

Was There Any Death in the World Before Adam?

A Study of Romans 5:12

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes various people (e.g., pastors, teachers, writers of devotional literature) misinterpret a single verse to try to prove something. Sadly, this has happened more than once with Roman 5:12.

A. Speculation based on Roman 5:12 – Some proposed ideas are very questionable at best; others are absolutely heretical.

- 1. Unsaved children are lost forever** – Some assume that “all sinned” in this verse means that all children are born sinners and so are lost forever if they die not trusting in Christ for salvation and/or without receiving Christian baptism.
- 2. Jesus sinned** – Others have gone so far as to claim that, since “ALL sinned,” then Jesus must have sinned!
- 3. This verse contradicts Genesis** – Some Bible critics have concluded that there’s a contradiction between Genesis 3:6 (Eve ate before Adam, so she was the first to sin.) and Romans 5:12 (Sin came into the world by “man.”).
- 4. The earth is “young” (10,000-12,000 years old).** Others think that nothing (no plants or animals or people) died before Adam sinned. They assume that since the verse says that death came into the world by Adam’s sin, then God did not create carnivorous animals or plants (e.g., the Venus Flytrap, Sundews, Pitcher Plants, and Bladderworts) as we now know them. They somehow survived (for hours, days, weeks, months, years??) before Adam sinned in some other way and then became carnivorous only after Adam sinned – though the Bible gives no hint of this change. They argue that, if there was no death, then there is no possibility of a previous creation – assuming God created the mess (Gen 1:2) before turning it into something good and beautiful – though there’s no Bible evidence that God ever did create anything devastated, deserted, and dark. Thus, many Bible-believers (including many Bible scholars) say the condition of the earth described in Gen 1:2 (as “waste and void” with “darkness upon the face of the deep”) indicates a previous creation that God destroyed.

B. Declaration based on Romans 5:12 – Instead of trying to deal with each one of the above proposed ideas one-by-one, let us examine Romans 5:12 more closely to see what it really teaches. The verse falls into four parts – two of them essentially saying the same thing as the other two – Paul’s way of emphasizing some vital history and doctrine.

I. Human sin’s start (“As by [“through”] one man sin entered into the world”)

A. The person (“one man” – Gr. *anthropos* (masculine gender) – the general word for mankind – not *aner* [“male,” “husband”]) – Paul is clear that sin began with “one man.” His point reflects the truth recorded in Genesis 5:2 that God “created them male and female ... and called their name Adam [“man” or “mankind”].”

Paul is thus giving the divine judicial view of the origin of sin – not the human historical view (that Eve, indeed, was the first human being to sin). Incidentally, this latter fact is found in Sirach 25:24 as follows: “From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die.” First-century Jews rejected the Book of Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus) as Scripture, and it’s never quoted in the New Testament but was included in the Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek).

B. The perversion (“sin” – Gr. *hamartía*, which has the idea of missing the mark or wandering from the path) – Sin, of course, has characterized the entire history of mankind – from Adam and Eve till the present time.

C. The process (“entered” – Gr. *eisērchomai*) – The idea of entering (literally, “to come into”) something or someone implies that what is entering existed previously somewhere outside. So, Paul’s use of this Greek verb indicates that there had been sin in the universe (possibly in the earth itself) before Adam and Eve sinned. We know for sure that the fall of Lucifer (his becoming Satan) must have occurred before he, using a snake, tempted Eve in Genesis 3:1-5.

D. The place (“the world”) What “world” was this? Was it the whole universe, the planet Earth, or the human race? Paul had been talking about salvation and sin in the human race, and that would seem to be the meaning here.

(1) The universe – Clearly, Satan sinned before Adam and Eve sinned. Paul knew this – and, of course, so did God, who guided Paul in writing Romans. So this cannot refer to the whole universe.

(2) The planet – Lucifer’s sin and fall from heaven (Isa 14:12) – prior to Adam’s fall – quite likely affected planet Earth (causing it to become “waste and void” – Gen. 1:2), so “world” here probably does not refer to the planet.

✓**(3) The race** – Paul is simply saying that Adam’s sin affected/ (infected) the whole human race (cf. 3:6,19; 1Co 6:2; Gal 1:4; Php 2:15; 1Ti 1:15; 6:7,17; Heb 1:6; 10:5; Jam 2:5; 2Pt 1:4), not the whole universe or the whole planet.

II. Human death's spread – death entered (“by [“through”]) sin”

A. The consequence (of sin = “death”)

(1) **Physical death** (death of body) – We know that Adam and Eve did not die physically as soon as they sinned. In fact, Adam lived 930 years (Gen 5:4-5 and “begat sons and daughters” – not just Cain and Abel and Seth).

(2) **Spiritual death** (death of soul) – More than just physical death was included in the “death sentence” that God gave, and it’s more than just temporal, spiritual death.

✓(3) **Eternal death** – It is likely that Paul means the eternal death of both body and soul (“death and hell” being “cast into the lake of fire” being called “the second death” in Rev 20:14 – cf. Rev 2:11; 20:6; 21:8).

B. The coming – Although Paul here omits the verb “entered,” it’s not needed for the meaning to be there. Thus, Paul’s wording (“and death through sin”) implies that death (as well as sin) existed before Adam’s sin.

C. The channel (“through sin”) – Death entered with “through” (“in,” “by means of”) sin.

III. Human death's spread (“and so death passed upon all men”)

A. The manner (*houtō* – “so [or “thus,” “in this way”] – cf. Jn 3:16 “God in this manner loved the world” and Rom 1:15; 4:18; 5:15,18,19,21; 6:4; 9:20) – Death came by way of sin.

B. The movement – (“death passed upon [or “came into”] all humans”)

1. **The condition** (death). It’s interesting that when someone dies, people often refer to it as “passing.” Death truly is a passing from one phase of life to another; in Eden, it itself passed – and it continues to be passed – along with sin.

2. **The action** – The Greek here (*diérchomai eis*) is somewhat awkward in English (death “came into”). The idea may be that – as science tells us and experience confirms – seeds of our death begin to germinate at birth.

3. **The victims** (“all humans” – again Gr. *anthropos* [“mankind”], not *aner* [“male, husband”]) – All humans in all of history were there in the Garden of Eden in the person of Adam. He officially represented us (the human race) as our federal head.

a. Comparable to those who represent their constituents in our constitutional republic (the USA)

b. Comparable (as Paul states in this chapter) to Christ (who died in the place of believers as our spiritual Head)

IV. Human sin's start (“all have sinned” – better rendered “all sinned”)

(A) **In the sinners’ acts** – Paul would have used the Greek aorist tense (English, “have sinned”) if he had been referring to separate individual acts of human beings.

✓(B) **In Adam’s act** (“sinned” – All three Greek verbs in this verse are in the aorist tense (not the perfect tense) – so Paul is referring to a distinct event in the past (All humans sinned in Adam.), not to ongoing sin in humans’ lives.

1. God regarded and reckoned Adam as the federal head (not just the progenitor) of the human race.

2. What Adam did was – in essence – an official act in which **all humans** judicially participated.

3. Romans 5 ends with what Jesus (**our** federal Head) did for believers (providing righteousness and life).

CONCLUSIONS

A. Adam had received the commandment that both he and Eve broke, and Adam was head of the race and of Eve.

B. All humans since Adam are born with a debt of sin to pay – and the penalty of death if left unpaid.

C. What Christ gained for us at Calvary (righteousness and life) is far more than what Adam cost us (sin and death).

D. As God views the human race, all “in Christ” are righteous, but all “in Adam” (unsaved humanity) are sinners.

E. Romans 5:12 in NO WAY supports the idea of recent creationists that there was no creature death before Adam’s sin. The passage is dealing only with the death of human beings since Adam, not that of any other creatures before Adam. In fact, Paul’s use of the verb “enter” implies sin and death existed in creation before entering the human race as recorded in Genesis 3 (the same catastrophic truth being also seen from Gen 1:2).