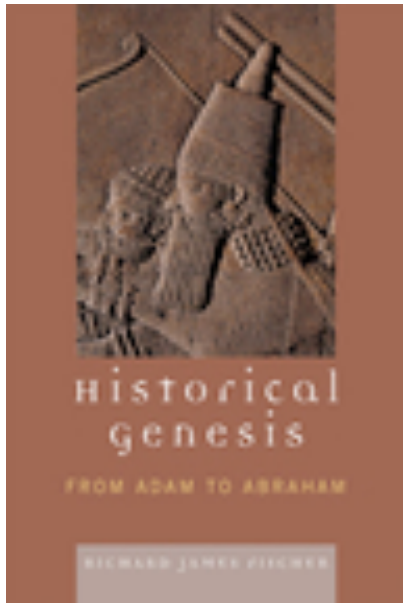


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**Fischer, Richard James**

***Historical Genesis: From Adam to Abraham***

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*Historical Genesis: From Adam to Abraham* purports to find harmony in the Bible, science, and history. This is indeed a hard and ambitious endeavor that Richard James Fischer, founder and president of the Genesis Proclaimed Association, aims to achieve in this volume published by University Press of America in 2008. He confirms the difficulty of this task and compares it to solving a jigsaw puzzle without the big picture, yet he boldly takes the challenge and claims, “It sounds difficult, but we can do it” (vii). In format, this volume comprises of twenty-two chapters beside the introduction, suggested readings, and indices, and it can be grouped basically under three foci: “The Historical Adam,” chapters 1–7 (1–57); “The Flood,” chapters 8–18 (58–155); and, finally, “The Babel Tower,” chapters 19–22 (156–87).

Already in the introduction, Fischer gives out his perspective. Though confident that the result of his approach will provide a complete picture, “one that takes a high view of Scripture, fully respecting the current findings of modern science, consistent with ancient history” (xi), Fischer, in fact, gives pride of place to science. His methodology is one that attempts to accommodate the biblical text into scientific data. This fact becomes clearer as Fischer asserts that the massive evidence from archaeological findings, biological, anthropological, and genetic discoveries in the area of ancient Mesopotamia supports the

historicity of Gen 2–11. One may just wonder why the author left Gen 1 out. He further claims that the biblical accounts from Adam to the Tower of Babel “fits neatly within the historical confines of the ancient Near East ... within a time frame beginning about 5000 BC to roughly 2000 BC” (x). How he achieved these conclusions are the subjects of discussion in the following chapters. Yet, chapters 1 and 2 are relevant in that they lay out the basic premises of Fischer’s approach.

In chapter 1, “A Man called Adam,” Fischer defends the idea of the historical Adam. He refutes the “No Adam” hypothesis on the basis of the genealogy in Luke 3:38 and some verses in the Pauline epistles (Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:22, 45; 1 Tim 2:13) and concludes, “So instead of ruling Adam out of the Bible, why not rule him in? Let’s assume the writer, or writers, of Genesis, upon whom the New Testament writers relied, got the story right and that Adam of Genesis was a real-live, flesh-and-blood human being with the same status as every other Old Testament figure” (3). Fischer’s theological assessment may have some validity, yet it is evidently too simplistic. In fact, for many of those “progressive-thinking theologians” (1), not only Adam is considered unhistorical but also many of other figures of the Old Testament. My attention, however, turns to a more critical issue: Fischer’s appraisal that this historical Adam was not God’s first creation but God’s special creation (11). More specifically, he posits that Adam was “the father of the Adamites-Semites-Israelites-Jews” alone (3) and was not the father of all humanity. Fischer understands that the human activities described in Gen 4 such as utilization of tents, farming, livestock, musical instruments, and implements of bronze and even iron places Adam and his successors basically in a time frame called Neolithic Age (3). Scholars in the field of biblical archaeology such as Alfred J. Hoerth, however, caution about the fluidity in the early dates for Mesopotamia and remark that the development of the simple lifestyle to a more complex one could have been multilinear—that is, “various degrees of advancement coexisted in different places”—and add, “The prehistory of the Near East simply cannot be compressed this side of 4004” (*Archaeology and the Old Testament*, 199). Therefore, to assert that Adam and his successors should be placed in the time frame of Neolithic period is a unilateral interpretation and does no justice to the biblical text.

In chapter 2, “A Place in History: Adam and Associates,” Fischer places Adam in time and space. The time is Ubaidan period (ca. 4800 B.C.) and the place Eridu, southern Mesopotamia. Fischer cites three rationales for his view: archaeological data, biblical genealogy and scientific information. Each one of these areas is highly controversial and does not present conclusive solutions. However, one thing is certain. To harmonize science and the Bible in this particular study, one must opt to give precedence to one over the other. Fischer does so by choosing scientific data over the authority of the Scripture. As result of this choice, Fischer clarifies that Adam was God’s special creation, not the first creation. He forgets, however, that a sound theology cannot be construed selectively and

that in this specific case Gen 1 is not only necessary but also crucial for the understanding of Adam's creation as *imago Dei* and his mission on earth. If he was not the first creation, then only the so-called Adamites-Semites-Israelites-Jews would bear God's image. This assumption clearly goes against Gen 1:26, which ties the creation of Adam to God's creation of the heavens and earth in the sixth day. Ignoring this fact, however, Fischer proceeds in chapters 3–7 to show archaeological evidences for Gen 2–4 on the basis of ancient Mesopotamia's history.

From chapters 8–18, Fischer defends the idea of a local flood. Following the same methodology and sometimes using innovative hypothesis to explain biblical accounts, he expounds the evidences for a local flood confined to the ancient Mesopotamia area. In chapter 10 Fischer concludes that "The notion of a global flood, based upon the Genesis narrative, fails on two counts: (1) the word translated 'earth' in Genesis can mean 'land,' and (2) any word which might have defined 'earth' would not mean then what it means today" (73). Victor P. Hamilton, on the other hand, explains that, when this term is used to refer to a particular piece of land, "it is often followed by a prepositional phrase that further identifies the land (e.g., the land of the Canaanites, land of the east, land of the fathers), except in those places where mention is made theologically of the land promised to Israel" (*The Book of Genesis 1–17*, 273). There is no doubt that, taking Gen 6–9 in the context of Gen 1–11, the flood incident was global, at least in the biblical perspective. Fischer, however, summarizes in chapter 17 that: the flood was historical and local; the flood occurred in ancient Mesopotamia around 2900 B.C.; and the flood was a judgment imputed on the sinful Adamite population rather than universal population (140).

Finally, Fischer turns to the Tower of Babel and discusses this subject from chapters 19–21. In this study Fischer's main contention is that the Tower of Babel was only one of the many ziggurats built in the land of Shinar. He posits that Nimrod, the king of Babylon, was the instigator in building a tower to Marduk and explains that, "Whatever the initial motivation, the builders at Babylon became caught up in a ziggurat building competition with their neighbors" (170). In order to give his theological assessment for this fact, Fischer explains Gen 11:1–11 in this way: "The confusion of tongues at Babel was not about scrambling one common language into various different languages. Instead, it related to the predominant topic of the conversation of the day, which was about building mud-brick platforms and adorning them with temples of worship" (157). Ingenious as it may be, this explanation is not consistent with the biblical text, which clearly informs us that God came down from heaven to judge humanity and confused their common language in order to scatter them abroad over the face of the whole earth. Refuting the plain text as "popular misconception" (156), Fischer squares the biblical narrative into the history of the ancient Mesopotamia. Finally, in chapter 22, "A Father of Nations in a Land of Turmoil," Fischer concludes with Abraham and explains that he was chosen by

God to be a founder of nations. Abraham was called by God to depart from Ur, a land plagued by rampant polytheism and idolatry, to Canaan, “a region that would come to be called the Holy Land” (186).

There is no doubt that this volume offers a great deal of information concerning archaeological data and citations of secondary sources and scientific reports; however, they are arbitrarily selected to support the author’s premises. Sometimes idiosyncratic views and premises lead to simplistic and unsound conclusions. In addition, the theological interpretations are most of the time found wanting and do no justice to the Scripture. Despite all these oversights, this volume still provides room for reflection, especially in the comparative study of the biblical accounts to the ancient Near Eastern sources. One relevant aspect would be to ponder about the origin and the uniqueness of the ancient Hebrew source in its contemporary context.