ABSTRACT
PRIMEVAL HISTORY ACCORDING TO PAUL: “IN ADAM” AND “IN CHRIST” IN ROMANS

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Paul’s comparison of Adam and Christ in Rom 5:12–21 is among the most influential doctrines in the Bible and Christian theology. Often it has been used to summarize God’s purposes in creation and redemption, from humanity’s “fall” in Adam to its restoration in Christ. In the past several decades, however, it has increasingly been seen as provisional and functional because the Jewish writings used to support it have now been dated after the apostle’s lifetime. This study retrieves the traditional position, but does so by appeal to different corpora of Jewish texts, those that are prior or contemporary to Paul.

After considering the most prominent interpretations of Rom 5 over the past century, and the increasing questions surrounding it, I argue that it is hard to explain Paul’s interest in the comparison and the rhetoric of Romans without the presence of underlying Adamic traditions. Turning to Greco-Roman Jewish thought about primeval history, I organize the traditions into a fivefold taxonomy: Adam as (1) the head of humanity, a (2) paradigmatic pattern and (3) moral warning, as well as a (4) bearer of disaster and (5) glorious figure. Of these, the first, fourth, and fifth are relevant for Rom 5. To combine these three, I propose a construct called “participatory domains” wherein a single figure, a heavenly or earthly patron, rules over a people and their destinies are intertwined. I then apply this construct to Romans, particularly the Adam-Christ typology, to demonstrate that it solves longstanding riddles within the text and provides a cohesive account of the letter as a whole. Insofar as the proposal is satisfactory, it holds a number of consequences for Christian theology and Pauline studies.