

## § 9. Excursus on Creation of Life and Biological Diversity

### Lecture 6

#### The Days of Divine Proclamation Interpretation

As we continue our discussion of various alternative interpretations of the creation account of Genesis 1, we turn today to a view that I'm calling “days of divine proclamation” interpretation. I'm using this title to comprise two different interpretations of Genesis 1: the first being “days of divine fiat,” and the second “days of divine revelation.”

You'll remember that when we studied *creatio ex nihilo* in Genesis chapter 1, we noticed that we seem to have in that chapter two different sorts of creation: creation by God's word, and then creation by God's action. These two traditions seem to be interwoven rather like a braid throughout the six creative days of Genesis chapter 1. The element that is common to both of the views that we're considering today is that the six days are days of divine proclamation only, not days of divine working. They differ in whether the divine proclamation occurs before or after the accomplishment of that proclamation.

The first view – the divine fiat interpretation – holds that at some point in the past God made a series of divine proclamations over six consecutive 24-hour days. He said “Let there be \_\_\_\_\_.” The word in Latin for this is *fiat* – *fiat lux* (“let there be light.”) These fiats or proclamations were then subsequently fulfilled (perhaps over very long ages) subsequent to the six days of divine proclamation. So on day seven on this view God does not cease from working as on the traditional interpretation; rather, he ceases from proclaiming.

The days of divine revelation view differs in that it holds that the seven days of divine proclamation that are spoken of in Genesis 1 are not days prior to the origin of things but rather later days during which God revealed to Moses or the author of Genesis (whoever he might have been) what God did. So each day is again a literal consecutive day of divine revelation describing God's creative activity rather than creative days themselves.

Both of these views thus separate God's proclamation from God's action and fulfillment of that proclamation and interprets Genesis 1 to describe six consecutive literal days of divine proclamation.

#### START DISCUSSION

*Student:* The days of divine revelation – what claim does that make about the actual creation itself?

*Dr. Craig:* It could have happened over a long period of time. You could imagine indeed an evolutionary history of the Earth much as is described in standard evolutionary theory. But at some point in the relatively recent past God spoke to Moses (or the author of

Genesis) over six literal consecutive days telling him what he did in the past to bring about the created order. So these are six days of divine revelation.

## **END DISCUSSION**

What might be said by way of assessment of these views? Well, let's talk first about the divine fiat view.

Supporters of this view draw attention to the fact, which we've already mentioned in our assessment of other views, that the fulfillment of God's fiats takes longer than one day to bring about. The most obvious example of this, I think, is day three with respect to the earth's bringing forth vegetation. We shouldn't imagine that the author thought that this was like something happening in time-lapse photography. Rather, the fulfillment of the command to let the earth bring forth vegetation bearing seed after its kind and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind took place over much longer than just a 24-hour period of time. But supporters of this view will also draw our attention to the draining of the primordial waters from the land. When God creates the dry land, the primordial ocean didn't just dry up overnight. The subsiding of the waters, the rising of the mountains, and the gathering of the waters into seas and lakes and rivers would take place over very long periods of time, not within an overnight period.

Although I think that the proponents of this view are quite right in drawing attention to this feature of the text, this feature is not unique to the divine fiat view. This is equally well explained by taking the days non-literally. If we don't take them as 24-hour periods of time then this feature of the text isn't really surprising. If the days are not literal then it's no problem that the fulfillment of God's proclamation should take a long time to bring about. Rather, it seems to me that the crucial question facing the divine fiat view is whether we have good grounds in the text for divorcing the fulfillment of the proclamation from the proclamation itself, and here I have to confess that I'm skeptical of this bifurcation. The text seems to imply, I think, the fulfillment of each fiat on the day that it was made prior to the commencement of the next day.

Two considerations, I think, come into play here. First, some of the proclamations presuppose the existence of the things previously proclaimed to be. For example, the proclamation, *Let the earth bring forth* (on days three and four) presupposes that the waters have already drained away and gathered into seas, lakes, rivers, and so on as God earlier proclaimed. It seems implausible to think that God proclaims, *Let the earth bring forth* while, in fact, the earth is still covered with a primordial ocean and there was no dry land at that point. Similarly, for the creation of man on the fifth day, when the text says, *Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth*, it presupposes the existence not only of the dry land but also of all of the animals that God

has made over which man is proclaimed to have dominion. So it seems to me that some of these proclamations most naturally presuppose that the entities proclaimed to be in the earlier proclamations have come to exist.

Secondly, the word of approval which is constantly repeated throughout the narrative – *and God saw that it was good* – implies that the divine fiat has been fulfilled. The end result has been accomplished and is now evaluated by God. It's not still future and yet to be fulfilled – especially at the end of the creative week when the text says, *and God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, a sixth day*. It seems most plausible to think that God is here giving a positive evaluation of the things that have come to be in fulfillment of the proclamation.

So I'm skeptical of the divorce that this view postulates between the proclamation and the fulfillment of the proclamations.

The days of divine revelation interpretation avoids these problems by holding that both the divine fiat and the fulfillment are in the past. What happens over the six days is just God's revealing what he has done. But this view strikes me as rather implausible. There's nothing in the text to suggest that these are revelatory days. The text does not say, for example, *and God spoke to Moses saying etc., etc*. Rather, the days describe what God does on each day, not what he reveals to Moses on each day. He then pronounces his work good, and each day ends with evening and morning. There's no suggestion that what we have here are days of revelation rather than days of God's creative activity; indeed, quite the contrary it seems to me. So I do not find the days of divine proclamation interpretations to be the most plausible interpretation of the text.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* That criticism I've not heard of my view, and I like hearing criticisms of the view. The idea that the account presupposes the existence of things. I think we have two things going on in the account. The account is a revelation after the fact that it's done to mankind. At some point God had to reveal what he had done to mankind – done for mankind – in the past. But I think he could tell it to the people. To them, everything was completed. So to speak of a presupposition of fish appearing in the sea that have already been separated, for example, makes sense. But in his proclamation of it in the past he could have proclaimed it over six days even though what he had proclaimed wasn't already in existence. Does that make sense?

*Dr. Craig:* I take it that just is the view. The question will be: do we think that's plausible? And here different interpreters obviously can have different points of view on that. It just struck me as implausible to think that here is a planet covered with this primordial ocean that has not yet drained away, and God is saying, *Let man have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the animals on the land* when there aren't any such

things. Your point that you're making, I take it, is that when this is revealed to Moses is all *ex post facto* and so you can look back on it and say that these things did come to exist. The question is whether that's the best interpretation of the proclamation at the time it was given.

*Student:* I just have two other points that I'd like you to respond to. One would be I know you take the days as metaphorical. If you take them as literal though, if the days are taken as literal days, and what was spoken on that day can't be fulfilled on that day then my view would sort of naturally follow if the days are taken as literal and what was spoken can't be fulfilled on that day then that would have to be the case. So the question I guess between us then would be do we believe the days are literal versus metaphorical.

*Dr. Craig:* That seems to me right. If they are literal and chronologically arranged – I'm thinking in my mind right now of the next view we're going to talk about (the literary framework view) – I could see where someone might think that if this is just a literary framework that the days could be literal but that the fulfillment could take longer. I'm not sure. Maybe you're right. But I do think whether or not we construe them as literal consecutive 24-hour days is going to be a really pivotal question.

*Student:* And that's where I would see the evidence in the text as supporting them being literal days, whereas the framework view would not. But since you bring up the framework view, one of the things that I hold in common with them is the framework view often sees dis-chronologies in the account. One of the things that I did when I was literally looking at the text in the order of it, it's interesting to notice that there's a five-fold pattern. There's a proclamation, there's a fulfillment phrase, there's action phrases of some sort (just extra information), there's the evening and morning phrase, and then a numbered day. You've got those five things appearing on every day. But sometimes the second and third one (the fulfillment phrase and the extra information) are inverted. So sometimes what you have is you have some statements in the account that are obviously out of chronological order, and I wondered why the account is both in chronological order (a numbered series and evening and morning), and yet contains some things that are logically out of chronological order. The framework view points some of those out. That was another thing – that's a reason why I think after God says that his proclamation is fulfilled, the information he gives after that is not necessarily in chronological order.

*Dr. Craig:* Actually, before you began to attend this class, when we discussed *creatio ex nihilo*, I also presented such a position with respect to some of those elements of that second braid that I described. You've got creation by the word, creation by action, and what I suggested, following John Sailhammer, was that this may not be the braiding together of two different creation traditions but rather the second braid may be simply the comment of the author on the creation by divine fiat and therefore doesn't necessarily

follow chronologically. This is most plausibly the case with respect to the creation of the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day. On the view that we're talking about – the divine fiat view – these were actually created prior to the first day when God created the heavens and the earth. When it says on the fourth day, *God made these celestial bodies*, it's simply telling us who is responsible for placing them in the firmament or in the sky, but not necessarily implying that they were created on the fourth day. I'm very open to that view that's also part of the divine fiat view as you explicate it.

*Student:* You brought up day four, and it's a perfect example. Day four God says, *Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens for the following three reasons: to give light on the Earth, to mark days and weeks, and seasons.* And then it says, *And it was so.* There's the fulfillment phrase – what God proclaimed, *And it was so*, and then verse 16 adds in, *and God made the lights.* My point there would be it can't be so until the lights are made, but yet the lights are made (the mentioning of it) is mentioned after. That's why it can't be in chronological order. Day four also presents one of the examples that I give to show that what God actually proclaimed on that day could not happen on that day because he says two things: *let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens*, and *let them be for these reasons.* They couldn't have been used for those reasons until mankind appeared on the Earth to use them for those reasons. So the fulfillment of the proclamation on day four can't be fulfilled until at least day six when mankind is there to use the lights for those purposes.

*Dr. Craig:* That's a good point. Thank you.

*Student:* I don't get wrapped around the axle in any of these as we've talked about before. I'll bring Romans 4:17 to bear here – that God calls all things as though they are. But with respect to this view . . .

*Dr. Craig:* Wait a minute. What are you reading into Romans 4:17?

*Student:* Because this is a question of what came before and after and whether this is in the mind or not in the mind. But Romans 4:17 says God calls all things as though they are.

*Dr. Craig:* But that translation you're quoting is rather misleading. It makes it sound as though they're not, but God calls them as though they are – a kind of fictionalism. Let me read you the RSV for that passage. What it says is, “God gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” I take that to be an affirmation of *creatio ex nihilo*. He calls things into existence.

*Student:* Exactly, but it's taking away our perspective time. All these views are trying to introduce how we see time in days. I see the time in days as secondary. The fact that God created and man fell – these are the primary issues. But with regard to this particular

view, this was going to be a lead-in to this discussion on this particular view. You have examples in the Old Testament where God calls either before the fact (he's going to do something) or after the fact (it is done) like in the case of Aaron he said, *One day go up with your son Eleazar up to the mountain because he's going to take over. You're going to go up but you are not coming down.* The same thing with the death of Moses. I think he gave revelation to Moses about his own death, and that was fulfilled.

*Dr. Craig:* OK, now let's understand whether we agree or not at least the point of my critique. In both of those cases, Eleazar and Moses exist. Right? So of course God can give prophecies of what's going to be done in the future. But the prophecy concerns something that exists. When he says, *Take your son Eleazar etc.*, there is such a person. But on this view, when God says, *Let the dry land bring forth vegetation and fruit trees*, there isn't any dry land. It's still this primordial ocean that's slowly draining away.

*Student:* Sure. But he knows there is going to be dry land.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, right. Of course. So then you can weigh for yourself whether or not that's a problem for the interpretation or not.

*Student:* I keep hearing the statement that, *Of course this couldn't happen in a day. You couldn't have all of the seas dry up into land in a day; you couldn't have the plants grow in one day; it would be like time-lapse photography.* It's God. I totally reject uniformitarianism – that everything that we see happening here and the time that we see happening here had to be applied to the first days. I think that's ridiculous.

*Dr. Craig:* After class last week, I reflected a little bit on your comments from last week on this very head. It seemed to me that there's a misunderstanding here of the point that the critics of the day-age interpretation or of the proponents of divine fiat view are making. The claim is not based on naturalism or anti-supernaturalism or bias against miracles. Of course God could make the plants pop up like on a film going on fast forward. Of course he could just make the seas and the lakes instantly. Why drag it out over six days, in fact? The point is not about what God could do, nor is this critique based on some sort of anti-supernaturalism. Rather, it's based solely on: what does the text say God did? And here I think that the proponents of the divine fiat view are quite right in saying that when you look at what the text actually says it is most plausible to think that it's describing processes that would take a long time to fulfill. It would be very anachronistic, I think, to project back onto the author of Genesis things like time-lapse photography and films being run on fast-forward. That is very, I think, anachronistic to read it in that light. We want to read it in the way that it would have been understood at that time, and the seas gathering together describes a process that would normally take a long time. There's nothing in the text to indicate that this took place in a sort of speeded-up kind of fashion.

*Student:* I disagree. This is all anachronistic. It is describing what happened in those six days. So to say I'm going to have to explain this using the processes of today of how the world was created applies a requirement to this revelation that is, I think, unfair.

*Dr. Craig:* Well, now, remember it's not just today. It would be the day, the time, of the author. He is familiar with plants sprouting and bearing seed and bearing fruit. There's nothing to me that would suggest that this author is thinking of this in terms of these sorts of speeded up, ultra-fast kind of processes.

*Student:* That's where we differ. I keep saying God is the author of Genesis. The structure of Genesis, the writing of Genesis – it is so perfect. There's no way Moses could have written it other than being told exactly what to write. I think God has to be the author of this.

*Dr. Craig:* That's not in dispute.

*Student:* And Moses going, *Oh, well, of course it couldn't have happened in a day.*

*Dr. Craig:* Now, wait. You are talking again about “could.” It is not what “could” have happened. It is what “did” happen.

*Student:* I guess what I'm saying is that the way it's written, if you say, *I don't apply uniformitarianism to it*, the waters could be dried up in a day. The earth could have generated plants in a day. Notwithstanding photography effects or anything else, Moses didn't have to understand that. He was told that that happened. That's what God told him, and I believe that.

*Dr. Craig:* Do you think that God couldn't have used figures of speech in revealing this to Moses? Or that it couldn't have been . . .

*Student:* Absolutely. He absolutely could have used figures of speech. To provide a revelation with figures of speech is not a revelation of what happened then.

*Dr. Craig:* Well, now, you have to be careful. You would admit that divine revelation includes all kinds of figurative language. For example, in the Psalms where God is portrayed as riding on the clouds with fire coming out of his nostrils, and other sorts of figurative descriptions. Even in Genesis 2 you have God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and exhaling into Adam's nose to make him come alive. There's a lot of figurative speech right there. To say that the author of Scripture – I mean God, the source of divine revelation – isn't free to use literary metaphors . . .

*Student:* But it comes out in the writing of what is literal and what is figurative most oftentimes. It comes out in the form of the writing – is it poetry?

*Dr. Craig:* Ah. Yes.

*Student:* We started off with this series by saying this isn't necessarily literal, and I disagree at that.

*Dr. Craig:* OK. Well, we'd need to go back to that first section then on a literal interpretation where I looked at the reasons that were offered for thinking that it's literal and found them to be inadequate. What Sarfati argued was that because it's narrative it's not poetry is correct. But it doesn't follow from that that it's literal. Narrative can be fable, mythology, folktale. The narrative form of the text doesn't say anything about whether it's to be literal. I have yet to see a demonstration that it is meant to be taken that way. You can have the last word.

*Student:* I think, yes indeed, one could say all of Genesis is figurative. The idea of Adam and Eve, that's figurative. The idea of the creation of the world, that's all figurative. Let's make it all myth and figurative. I think God is revealing something not only to Moses but to us in this day and time of what he revealed in Genesis. If we take what is written in Genesis as saying it's all just figurative then I start to lose any understanding that the Bible is true.

*Dr. Craig:* I said you could have the last word! I'm going to stay by my word, but when we look at some further interpretations of Genesis over the next few weeks, let's keep in mind your comments.

*Student:* You mentioned in your explanation here something that probably should be addressed every time. When God says, *He saw that it was good*, this message of approval I find very interesting because why would God say that? Because anything he does should be good. He doesn't make any mistakes. But here he says he saw that it was good and he says that every time. Is he waiting until there's enough light or enough life that he says, *OK, that's good enough – not too much, not too little, and now we can move on. Now the Earth can continue.* What are your thoughts on that?

*Dr. Craig:* That is rather similar to my second criticism of the divine fiat view. God sees the vegetation that he has created; he sees the animals that now populate the land, and he evaluates it and says, *This is good, and now I'm going to do the next step. Now I'm going to proclaim that man will come into being.* So I do think that what you're saying is very similar to the second point that I was trying to make.

*Student:* To which view do you think that applies most? This particular message? Because this is written in the Bible, and I think every one of these views has to take this into consideration.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, I think that's quite right. I think that this point would tell most against the divine fiat view. I can't think that it would apply to the day-gap view or the day-age view or the literal view that we've talked about so far, or the gap theory. It seems to me in all of

those they could accept the point that at the end of each period of time or day God evaluates what has been created and says it is good.

*Student:* Does the creation of mankind as a mature complete adult rather than a process raising from a child to an adult cap off this pattern that we see? Could not God create mature vegetation that can produce seeds and each day be complete in itself as a completed process?

*Dr. Craig:* I'm so glad you've raised that point because I think that the difference between the creation of man and the creation of the plants and animals is telling. In the case of man, we do have an instantaneous mature creation – Adam is formed out of the earth or Eve out of his rib – and God breathes into Adam the breath of life. There is no suggestion here that the earth brings forth Adam and that he grows up and becomes an adult. He is formed as a mature fully-formed adult. What a contrast with the way in which the vegetation, the fruit trees, and the animals are created. In that case, it says, *Let the earth bring forth vegetation and fruit trees*, and so forth. Would the trees in the Garden of Eden have had growth rings in them? Young earth creationists that I've read have said no – there were no growth rings inside the trees because they were just formed fully mature. In the same way that Adam had no navel, the trees in the Garden – none of the trees on Earth – had any growth rings. That seems to me to be really in direct contradiction to the idea that the earth brought forth these plants and they grew. Now, you could say, well, wow, it was speeded up and so they would have had growth rings, but it took place ultra-rapidly. My view is I don't see that in the text. I don't see that he's imagining that taking place. But the difference between Adam and the formation of plants and animals, I think, is a good contrast.

*Student:* By the way, day two does not have “and God saw that it was good.” I've heard somebody quip that day two would have been a Monday so God didn't think it was good to work on a Monday. I always thought that was hilarious. In response to what you were just saying there, I would point out that Genesis 2:19 actually says the animals and the birds were created from the dust of the ground also, but yet verse 24 of chapter 1 says, *Let the earth produce land animals*. It does seem to be that there's a bit of a contrast going on there. In response to his comment, I like to point out the fact that I like to take the text as literally as I can, and I think the literal meaning of the text is that it took a while for those proclamations. God intended for it to be that way. A good example is on day five God says, *Let the sea abound with an abundant variety of animals* and then, *He blessed the sea creatures to fill the sea*. My question is: who filled the sea with sea creatures? It's not God. God blessed them to fill the sea with sea creatures. He had to make the sea creatures, but he said, *Be fruitful and multiply and fill the sea and let birds multiply on the land*. So he creates a few, and then it takes a while for the sea to be filled.

*Dr. Craig:* OK, good. Thank you.

**END DISCUSSION**

We will continue this discussion next week.<sup>1</sup>

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