

Exchange regarding evidence for evolution of humans

The following is a transcript of the exchange I had, writing as Sicut Erat in Principio (“Sicut” below), with R. Gary Shapiro (“R. Gary” below) on LDS doctrine about Adam and evolution between June 22, 2014 and June 27, 2014.

Adam, the first of all human beings [original post by R. Gary]

Science insists that the first humans appeared in an already mortal world some 200,000 years ago. Conversely, the Church teaches that the first humans were Adam and Eve, who brought mortality to a previously non-mortal world about 6,000 years ago. There is no harmony between these views.

A current missionary pamphlet about [The Plan of Salvation](#) teaches that Adam and Eve were “the first humans.” Indeed, according to LDS scripture, Adam was “the first man of all men.” (Moses 1:34.)

This scriptural view of man’s origin was taught again in the April 2014 General Conference. Carlos H. Amado, of the First Quorum of the Seventy, declared: “[The Redeemer’s] sacrifice blessed everyone, from Adam, the first, to the last of all human beings.” (Ensign, May 2014.)

June 24, 2014. An anonymous comment this afternoon (see below) prompted the following addendum. It is from the 2013 edition of LDS Scripture.

BIBLE CHRONOLOGY

Bible chronology deals with fixing the exact dates of the various events recorded. For the earliest parts of Old Testament history we rely entirely on the scripture itself; but the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint or Greek translation, and the Samaritan Pentateuch do not agree together, so that many dates cannot be fixed with certainty. From the time of David onwards we get much assistance from secular history, such as inscriptions on monuments and other state records. Much work has still to be done in this direction. The dates found at the top of many printed English Bibles are due to Archbishop Ussher (1581–1656). Some of them have been shown to be incorrect.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT		
B.C.	SEQUENCE OF EVENTS IN THE DAYS OF THE EARLY PATRIARCHS	
4000	Fall of Adam. Ministry of Enoch. Ministry of Noah; the Flood.	(Those desiring calculated dates on these events may wish to consult published chronologies.)

Figure 1: Bible chronology begins at 4000 B.C.

[Sicut]

1. The phrase is found tucked away in a glossary and is clearly not the emphasis of the pamphlet. The body of the pamphlet itself uses this verbiage: “Adam

and Eve were the first of God's children to come to earth". This verbiage is consistent with repeated official proclamations on the subject proclaiming that "Adam is the primal parent of our race". The pamphlet's glossary, and Elder Amado's comments, somewhat overstep official doctrine on the subject.

2. The evidence for man's shared *biological* heritage with primates is overwhelming. For instance, we see evidence of our biological heritage in the form of atavisms and vestigial organs. How can you explain how these curious features of our anatomy map to our evolutionary lineage and not across divergent lineages (i.e., why do we not share vestigial organs or atavisms with lineages that developed after evolutionary divergence, say with features unique to birds or squid.). Stated another way, we share (often broken) genes with primates but we do not share genes or structures with lineages that diverged after we shared a common ancestor (see [here for a more developed argument](#)). Some examples:

- [goose bumps](#) are associated with responses that only make sense if our ancestors were once covered with hair
- [ear wiggling muscles](#): Why are we able to wiggle our ears? (besides [entertaining young children in conference](#))
- remnants of a third eyelid, including non-functional muscles (the plica semilunaris is a remnant of a [nictitating membrane](#))
- [the palmar grasp reflex](#)
- [true tails](#)
- the point in many people's ear: [Darwin's tubercle](#)

Why did God give *some* people a point in their ear at exactly the same location as would map to a primate's ear? If we do not share biological ancestry, we would expect instances of extra tissue to be randomly located around the ear. Instead, we observe that ~10% of the human population has extra thickening at the same location as would be found in other mammalian ears. How to explain this, except by invoking common ancestry?

If you dig through the molecular genetic evidence, the case for common biological ancestry is equally strong. Here are a couple of my favorites:

- Great apes have 48 chromosomes and we have 46. Chromosome two was formed by a fusion of two chromosomes. However, sequence around the fusion event still bears resemblance to the *end* of the chromosome, [pointing strongly to an evolutionary heritage](#).
 - Loss of the *functional* gene to synthesize vitamin C tracks evolutionary lineage (we have the gene, but it is broken) [see here](#).
3. I am familiar with the evolutionary views of many professors at BYU in the sciences. These are individuals intimately familiar with both the scriptural/prophetic canon *and* the biological evidence. Without exception, every one of them of which I am aware accepts as fact that we share a common *biological* lineage with primates (and while still harmonizing this with official statements). In fact, I have never met a latter-day-saint with intimate knowledge of modern

biology who does not accept as fact our common biological lineage with primates, and this is a topic I have discussed with many LDS. I personally do not think such an individual exists (perhaps I can be proven wrong?).

4. The idea that mankind was the direct offspring of God the Father (I'm assuming that is what you believe) directly contradicts scripture (Mosiah 26:23). How can you countenance such a view and still profess belief in the Book of Mormon? I'm aware of attempts to explain this verse away as divine investiture of authority, but it seems a blatant contradiction of this very plain scripture coupling Jesus Christ's redemptive power to the fact that he created mankind (through evolutionary means, I would footnote).

While I cannot yet explain exactly *how*, there are very good arguments for believing that Adam was the primal parent of our race, *and* that he shared a common ancestor with primates.

[R. Gary]

Now please tell me this: Where and when has the Church published an apostolic statement endorsing the idea that organic evolution explains the origin of man?

Prominence is unimportant. If the author is clearly identified, if he is a latter-day apostle, and if the statement appears in official LDS media, that will suffice.

[Sicut]

"Where and when has the church published an apostolic statement...": nowhere that I can find.

Now, if you will kindly address the questions I posed to you in my comment.

Many of us are interested in truth as defined in scripture ("knowledge of things as they are, and as they were...") and not just that subset of truth found in official Church material. Or can all truth not be circumscribed into one great whole?

[R. Gary]

Sicut: The official position of the Church regarding human evolution was announced in a formal 1909 statement by the First Presidency. Over the years, it has generated much discussion among Church members. However, there has been no discussion in official LDS media among those authorized to interpret what the Church has officially said, they being members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Their comments in official LDS media about the origin of man have been very consistent and one-sided. Neither the missionary pamphlet nor Elder Amado are overstepping what the Church has authoritatively taught for 115 years.

Yes. The physical evidence for man's shared biological heritage with primates appears overwhelming. But physical evidence alone does not establish knowledge of things as they are or as they were. Reality includes a great deal which the physical senses cannot access. That is why we have prophets and apostles who speak by the Spirit and help us see into eternity.

This is important because the Spirit “*speaketh the truth and lieth not*. Wherefore, it *speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be.*” (Jacob 4:13; italics added.)

When I’m confronted by physical evidence that contradicts what apostles and prophets teach, I choose to rely on the repeated confirmations I’ve received that they speak for God and that they speak the truth.