

§ 9. Excursus on Creation of Life and Biological Diversity

Lecture 5

The Day-Age Interpretation

We've been studying different interpretations of Genesis chapter 1. We've looked at the literal interpretation and then at the gap interpretation then thirdly at the day-gap interpretation. Today we want to turn to the day-age interpretation. The day-age interpretation has been held by a number of church fathers and commentators down through history. It holds that the days of Genesis 1 are not meant to be taken as 24-hour periods of time. Rather, they represent long periods of time of unspecified duration. On this view, God created the world over six ages, so to speak. You might interpret Genesis 1 as describing six consecutive ages of creation. Thus, the text is not meant to teach a literal six-day creation.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Who were some of the church fathers who would have accepted this?

Dr. Craig: I think Augustine held to something like this. Is that right – you would know, I think? [*someone off mic answers*]. I will have to check on names.

Student: Are they always talking about this physical realm or are they also talking about day-ages of the spiritual realm?

Dr. Craig: This is supposed to be about the creation account in Genesis 1 – so about this physical realm, not prior ages in the spiritual realm.

Student: Don't some of them also hold to that as well?

Dr. Craig: If they do, I'm not aware of it.

Student: Could you differentiate between the day-age theory and the day-gap theory a little more clearly?

Dr. Craig: Yes. The day-gap theory was that these are 24-hour periods of time – literal days – but they are not consecutive. They are separated by long periods of time. On this view, the days are consecutive but they're not 24 hours. They are great long ages that follow one after another. So this would be consistent with a very old age of the Earth and consistent with the evolution of life over millions of years depending on how long you want to make the days last.

Student: How old is this theory in relation to the others?

Dr. Craig: As I say, my information is that it's been one that's been held by some of the church fathers and then down through history by various commentators. But I am at a

loss to name specifically at this point who they might have been. I didn't anticipate that question.

Student: I've got a quote here from Augustine to answer the question. From the *City of God* he wrote (and this is in, I guess, about 410 he wrote it):

“As for these days, it is difficult, perhaps impossible to think, let alone explain in words, what they mean.” In *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* he added, “But at least we know that it [the Genesis creation day] is different from the ordinary day with which we are familiar.”

In the same book he added this comment: “Seven days by our reckoning after the model of the days of creation, make up a week. By the passage of such weeks time rolls on, and in these weeks one day is constituted by the course of the sun from its rising to its setting; but we must bear in mind that these days indeed recall the days of creation, but without in any way being really similar to them.”

Augustine understood the evenings and mornings of the Genesis creation days in a figurative sense. He concluded that the evening of each creation day referred to the occasion when the angels gazed down on the created things after they contemplated the Creator and that the morning referred to the occasion when they rose up with their knowledge of the created things to praise the Creator.

In *Confessions*, Augustine noted that for the seventh day Genesis makes no mention of an evening and a morning. He deduced from this omission that God sanctified the seventh day, making it an epoch extending onward into eternity.¹

It does list here several others – you asked about other scholars. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus – just for a few.

Dr. Craig: They are listed among proponents of the day-age view?

Student: Yes.

Dr. Craig: OK. Very interesting. So Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and perhaps Augustine. Basil? OK, Basil of Caesarea.

Student: He's not an old-timer but Gleason Archer, I think in more contemporary times.

Dr. Craig: Right! He wouldn't be a church father. *[laughter]* He was my colleague at Trinity when I taught there.

¹ The student is reading from the document “A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy” by Hugh Ross, pages 13 and 14. That document provides citations for the Augustine writings it quotes. A copy of this document can be found at: <https://alta3b.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/matter-of-days.pdf> (accessed February 13, 2019).

Student: Going back to the previous day-gap. I re-read *Seven Days To Change the World* by John Lennox. Great book. He pointed out in connection with this that the first five days don't have the definite article *ho* for saying "the day" for the first five but only the last two. So he makes the point that the grammar would allow for extended days, whether you would take this view or not. Anyway, that was his point.

Dr. Craig: So are you saying that you think Lennox is a proponent of the day-gap view rather than the day-age view?

Student: Yes. He is a day-gap as far as I understood.

Dr. Craig: You'll find these views represented across the spectrum among contemporary evangelicals. Probably the most famous day-age advocate today would be Hugh Ross with *Reasons to Believe*. This is their theory.

END DISCUSSION

What might we say by way of critique? I think that the day-age interpretation is certainly a possibility. We do have, as I pointed out earlier, suggestions in the text that the days are not necessarily intended to be literal 24-hour periods of time. Recall what I said about the creation of the vegetation and the fruit trees on the third day. We're not to imagine this as being like time-lapse photography where the vegetation sprouts out of the ground and bears seed and fruit in a mere 24 hours. So I think that there are indications in the text that these are not necessarily 24-hour periods of time. But the idea that the text intends us to take the days as six consecutive ages, especially of equal duration, is something that is being read into the text rather than out of the text. I don't think there is much in the text that suggests that we have here six consecutive ages rather than a figurative or a metaphorical use of the language of "days."

In fact, insofar as those who adopt the day-age interpretation are motivated by modern science to embrace it, it really doesn't fit that well with what modern science says in many respects. For example, the evidence does not support the view that certain forms of life didn't appear on the scene until the previous age was over. For example, according to the scientific evidence, terrestrial life appeared long before birds appeared on the scene. But in the Genesis text it has birds created during the age prior to the creation of the land animals. Now some interpreters have tried to escape this problem by maintaining that the days or ages were not consecutive but were actually overlapping so that midway through one age a succeeding age began. But, again, such a hypothesis is clearly a contrivance aimed solely at reconciling the text with modern scientific evidence. I think it would be hopeless to try to find anything in the text that suggests such an interpretation of overlapping ages. Indeed, what the text says about morning and evening being the end of each age would seem to contradict the idea of overlapping ages because the dawning of a new age is the morning of the next day, and each age ends with the evening and then the

dawning of the succeeding age. So that would be incompatible with seeing these ages as overlapping.

So the day-age view, I think, is certainly a possibility, but it's one that I think finds little support in the text apart from the fact that the days are not necessarily meant to be taken literally.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I think you glossed over the exposition in support section and immediately went to critique for the day-age interpretation. Is that right?

Dr. Craig: I did not. I just didn't have very much to say about this position! *[laughter]*. It just seemed very straightforward to me to say that the days aren't literal; they're ages of time that happened one after another. It's not complicated.

Student: I'm just going to make a general comment on all of these as we're reviewing them. Almost any of these you could find biblical support and scientific support for almost any of these scenarios on origin, so we have to consider that. I think also we have to consider that the science changes. A lot of these have been adapted to science, but science has moved in a lot of areas and changed. If you take the origin of the universe sixty years ago, the universe was supposed to be static, infinite, and unbounded. Now we know it has an origin, it has expanded, and it has a bound. This is 180 degrees in sixty years.

Dr. Craig: Fortunately, what we're doing here, although I did mention the motivation that some people might have in modern science, is assessing these views simply with respect to the biblical evidence rather than with respect to modern science. I just don't see anything in the text apart from the fact that the days don't seem to be 24-hour periods of time to support the day-age interpretation – that we have here ages of long periods of time equal in duration, especially the idea that they're non-consecutive but overlapping. It seems to me that all of this is being read into the text and therefore the biblical support for it is slim. Now, that doesn't rule it out. These aren't knockdown arguments. I'm just giving some of the pros and cons for each one.

Student: One of the things I would say that we cannot say it has to be an age rather than a day is God can create things in maturity. You talked about that this would be a fast thing happening in one day. But God creates things in maturity. Certainly we know he didn't create Adam and Eve as babies; he created them mature. He created the mature as well as the seed at the same time – all created at one time.

Dr. Craig: He certainly could. As you say, the creation of Adam and Eve, or the sun, the moon, and the stars doesn't seem to be the result of a long process. But the third day to me is just so striking that God doesn't say, *Let there be fruit trees bearing fruit after their*

kind; let there be vegetation bearing seed after their kind. Rather, what he declares is, *Let the earth bring forth vegetation bearing seed after its kind and fruit trees bearing fruit after its kind.* And it was so. The *earth* brought forth these things. There you do not seem to have a sort of instantaneous creation of the biosphere on the Earth but rather a gradual generation of the vegetation from the ground.

Student: Do you see there is any difference if it was a slow growth of all the rest of the plants as when it says that God planted a garden – that that could be different – that he actually planted that possibly?

Dr. Craig: Yeah, I do agree with you that that language in Genesis 2 about God planted a garden in Eden and there were in it things like The Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That could be different. There you don't have this language of the earth bringing forth these things. So, yeah, I think that that difference is interesting and would support what I'm saying about day 3 being not a 24-hour period of time but a process.

Student: I was going to say in terms of support, I know Hugh Ross would say that he uses three arguments to say that the days are long periods of time which are similar arguments that you've already used once before to say that they're more metaphorical. And that is day 6 is long because of Genesis 2 giving too much information to happen in one day.

Dr. Craig: For the class's sake, let's just review that. That would be like bringing all the animals to Adam to name, and he feels lonely without a companion, and so forth.

Student: Hugh's position would be everything in Genesis 2 happened on day 6. Then day 7 not having an "evening and morning" phrase and being a continuous day, he would agree that we're in the seventh day, so it must be a long day. Then just the meaning of the word *yom* as a possibility for a long period of time. So those would be the three arguments he would use.

Dr. Craig: OK, that's helpful. Thank you. Especially that third point. There you notice that it's appealing to a different meaning of the word. That I'm very skeptical about – that the word means age or a long period of time as opposed to being a metaphor for a long period of time or an indefinite period or something of that sort.

Student: I just wanted to share Genesis 1:11. It says, *and God said "Let the earth bring forth grass and herb yielding seed and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind whose seed was in itself upon the earth."* And it was so.

Dr. Craig: Yes. This is the account on the third day that we referred to about letting the earth bring forth these things.

Student: Before I was saved, I was kind of one of those people that believed in evolution. Praying and asking God, "Did you create it all?" he brought me to this verse and revealed

to me that seeds don't evolve. He actually put the seed within the fruit. He created the tree with the fruit and the seed in it already.

Dr. Craig: Is that what you are suggesting? That's not what I read in the text. It says, *Let the earth bring forth the vegetation, plants yielding their seed, and fruit trees bearing their fruit.* It sounds like a very natural process to me.

Student: Where it says, "whose seed is in itself."

Dr. Craig: Your translation is a little bit different than mine. Bearing fruit in which is their seed – talking about the trees – each according to its kind. I take it that that would mean things like peaches that have a stone in them. Fruit trees.

Student: You said peaches that have a stone?

Dr. Craig: Yeah, that's what the pit of the peach is called. Not meaning a piece of rock. Right? Isn't that right?

Student: But the pit would be the seed right?

Dr. Craig: Yes.

Student: Maybe I'm off or something, but it seems like you were saying that it was taking a while for it to get there.

Dr. Craig: Yes.

Student: God is actually saying that he created that peach tree with a peach on it.

Dr. Craig: It doesn't say that though. Read what it says again. It says, *Let the earth bring forth vegetation bearing seeds according to their kind with fruit with the seeds in them according to their kinds.* And then it says, *And it was so.* The earth brought forth these things. So it isn't as though there's the miraculous appearance suddenly – full-blown mature fruit trees with peaches hanging on them and ripe fruit. The earth brought forth these little things and they grew and flowered and produced fruit. So it seems to me that that's just one indication that we're dealing here with something that's not a 24-hour time period.

Student: Why would you . . . because here it's actually saying that it's "yielding." Yielding means that it's already bearing.

Dr. Craig: Yes, but it had to first grow up and then produce seed and trees.

Student: That would be from our human thinking, but that is not how the Lord is saying that he did it.

Dr. Craig: Except that it doesn't say that. If it said, *Let there be fruit trees with fruit on them and let there be plants with seeds in them,* that's what I would say it teaches. But it

doesn't say that. It says that the earth brought forth these things; that they grew up out of the ground.

Student: A lot of translations don't make day 3 sound very good. There's actually two Hebrew verbs there that's used. The New American Standard says, *Let the earth sprout sprouts*. The noun and the verb are the same. It means new growth. And then verse 12 says, *And the earth produced*, which is the same word on day 6 – that the earth produces land animals as well. So it's, *Let the earth sprout plants*. That word “yielding” is actually the Hebrew word *dasha* – so it's causing or making seeds. So it's, *Let the earth sprout plants that make seeds* is what it's saying. Not let there be trees with the seeds in them. It's, *Let the earth sprout*. And then it says, *and the earth produced*.

Dr. Craig: OK, good. Thank you.

Student: When we started this discussion about this Genesis 1, and I'm reading it and it says day one and then day two. Right off the bat I'm thinking 24 hours. I think that goes all the way back to Adam's days. A whole day is 24 hours. I don't think that ever changed. What I want to know is: does the Bible give us any indication that God would mean that a day might be a little bit more than 24 hours – at least in this first couple of verses here.

Dr. Craig: There are two issues going on here that shouldn't be conflated. You'll remember I spoke to this earlier when we talked about the literalistic view. One would be to say that the word “day” can mean age. That was the point that was being made earlier here. Does it really mean age? I'm skeptical that that's the case. Here it says there was evening, there was morning. This is clearly talking about ordinary 24-hour days, not ages. But the other issue is: Can a 24-hour day be used as a metaphor for something else? And that is a totally different question – whether or not a 24-hour day can be used figuratively. You may remember from the class before I used the example of the English word “arm” which can mean either an appendage or a limb, or an arm can mean a weapon that somebody carries. Now, when the Bible talks about “the arm of the Lord is with the people of Israel” it doesn't mean a weapon. It means a limb; an appendage. But that doesn't mean that God literally has limbs, as the Mormons think. Rather, it is a metaphor for the power of the Lord or the strength of the Lord or God's favor being with the people of Israel. So, yes, it's a literal arm in the sense of a limb – an appendage. That's correct. But that doesn't begin to address the question of whether or not a literal arm or limb might not be used as a metaphor literarily for something else. And that's what I'm suggesting could be going on here in Genesis. It is talking, yes, about 24-hour days, but they might be used as literary metaphors for something else. But that's not the day-age view. The day-age view is that it means, or is talking about, these long ages or periods of time.

Student: It seems pretty clear to me that the days in here are days because they're over and over. If you were to write this in a way that says it's not really a 24-hour day, there's lots of other ways you could write it other than day 1, day 2, morning and evening. But this right here where it says, *The earth brought forth vegetation*, are we saying that the earth created the plants? That they somehow spontaneously were created? Or are we saying God created plants that then grew from the earth? I question why we say that's enough – the earth brought forth vegetation – that's enough for us to question something that's very clear – the time period of the day – but not to question whether or not God created the vegetation and this is the mechanism that these plants are using to grow.

Dr. Craig: Each one is free to assess these arguments as he sees fit. It seems to me that in this case, as I just explained, it's not an either-or. I do think it's talking about 24-hour days in the sense that it says evening and morning a second day, evening and morning a third day, and so forth. But at the same time, on various days you have processes described that are very implausible to think that the ancient writer would have thought these happened in just 24 hours like the earth bringing forth these plants and growing fruit and seeds and so forth. If it were described in the way that we discussed before where he simply declared, *Let there be trees; let there be bushes; let there be vegetation* – right, then one could imagine a sort of instantaneous thing that could happen within a 24-hour time, or even an hour. But the language of it suggests a process that isn't something that's just accomplished instantly.

END DISCUSSION

All right. We need to close now. We're just over time. We'll continue our discussion when we meet next time.²

² ?Total Running Time: 27:00 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)