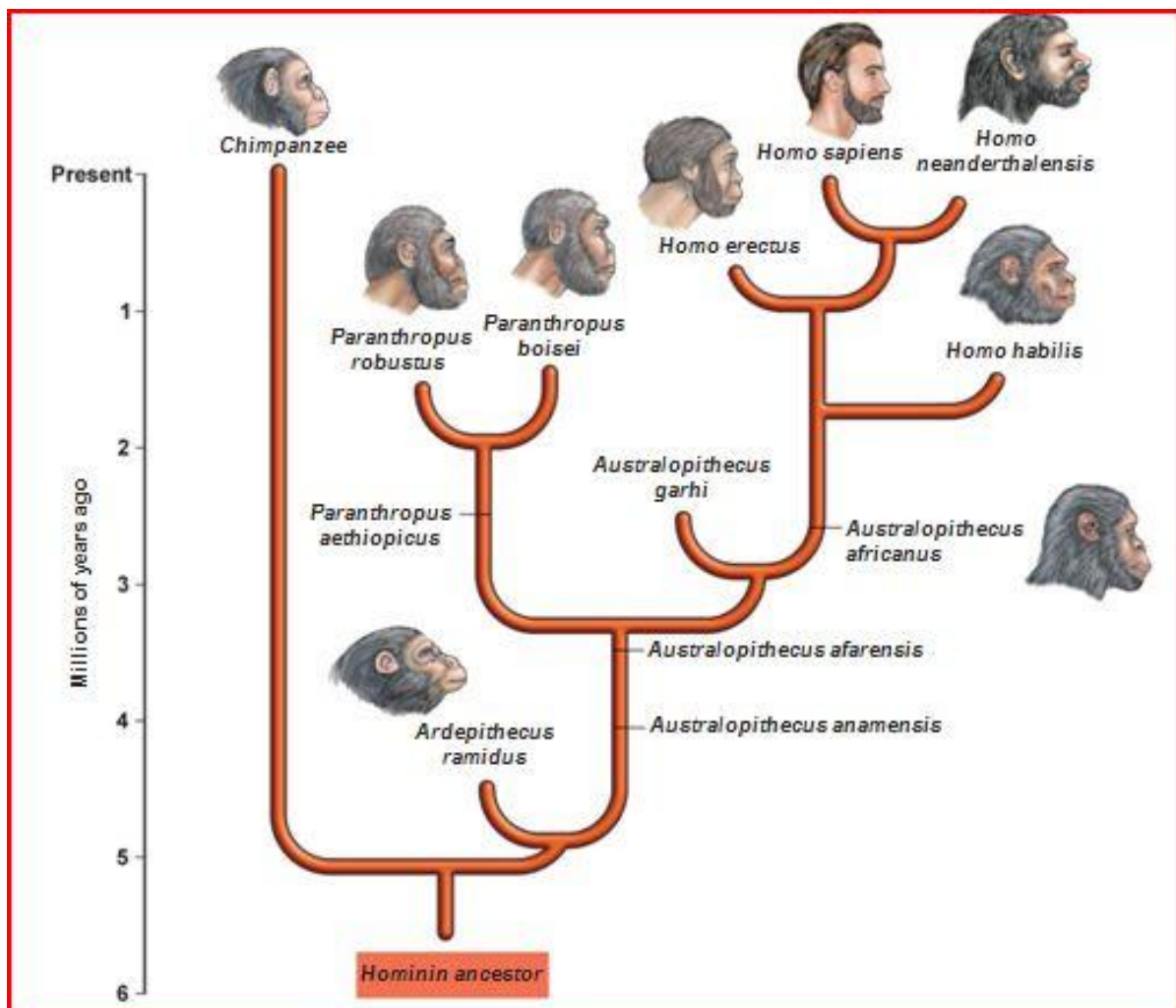


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We are all familiar with the reality that it is hard to find two individual humans who look identical. The extremes of this reality are well illustrated by this picture of an average sized Caucasian man standing with a group of Pygmy men from the Congo forest.

Prior to the most recent discovery of Naledi people, the accumulated scientific evidence has suggested the following relationships between the various species related to mankind;



The scientific evidence for Neanderthals is based on many skeletons and it seems that they only disappeared from the earth quite recently. In fact skeletal remains show modern *Homo sapiens* like us existing together with Neanderthals in some places.

The scientific evidence also shows that anatomically modern humanity has existed in Europe for at least 60,000 years and this is long before the impression we may have gained from the Bible account of Adam and Eve. Some Bible scholars have used genealogies listed in the Bible to date Adam and Eve to about 4,000BC. This would place them in the Neolithic period, according to science. This was the same period when the first complex cities appeared, including the first writing, mining and complex social systems.

Can the Bible creation account be reconciled with these fast developing scientific discoveries?

It should be noted that historically there have been three broad categories within which Christian theologians and also other monotheistic faiths have understood the Bible creation accounts in Genesis 1 to 3. These are:

1. Literal interpretation, such as is advocated by so-called 'six day creationists'.
2. So-called 'Concordist interpretations' that look at alternative meanings of Hebrew words, so as to try to reconcile the main aspects of the creation accounts with scientific discoveries.
3. An approach often called 'cultural-literal' that views the Genesis accounts as largely figurative, aimed at persuading ancient Middle Eastern cultures to believe in one God instead of many and that this God has created everything. In this approach it is suggested that the account cannot and should not be reconciled with scientific discovery.

My own understanding is that God inspired the Genesis accounts so that they could have relevance to each generation. In other words they can legitimately be interpreted in more than one way.

In pre-scientific generations it mattered little that most people interpreted Genesis as saying that God created everything in six days of 24 hours duration. However, in our scientific generation most people recognise that this interpretation inevitably brings the Genesis account into conflict with scientific discoveries.

In fact, this sort of conflict between science and faith started much earlier than today with events such as the trial of Galileo in 1615 before the Roman Church Inquisition. Early science, including use of the first telescopes, revealed to Galileo that our earth orbited our sun. However, theologians of his day interpreted several Bible passages as saying that our earth was the centre of the universe. Today we face similar dangers when we are not prepared to look again at traditional interpretations of key passages in the Bible.

My own preferred approach to Genesis falls within the 'concordist' category but I acknowledge that other approaches can be consistent with the biblical account.

Does the Genesis account allow us to interpret it in a way that is reconcilable with our earth being millions of years old and containing many God-ordained mechanisms and processes, designed by the Creator to lead to his pre-ordained outcomes?

In this article I am not explaining my understanding of how Genesis chapter one can be reconciled with the stages of creation that led to mankind. I am here only concentrating on Genesis chapter 2 and its description of the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve. In this context the following questions need to be answered.

1. Were Adam and Eve the first humans?
2. Who were the Nephilim?
3. How do the Garden of Eden events relate to our understanding of 'sin' and God's historic plan to restore a sinful and rebellious humanity back into a harmonious relationship with himself.

Were Adam and Eve the first humans?

In this section I am not discussing the scientific evidence but I am looking at the Bible text to show that the account, even when taken at face value, tells us that Adam and Eve were not the first humans.

We read in Chapter one that on creation 'day six', *God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; **male and female he created them*** (Genesis 1:27). However, in chapter 2 we have the Garden of Eden account and in this case Adam was created before Eve. In fact Adam was instructed to name *all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air*. (Genesis 2: 19). It was only after this lengthy process that God made/created Eve.

Since on creation 'day six' man and woman were created but, in the Garden of Eden they were not both created on the same 'day', we can suggest that 'day six' refers to the creation of mankind (however long that took) and the Garden of Eden events refer to God's intimate interactions with one unique man Adam and his wife Eve.

We can also ask if the Genesis account refers to other humans at the time of Adam and Eve? In fact the account does have clear evidence that other humans existed. For instance:

1. When Cain killed Abel his punishment was to be driven from Eden. He replied, *I will be a restless wanderer on the earth and **whoever finds me will kill me*** (Genesis 4:14).
2. We read, *Cain lay with **his wife**, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch* (Genesis 4:17).

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3. Cain was then **building a city** and he named it after his son Enoch (Genesis 4:17).
4. We read, **the Nephilim** were on the earth in those days – and also afterward – when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown (Genesis 6: 4). In Numbers 13:31-33 they are spoken of as people of large stature.

From these passages we can suggest that Cain obtained his wife from the surrounding humanity outside the Garden of Eden. He initially feared hostility from the surrounding people but apparently overcame this and was instrumental in building a city. People do not build a city just for themselves, their wife and one son!

Suggestions that Cain obtained his wife from other children of Adam and Eve are not justified. We read, *Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him".... After Seth was born, Adam had other sons and daughters* (Genesis 4:25 and 5:4). These accounts strongly indicate that Cain would not have obtained his wife from Adam's family.

Who were the Nephilim?

Regarding the Nephilim, there are several references to them in the Bible, both in Genesis and also later when the Israelites were conquering Canaan. In Canaan the Israelites again encountered the Nephilim giants and we have Bible references that trace these exceptionally large people back to one of the sons of Noah.

The most convincing understanding of the 'sons of God' intermarrying with the 'daughters of men' is that some of the Adamic family line took wives from other humanity. Throughout the Bible people in relationship with God are referred to as 'sons of God'. Suggestions by some that the Nephilim were crosses between spiritual beings and human women do not stand up to close analysis of Bible references. A more detailed discussion of the Nephilim warrants a separate article and will not be detailed here.

If crosses between Adamic people and other humanity sometimes produced Nephilim giants, this may suggest that the Adamic family line differed slightly in their genetics from some of the surrounding humanity. In biology we know that crossing slightly different genetics sometimes produces so-called 'hybrid vigour'. It may be significant that there is scientific evidence that modern humans lived alongside Neanderthals in some localities and DNA extracted from ancient skeletons indicates that there was limited interbreeding between modern humans and Neanderthals.

These Bible references to other people outside of the Garden of Eden should motivate us to look again at the significance of the Garden of Eden and of the Adam and Eve accounts.

What spiritual lessons can we learn from a Garden of Eden surrounded by other humanity?

The Bible descriptions of the Garden of Eden do suggest a real locality. The names are given of four rivers originating near the Garden of Eden, two of which still have the same names and descriptions are given of minerals found in the area. Genetic studies of the first domesticated food crops place their origin in the same geographical region identified as the location for Eden. It is situated in a part of modern Turkey.

Parts of the Garden of Eden account suggest figurative language, such as the 'Tree of Life'. However, irrespective of any possible figurative language the events described form the basis for all interactions between God and humanity down through the following centuries.

The Bible does not tell us whether God had any personal interactions with pre-Adamic humans and so we are left in the dark on this question. However, in the Garden of Eden we are told that God entered into a very intimate relationship with Adam and Eve. Throughout the Bible such close relationships are often called 'Eternal Life Relationships'.

As far as we know from the Bible account, Adam and Eve were the first humans to be given a direct instruction or 'law' from God. When they broke that instruction they became the first humans to 'sin', since sin is defined as breaking a law of God or falling short of his standards.

Science tells us that our universe only exists because of amazing fine tuning between all the laws and processes that hold the universe together. The Bible tells us that God *sustains all things by his powerful word* (Hebrews 1:3). This and other similar scriptures imply that there is no place for any alternative authority in the universe. God alone must be in full control.

This reality gives us a clue as to why the Bible says that there was and still is a spiritual reality that attempts to usurp God's authority. We can better understand the Garden of Eden events if we accept the biblical revelation that there is a cosmic battle in progress between good and evil and that the evil is personified by Satan and some angelic beings that took his side in challenging the absolute authority of the Creator.

Since God has voluntarily limited himself when he created angels to be immortal (Luke 20:36), this meant that any rebellion by them could not be dealt with by eliminating them. The penalty pronounced by God for rebellion was exclusion from God's intimate presence and ultimately it will be eternal exclusion in a reality that the Bible calls Hell. In fact we are told that Hell was specifically created for the Devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41).

In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve were representatives for all of humanity and they demonstrated through their disobedience that all of us would have disobeyed at some or other time. Adam and Eve were placed in idyllic surroundings where there was nothing to harm them. They could not blame their disobedience on poor surroundings.

As soon as mankind were aware of God's law and disobeyed it by exercising their God given 'free will', Satan could claim humanity for himself.

We are told that God does not change. For this reason Satan could remind God that he had pronounced the sentence of 'exclusion from his presence' on all rebellion. Therefore, to be consistent God had to apply the same sentence on humanity.

However, this is where the GOOD NEWS comes in. Since God is independent of time he knew in advance how humanity would react to his laws. In spite of this he had decided to include humanity in his plans, both on earth and within the Timeless Dimension to which we are all heading. So we read, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him* (John 3:16-17).

The Gospel Message tells us that God decided to interact with humanity in a very personal way through Jesus Christ, who fully identified with our humanity and on the cross experienced the reality of, for the first time, being separated from the intimate relationship he had with Father God. This separation was because, *God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them* (2 Corinthians 5:19).

To put it another way, The Judge took upon himself the penalty that had been prescribed for all rebellion. When Jesus was on the cross he experienced all the horror, pain and suffering that sin has caused within humanity and he fully identified with our humanity by experiencing physical death. He experienced the reality of separation from Father God, even though he himself was not guilty of any sin. He was in effect taking upon himself the sin of the world. The climax of this transaction was reached when Jesus cried out *"My God, my God why have you forsaken me"* (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34,).

At that moment Jesus experienced the horror of separation from the intimate relationship he had always experienced with Father God. When Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, he could proclaim within the spirit world that he (as Son of God) had stood in the place of humanity's sin and rebellion. He had suffered the penalty himself and so the guilty could now go free from the judgment. He had bought the right to 'redeem' humanity from the destiny decreed for Satan and his rebellious angels.

The Garden of Eden events demonstrated why Calvary was needed. Mankind could not save themselves from the destiny decreed for rebellion. Since the Garden of Eden demonstration God has guided human history towards the cross, so as to open a way for humanity to regain an Eternal Life intimate relationship with their Creator and to enter into the fullness of God's plans for humanity, for now and for all of eternity.

In other words, an acceptance of the evidence for humanity before Adam and Eve need not diminish what the rest of the Bible teaches us about God, about the Gospel message and our relationship with him.

Reconciling the Bible with acceptance of an ancient universe containing God-ordained mechanisms and processes spread over vast time scales

We live in a generation that is being challenged to rethink our traditional interpretations of the Bible. In my webpage www.factandfaith.co.za I have attempted to summarise how I personally reconcile acceptance of a Big Bang Creation, containing God ordained evolutionary processes, while retaining all the foundational beliefs of Christianity. I cover aspects of this in articles freely downloadable from my webpage.

The most comprehensive presentation of these questions can be found in my book 'Big Bang Christianity'. This is also freely downloadable from the webpage.

Overall, I believe those of us who have a high regard for the Bible need to face realities, such as the existence of humans before Adam and Eve. If we fail to face the many challenges presented to our generation, through the discoveries of science, then we are in danger of presenting our faith as out of date and irrelevant.

We live in very challenging times. Let us rise up and embrace them constructively. Hopefully we can come to accept that we live in a very ancient universe containing many mechanisms and processes spread over vast time-scales. We need to understand that the Creator has used mechanisms and processes that he set in motion and which he guides, so as to produce his pre-ordained outcomes.

If our concept of God is adequately great then we can accept that he has guided these mechanisms and processes right down the centuries. To achieve this measure of involvement he must be great enough to be aware of every detail, just as Jesus said, *Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.* (Matthew 10:29-30).

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