

Review: When Did Sin Begin?

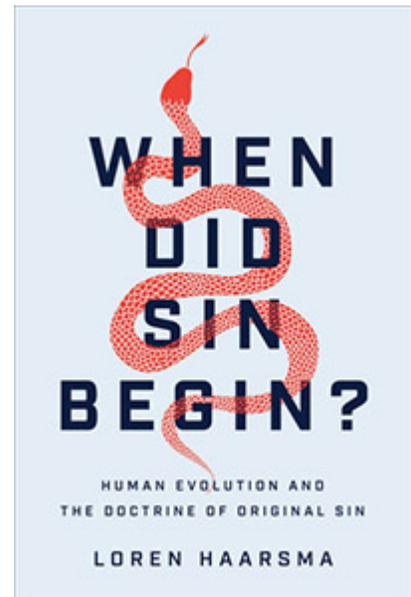
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When Did Sin Begin: Human Evolution and the Doctrine of Original Sin

By Loren Haarsma (Baker Academic)

Is evolution true, and if so, what does that mean for Adam and Eve and sin?

Loren Haarsma, associate professor of physics at Calvin University, does not question the validity of evolution. He does wonder, however, about traditional Western readings of Scripture such as Augustine’s position on the creation and fall story. He considers alternatives, focusing on four scenarios for how the orthodox biblical understanding of sin and its origin might square—or “harmonize”—with evolution.



Concerned readers ought to know upfront: Haarsma holds to the orthodox Western view of “the unity of Scripture;” Scripture’s inspiration by God; God as Creator; sin as rebellion against God, the consequence of which is separation from God; and God’s atonement for sin through Jesus Christ.

While seeking harmony between Scripture and evolutionary science, Haarsma is clear: “science and theology are [not] equally authoritative.” “Science doesn’t decide how we interpret Scripture. Theology decides,” he

asserts. The Christian, then, can learn from science without conceding core doctrines of the faith. To this end, he includes a brief historical survey of how new scientific knowledge has shaped our reading of Scripture without changing doctrine.

Haarsma puts four scenarios to the test, posing challenges to each based on the orthodox Western reading of Scripture. In the end, Haarsma does not put both feet down on any one scenario, but he does put both feet down on Jesus Christ as “God’s ultimate answer” to sin.

One who holds to a literal seven-day creation, and Adam and Eve as the first humans and the first to sin, might wonder: “Why read the book, then, if he ends up noncommittal except on what we all agree on already? Why confuse myself with scenarios I discount in advance on the grounds I don’t believe in evolution?”

A simple answer is increasing numbers of people you may care about do not take a literal seven-day creation account at face value and have serious questions about God, sin and salvation. Taking them seriously warrants some study of their questions.

*Eric Black, executive director/publisher/editor
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