

Romans 5:12-21 (ESV)

Death Enters the World

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

13 for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.

14 Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

16 And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

17 For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

18 Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

20 Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

21 so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In this passage the Apostle Paul is instructing the church in Rome regarding the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Adam is mentioned twice by name and six times by the phrase "one man". The most debated verse here is verse 12. Global-extent YECs use this as evidence that there was no death in the world, including animal death, before Adam sinned. Others maintain that this passage does not speak to animal death but only mentions the human death that was passed down to all generations. As we dive into the passage we need to pay attention to any possible references to Genesis 3.

Paul starts the passage with a therefore (Gr. *dia*) which should always prompt the question "What's it there for?" The word always looks back, and in this case, Paul was discussing our state of being helpless to save ourselves and that at the right time, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us to save us. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. The first thing to note is that what Adam did in the Garden of Eden was indeed sin. There is no getting around that. Sin came into the world through one man (Adam, v. 14). Through sin (Gr. *hamartia*) came death (Gr. *thanatos*). I believe Paul is directly referring to Genesis 2:17 and 3:19 where we found the warning and punishment for sin, namely death. The death referred to in Genesis is both spiritual and physical. Spiritual in that Adam would be fallen from his perfect relationship with his Creator, thus spiritually dead and in need of a savior. Physical in that his body would return to the dust from which it was made. Paul echoes this punishment for sin in Romans 6:23 where he says that "the wages of sin is death (*thanatos*)".

In reading that death entered the world through sin, many YECs have taken this to mean that there was no death, period, before Adam's sin. This might be a reasonable interpretation if the verse would not go on to say that death spread to all men. Paul seemingly goes out of his way to say that death affected the human race (*anthropos*). *Anthropos* is never used to mean anything

other than man. In fact, Jesus says that *anthropos* is distinct from and more important than the animals (Matt. 12:12). It is clear that *anthropos* cannot include animals, and the fact that Paul specifically mentions death spreading to all men, may mean that he wished to exclude animal death from the conversation. Perhaps this was because animal death is either unimportant to the story or because it had been in the world for a long time before human death. I believe it is dangerous to read into the Bible what it does not say. Specifically where it might cause contradictions with other portions of Scripture or cause the adoption of heretical doctrine. If that is not clear here, it is so in the parallel passage in 1Cor. 15:21-22. There, Paul says that in Adam all die, and in Christ all are made alive. If that includes animal death, then Paul is saying that Christ died so that animals may have eternal life. This notion is not supported in Scripture. I believe the idea of lumping animal death in with these passages is not only careless exegesis at best, it is approaching the fine line of heresy.

So what is Paul saying here? He says that death spread to all men because all sinned. Because of Adam's sin, death entered the world. This death spread to all (*pas*) men because all (*pas*) sinned. The word "sinned" here (*hamartia*) is in the aorist tense which is the closest thing Greek has to the English past tense. Many people, including me, believe that Paul's use of the aorist here implies that all people sinned when Adam sinned. Adam's sin, and its punishment were imputed, or charged, to all future generations. Though verse 13 says sin is not imputed where there is no Law, it goes on to say that death reigned in the time between Adam and Moses when the Law was given. This means that if those people were not charged with sin, but still suffered the consequences of sin, they must have been charged with Adam's sin. Even after the giving of the Law, which was meant to show us our sin and our inability to live up to God's standards, we are still charged with Adam's sin. While this may not seem fair, it is a fact we cannot deny. Unless someone saves us from this sin, we will suffer death in its fullest capacity. While everyone will suffer physical death because of Adam, the unsaved will suffer the second death which is called the lake of fire, or hell in Rev. 20:14; 21:8. Because of Adam's sin, we are all condemned sinners (Rom. 5:18).

Adam was a type of the One who was to come (v. 14). Just as through Adam's disobedience we are all called sinners, through Jesus' death on the cross we can all be called righteous (v. 19; Phil 2:8). This means that Jesus Christ is the salvation we need to get this imputed sin off of our records. The Bible clearly says that we are all sinners (Rom. 3:23). David even affirms that initially this is of no fault of our own, for he says "in iniquity I was brought forth" (Ps. 51:5). David recognized he was a sinner from his birth. Like him, we need a savior. If we say we are not a sinner, we make ourselves out to be liars (1John 1:8). Jesus did not die on the cross to save animals from condemnation, he came to save sinners (1Tim. 1:15).

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