

Early History

- **God's picture language and scientists' ideas**

From about the end of Genesis 4 it is possible to see contacts with the story of our world as historians study it, and to date some of what is happening. At Genesis 4:1 we are apparently at about 13,000 BC.

According to Genesis 1:1–2:3 God created the world including the human race. The 'days' of Genesis 1 are part of the picture-language of the story and are not to be used to give a date to creation. Scientists say that the universe is perhaps about 13-14 billion years old. They also have their ideas about the date of planet earth, and the date of the first man-like creatures, and the date of modern man about 100,000–75,000 years ago, but no dates are given in the Bible.

- **Spreading out**

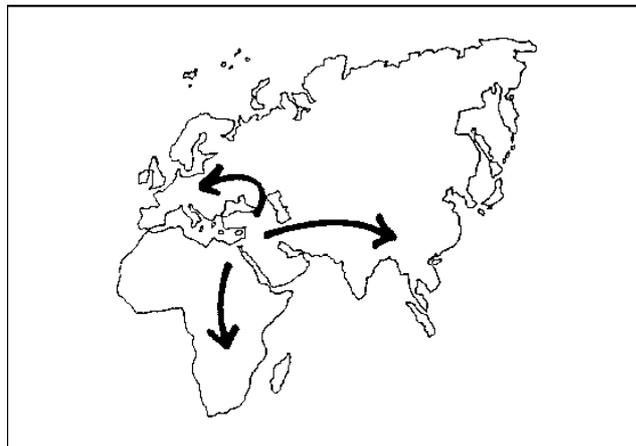
It seems from the various human remains that have been found, that the modern human race originated in Africa or maybe in the 'fertile crescent' about 100,000–75,000 BC, and then spread out through Africa, Europe and Asia (see Map 1 below).

At about 20,000 BC human beings found their way into the American continent and into Australia (see Map 2 on the next page).

- **Ethnic groups**

There was only one human race. The whole of humanity is '*of one blood*'. ¹ Long before 20,000 BC the 'sub-races' already existed. There were already Africans, Indo-Europeans and Orientals, before 20,000 BC. Those who travelled into America and Australia were of different ethnic groups; the division into African, Indo-European and Oriental peoples had already taken place.

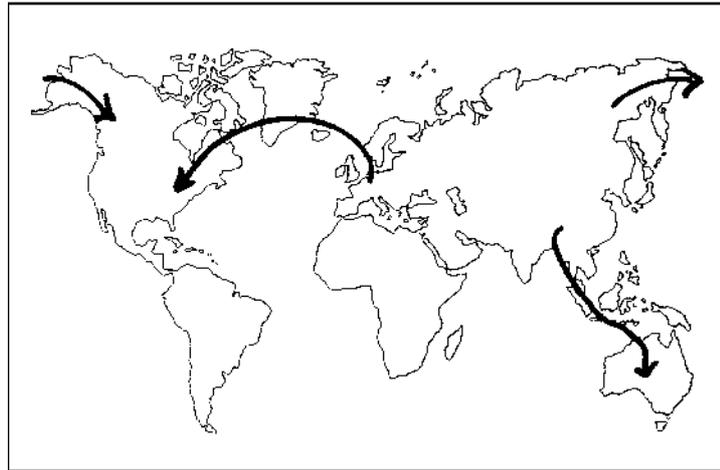
¹ Acts 17:26



Map 1: The Spread of the Human Race

- **The first man's sin told in parabolic form**

Genesis 2:4–3:24 tells in parabolic form the story of the sin of the first man. What language he spoke and what was his original name is lost in the unimaginably distant past. Our writer, using the Hebrew of about 1000 BC calls him 'the man'.



Map 2: Humans Spread into America and Australia

• **History condensed**

'The man' of Genesis 4:1 is not strictly 'the man' of Genesis 1–3. This is quite clear as the story develops. Cain, Abel, and Seth are not the immediate children of the first man ever. The narrator uses the phrase 'the man' to condense a sketch covering tens of thousands of years. Because of the compressed style of picture-like history, Genesis 4:1 in effect means '*Someone in the line of the man and his wife gave birth to a son...*'.

The Mesopotamian world

We are now moving into the Mesopotamian world, and into its earliest history of about 13,000–10,000 BC. It would not be right to think that there are only three people left on earth at the time of Genesis 4:1, Adam, Eve and Cain. Cain says that, as he wanders around the earth, whoever finds him will kill him. ¹ Genesis 4:14–15 lets us know that there were plenty of other human beings around. God performs a sign for Cain so that no one will kill him. ² It is not that 'Adam and Eve' now need a sign to know who their son is! In Genesis 4:17 Cain builds a town. There were plenty of people around, some of whom would live in Cain's town.

¹ 4:1

² 4:14-15

• **Leaping over the years**

Another important fact is that Genesis 4:17–26 fits with what we know of neolithic ('new stone-age') man of about 10,000 BC. 'Modern' man – 'homo sapiens sapiens' as scientists call him – goes back at least as far as 50,000 BC and maybe much earlier. If the event of Genesis 1:26–27 is to be dated earlier than 50,000 BC and if Genesis 4:17–26 is at about 10,000 BC then we are leaping over tens of thousands of years in a few verses of Genesis.

• **Adam, humankind and 'Mr Human Race'**

The Hebrew word 'adam (in which ' represents the Hebrew letter 'aleph) occurs 34 times in Genesis 1–5. It means 'man' or 'humankind'. It stands both for a section of the history of the human race and for different individuals. Twenty-two times ¹ ha'adam ('the man') is used referring either to 'humanity' ¹ or to an unnamed individual. ²

¹ 1:27

² e.g. 2:7

The word (without 'the') in 1:26 and 2:7 means 'humanity' or 'a man'. Three times the word is preceded by the Hebrew *lamed*

(‘to’, ‘for’) and on such occasions the consonantal text cannot distinguish between ‘the man’ and ‘Adam’. But 2:20 probably means ‘for a man’; 3:17 could mean ‘to Adam’; and 3:21 could mean ‘for Adam’.²

Actually the first place in the Bible where ‘adam seems to be a name, ‘Adam’, is Genesis 4:25. Then the word appears apparently as a name in Genesis 5:3, 4, 5. Before that one could often almost translate ‘adam by ‘Mr Human Race’ or ‘Mr Humankind’.

What all this means is that there is a strong suggestion in the text itself that ‘Mr Human Race’ refers to different people at different times. Scarcely ever is ‘adam a name. When it is a name it has the ‘feel’ of ‘Mr Human Race’. **There is an obvious leap of time between Genesis 1–3 and Genesis 4:1.** So ‘Mr Human Race’ is not always the same person. In Genesis 5:1 the word occurs twice. It is generally first translated ‘Adam’ and then translated ‘man’ – but it is the same word.

Compressed history and ‘ordinary history’

Genesis 1–4 is highly compressed and leaps over thousands of years. This is why Genesis 4:14–15 can talk as if there were thousands of people around, and Cain can be the builder of a town. [Ⓐ] Cain, Abel and Seth were sons of ‘the man’ but they were not one generation after ‘the man’ of Genesis 1–3. The people of the Americas and of Australia in 20,000 BC were descendants of the first man, the ‘man’ of Genesis 1:26 but they were not the descendants of ‘the man’ of about 13,000 BC who was Cain’s father.

[Ⓐ] 4:17

From about Genesis 4:17 onwards we have reached the time when we can compare what we read with the history of the human race known from ‘ordinary’ historical study. In Genesis 1–3 it is difficult to correlate those events with other sources of history, but from Genesis 4 onwards our story can be studied alongside the earliest history of mankind that we know from other sources.

Genealogies

The genealogies of Genesis 5 and 10 may well have gaps in them, but it is not possible to push the date of Genesis 4 back to 100,000 BC or even 30,000 BC. The first period in the Bible which can be given a rough date with tolerable certainty is the time of Abraham (about 2000 BC). Terah [Ⓐ] must be dated at about 2135–1925 BC. Working backwards, the period covered by Genesis 10:1– 11:26 must stretch from about 5000–2135 BC (as I shall argue). The time of the flood [Ⓑ] seems to be about 5600–5000 BC. Genesis 4:1–5:32 must cover a lengthy period, possibly from 13,000–5600 BC roughly. The date of Genesis 4:1 must be somewhere around 13,000 BC. Genesis 1–3 covers all the history of the universe before that time.

[Ⓐ] 11:27-32

[Ⓑ] 6:9-9:28

The story narrows

The Bible has its setting in real events, but by the time we have got to Genesis 4:1 the story has narrowed down. First it was the heavens and earth [Ⓐ], then it was just the earth. [Ⓑ] Then it was the human race in the garden of Eden. [Ⓒ] At 4:1 it narrows even more. We are now in the Mesopotamian world, and we are looking at two brothers that come from ‘the man’

[Ⓐ] 1:1

[Ⓑ] 1:2-2:3

[Ⓒ] 2:4-3:24

and we are looking at two brothers that come from ‘the man’ and from ‘She who gives life’.

Footnotes

1 Genesis 1:27; 2:7 (twice); 2:8, 15, 16, 18, 19 (twice), 20, 21, 22 (twice), 23, 25; 3:8, 9, 12, 20, 22, 24; 4:1.

2 Perhaps the vowel-pointing should be not *le’adam* but *la’adam*. The difference between ‘Adam’ and ‘the man’ depends at this point not on the consonantal text but upon the vowel-pointing – which was not part of the original text but was added much later.



	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</i> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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