HOW LONG WERE ADAM AND EVE IN THE GARDEN?

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On occasion, those who defend the concept of an old Earth suggest that it is impossible to know how long Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden and that untold years may have elapsed during that time period. Is this a possibility? How long were Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?

The suggestion that millions or billions of years may have passed during the time Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden is a common ploy of those who, like progressive creationists and theistic evolutionists, advocate an ancient Earth. However, it is nothing but another failed attempt to try to insert vast ages of geologic/evolutionary time into the biblical record. Consider, in this regard, two popular arguments that frequently are offered in support of such a concept.

First, one theistic evolutionist, John N. Clayton, has suggested that since a part of God’s curse on Eve was that He was going to multiply her pain in childbirth (Genesis 3:16), she must have given birth to numerous children in the garden, or else God’s curse would have meant nothing to her. How could God “multiply” something if she never had experienced it in the first place? Furthermore, Clayton has lamented, rearing children is a process that requires considerable time, thereby allowing for the possibility that Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden for an extended period prior to being evicted after their sin. As Clayton has written: “Every evidence we have biblically indicates that mankind’s beginning in the Garden of Eden was not a short period which involved one man and one woman” (1980, 7[1]:5, emp. added).

The second argument (which is somewhat related to the first) suggests that Adam and Eve must have been in the garden for quite some time because after they left, it was said of Cain that “he builded a city” (Genesis 4:17). To quote Clayton, that would be something “which you cannot do with you and your wife” (1980, 7[1]:5). In other words, Cain had to have a large enough family to help him build “a city.” That, suggests Clayton, would have taken a lot of time.

Mr. Clayton is completely in error when he states that “every evidence we have biblically indicates that mankind’s beginning in the Garden of Eden was not a short period which involved one man and one woman.” The fact is, every evidence we have biblically proves conclusively that man and woman could not have been in the garden for very long. Consider the following.

First, regardless of what defenders of an ancient Earth may wish were true, the simple fact of the matter is that the Bible sets an outer limit on the amount of time that man could have lived in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 5:5 states clearly that “all the days that Adam lived were 930 years.” We know, of course, that “days” and “years” already were being counted by the time of Adam’s creation because in Genesis 1:14 (day four of the Creation week) God mentioned both in His discussion of their relationship to the heavenly bodies. Therefore, however long Adam and Eve may have been in the garden, one thing is certain: they were not there for any time period that exceeded Adam’s life span of 930 years. But there is additional information that must be considered as well. Genesis 4:25 explains that Seth was born after Cain slew Abel. Since the biblical account makes it clear that Seth was born outside the garden, and since Genesis 5:3 informs us that Adam was 130 years old when Seth was born, it is obvious that Adam and Eve could not have been in the Garden of Eden any longer than 130 years.

Second, surely it is not inconsequential that all the children of Adam and Eve mentioned in the Bible were born outside the Garden of Eden. Not one conception, or birth, is mentioned as having occurred while Adam and Eve lived in the garden (see Genesis 4:1 for the first mention of any conception or birth—only after the couple’s expulsion from Eden). Follow closely the importance and logic of this argument, which may be stated as follows.

One of the commands given to Adam and Eve was that they “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the Earth” (Genesis 1:28). [Interestingly, Isaiah would say many years later that God created the Earth “to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18).] In other words, Adam and Eve were commanded to reproduce.

Now, what is sin? Sin is: (a) doing what God said not to do; or (b) not doing what God said to do. Up until the time that Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:6), had they sinned? No, they still were in a covenant relationship with God and everything was perfect. Since that is the case, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that Adam and Eve were doing what God had commanded them to do—reproducing. Yet, I repeat, the only conceptions and births of which we have any record occurred outside the garden! In other words, apparently Adam and Eve were not even in the garden long enough for Eve to conceive, much less give birth.

Third, while the Bible does not provide a specific time regarding how long Adam and Eve were in the Garden, it could not have been very long because Christ Himself, in referring to the curse of death upon the human family as a result of its sinful rebellion against God, specifically stated that the devil “was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). [Of interest is the fact that in Luke 11:45-52, the account is recorded of the Lord rebuking the Jews of His day. He charged them with following in the footsteps of their ancestors. He foretold the destruction that was yet to befall them. And, He announced that upon them would come “the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world.” Then, with emphatic linguistic parallelism typical of Hebrew expression, He added: “from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zachariah...” Jesus therefore placed the murder of Abel near the “foundation of the world.” Granted, Abel’s death occurred some years after the Creation, but it was close enough
to that event for Jesus to state that it was associated with “the foundation of the world.” If vast spans of time—that is, enough to accommodate evolutionists and their sympathizers—occurred while Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, then how could the shedding of human blood be declared by the Son of God to extend back to the “foundation of the world”?

Satan and his ignominious band of outlaws (“sons of the evil one”—Matthew 13:38) have worked their ruthless quackery on mankind from the very moment the serpent met mother Eve in the Garden of Eden. When he and his cohorts rebelled and “kept not their proper habitation,” they were cast from the heavenly portals to be “kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6).

The conditions of Satan’s surrender were harsh. Although he had been completely vanquished, although his armies had been thoroughly routed, and although the Victor had imposed the worst kind of permanent exile, Satan was determined not to go gently into the night. While he admittedly had lost the war, he nevertheless was planning future skirmishes. Vindictive by nature (Revelation 12:12), in possession of cunning devices (2 Corinthians 2:11), and thoroughly determined to be “the deceiver of the world” (Revelation 12:9), he set his face against all that is righteous and holy—and never once looked back. His anger at having been defeated fueled his determination to strike back in revenge.

But strike back at whom? God’s power was too great, and His omnipotence was too all-consuming (Job 42:2, 1 John 4:4). Another target was needed; another repository of satanic revenge would have to be found. And who better to serve as the recipient of hell’s unrighteous indignation than mankind—the only creature in the Universe made “in the image and likeness of God” (Genesis 1:26-27)? As the late Rex A. Turner Sr. observed: “Satan cannot attack God directly, thus he employs various methods to attack man, God’s master creation” (1980, p. 89). What sweet revenge—despoiling the “apple of God’s eye” and the zenith of His creative genius! Thus, with the creation of man, the battle was on. Little wonder that in his first epistle the apostle Peter described Satan as an adversary that, “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (5:8).

Now—knowing what the Scriptures tell us about Satan’s origin, attitude, and mission—is it sensible to suggest that he would take his proverbial time, and twiddle his figurative thumbs, while allowing Adam and Eve to revel in the covenant relationship they enjoyed with their Maker? (Genesis 3:8 relates how God walked with them in the garden “in the cool of the day”)? Would Satan simply “leave them alone for a long period of time” so that they could conceive, give birth to, and rear children in the luscious paradise known as the Garden of Eden? Is this how a hungry, stalking lion would view its prey—by watching admiringly from afar, allowing it hundreds or thousands of years of fulfilled joy, and affording it time to conceive, give birth to, and rear a family? Hardly—which is why Christ described Satan as a murderer “from the beginning.” Satan was in no mood to wait. He was angry, he was bitter, and he was filled with a thirst for revenge. What better way to slake that thirst than introducing sin into God’s perfect world?

What may be said, then, about John Clayton’s suggestion that Adam and Eve must have been in the garden for an extended period of time since God said that He was going to “multiply” Eve’s pain? How could He possibly “multiply” something she never had experienced? This quibble can be answered quite easily. Does a person have to “experience” something before that something can be “multiplied”? Suppose I said, “I’m going to give you $100.” You therefore stick out your hand to receive the $100 bill I am holding in mine. But I immediately pull back my hand and say, “No, I’ve changed my mind; I am going to give you $1,000 instead!” Did you actually have to possess or “experience” the $100 before I could increase it to $1,000? Of course not.

The fact God said He was going to “multiply” Eve’s pain in childbirth does not mean necessarily that Eve had to have experienced some pain prior to God’s decree that she would experience more pain. God’s point was merely this: “Eve, you were going to experience some pain in childbirth, but because of your sin, now you will experience even more pain.” The fact that Eve never had experienced any childbirth pain up to that point does not mean that she could not experience even more pain later as a part of her penalty for having sinned against God.

Last, what about John Clayton’s idea that Adam and Eve must have been in the Garden for an extended period of time because the text indicates that when they left Cain and his wife “built a city” (Genesis 4:17). Clayton has lamented that this is “something which you cannot do with you and your wife” (1980, 7:1:5). Of course he would be correct—if the city under discussion were a modern metropolis. But that is not the case here.

The Hebrew word for city is quite broad in its meaning. It may refer to anything from a sprawling village to a mere encampment. Literally, the term means “place of look-out, especially as it was fortified.” In commenting on Genesis 4:17, Old Testament commentator John Willis observed: “However, a ‘city’ is not necessarily a large, impressive metropolis, but may be a small unimposing village of relatively few inhabitants” (1979, p. 155). Again, apply some common sense here. What would it be more likely for the Bible to suggest that Cain and his wife constructed (considering who they were and where they were living)—a thriving, bustling, metropolis, or a Bedouin tent city. To ask is to answer, is it not? To this very day, Bedouin tent cities are quite commonplace in that particular area of the world. And—as everyone will admit—two boy scouts can erect a tent, so it hardly strains credulity to suggest that Cain and his wife would have been able to accomplish such a task as well.

REFERENCES

