

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

### Lecture 15

#### Genealogies in Genesis 1-11

In our last session I argued that Genesis 1-11 is brimming with etiological motifs concerning the origins of the world, the origin of humanity, the origin of certain natural phenomena, of various cultural practices, and of the prevailing religious practice in Israel. So even if attempts to show direct borrowing of Genesis 1-11 from Ancient Near Eastern myths are fraught with uncertainty and conjecture, I do not think that it can be plausibly denied that these chapters in Genesis treat many of the same grand themes as Ancient Near Eastern myths, and they also seek to ground present realities for the Pentateuchal author in the primordial past. Therefore, they deserve to be classified as a Hebrew monotheistic myth according to the standard definition of myth among folklorists.

But that is not the whole story! For there is an additional feature of these narratives that must now be taken into account, and that is their apparent interest in history. This interest comes to expression most clearly in the genealogies that order the narratives. A genealogy may be defined as a written or oral expression of the descent of a person from an ancestor or ancestors. There are two types of genealogies that have been identified. First, a linear genealogy traces a single line of descent from some ancestor to one of his descendants. By contrast, a segmented genealogy traces the lineage of multiple persons from ancestors in the past. In Genesis 1-11 we find both linear and segmented genealogies. The narratives of Genesis are peppered with these genealogies that express the descent of the principal characters who are featured in the narratives. These are introduced by a standard formula: “These are the generations of.” The word in the Hebrew is *toledoth* which means literally “begettings” – these are the begettings, or the generations of, some particular ancestor. There are ten of these *toledoth* formulas in Genesis that punctuate the narratives. By ordering the principal characters of the narratives into lines of descent these *toledoth* genealogies turn the primeval narratives into a primeval history. You don't have in Genesis 1-11 simply a pool or cluster of unordered prehistoric stories, but rather a chronological account beginning at the moment of creation and carrying through to the call of Abraham in Chapter 12.

The prominent Old Testament commentator Gordon Wenham refers to the genealogies as the backbone of Genesis 1-11. I think this is a very apt metaphor. Having a backbone does not determine what sort of bodily structure a vertebrate has, whether it has for example legs or arms or flippers or wings or no limbs at all. The *toledoth* formulae helped to order the stories of Genesis 1-11 chronologically from beginning to end, but they do not determine the literary structure of the history.

In contrast to Mesopotamian king lists which list successive kings in ascending order (that is to say, going from the present back into the past), the genealogies of Genesis list the people in a descending chronological order and thus drive the narratives forward in time.

Mere chronology, however, is not sufficient to indicate a historical interest. After all, even a myth like the *Enuma Elish*, which we looked at in a previous lesson, contains chronologically ordered stories. For example, the god Marduk conquers Tiamat before he ascends to supremacy over the gods. So mere chronologically ordering the stories is not sufficient for history. What makes Genesis 1-11 different is that the genealogies move seamlessly into the historical period of the patriarchs where the historical interest is obvious and is not in dispute. Just as Abraham is presented as a historical person, so his ancestors are presented as historical persons. The lack of differentiation between Abraham and his successors and his predecessors supports the view that Genesis 1-11 is intended to be a primeval history.

That being said, however, the relation between Genesis' genealogies and historical interest is not so straightforward as might at first appear. Robert Wilson's groundbreaking book *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (1977) on the function of genealogies has been pivotal in the understanding of the role of genealogies in general and in the biblical text in particular. In this book, Wilson seeks to address the fundamental question: Are the genealogies a historiographic genre of literature? Were they constructed for the purpose of making a historical record? In an effort to answer this fundamental question Wilson examines both the data collected by contemporary anthropologists on how genealogies function in tribal societies and also from the comparative literary evidence of the Ancient Near East. With respect to the first (the anthropological data on how genealogies function in tribal societies), Wilson collects data showing that oral genealogies often involve different domestic or political functions, sometimes resulting in conflicting genealogies each of which is considered valid by the society in its own sphere. Wilson summarizes the anthropological findings with these words,

the data we have collected so far casts considerable doubt on the proposition that oral genealogies function primarily as historical records. Nowhere in our study of genealogical function did we see genealogies created or preserved only for historiographic purposes. Rather, we saw that oral genealogies usually have some sociological function in the life of the society that uses them. Even when genealogies are recited as part of a lineage history, they are likely to reflect domestic, political, or religious relationships existing in the present rather than in the past. The purpose of the recital is not to provide the sort of accurate historical account that is the goal of the modern historian but to legitimize contemporary lineage configurations.

The emphasis here, I think, is on the words “primarily” and “only.” It's hardly surprising that tribal societies do not have a disinterested pursuit of history for its own sake. But that doesn't imply an absence of historical interest on their part. It's just that that interest is subordinated to contemporary needs. So Wilson says,

Even though oral genealogies are not created or preserved for strictly historiographic purposes, the genealogies that are accepted by a society are nevertheless considered to be accurate statements of past domestic, political, and religious relationships. A society may knowingly manipulate a genealogy, and rival groups within the society may advance conflicting tendentious genealogies, but once the society agrees that a particular version of the genealogy is correct, that version is cited as historical evidence to support contemporary social configurations.

As we've seen, this is much the same concern as what drives myth-making, that is to say, the desire to ground present realities in the primordial past.

However interesting this data from contemporary anthropology may be, its application to ancient Israel must be fraught with uncertainty in light of the inaccessibility of data concerning Hebrew oral traditions. We just don't have access to them. More relevant, I think, will be the comparative literary evidence from Ancient Near Eastern genealogies. In considering ancient Mesopotamian genealogies, Wilson turns to an examination of Sumerian, Assyrian, and Babylonian king lists of successive rulers. He finds that the lists were primarily concerned with the succession of cities or dynasties through which kingship passed, or with the antiquity of kingship in a city. In some lists the formula, “\_\_\_\_, son of \_\_\_\_” is simply imposed on the names in the list by the scribe whether it applied literally or not. Thus, in the Mesopotamian king lists, the genealogies,

have no role in the overall function of the lists. The genealogies were simply part of the additional information that the compilers of the lists added to them.

Wilson concludes,

As a rule, Ancient Near Eastern genealogies seem not to have been created specifically for the purpose of writing history. They seldom have strictly historiographical functions, but they usually function sociologically in much the same way as the oral genealogies we have examined.

Nonetheless, he says,

they are still valuable historical sources provided their nature and functions are taken into account.

If Wilson is right about the role of the genealogical notices in the Mesopotamian king lists then these lists are hardly comparable to the biblical genealogies, for the biblical

genealogies are not just lists of names which are incidentally genealogical. The linear genealogies wouldn't even exist if the genealogical connections were removed. That makes them completely different, I think, from the Mesopotamian king lists. For example, King Esarhaddon might not have been the literal offspring of his royal predecessor, but Seth is considered to be the third son of Adam.

In dealing with the genealogies of Genesis 1-11 Wilson considers only the genealogies of Cain in chapter 4 and of Seth in chapter 5. Unfortunately Wilson's analysis is predicated upon assumptions about the tradition history behind these genealogies that lead him to treat these passages as contradictory versions of the same genealogy. They're really the same genealogy even though they now contradict each other. Wholly apart from the narrowness of his sampling (just two genealogies out of all of them), the uncertainty attending these assumptions and inferences makes Wilson's conclusions about the function of biblical genealogies less compelling. For example, his claims about the fluidity of the names in the middle of the genealogy can be equally taken as evidence that they're not the same genealogy. Wilson concludes,

Our work on biblical as well as extra-biblical genealogies indicates that genealogies are not normally created for the purpose of conveying historical information. They are not intended to be historical records. Rather, in the Bible, as well as in the Ancient Near Eastern literature and in the anthropological material, genealogies seemed to have been created and preserved for domestic, politico-jural, and religious purposes and historical information is preserved in the genealogies only incidentally.

Unfortunately, this conclusion has not been established by the evidence cited by Wilson, but it depends upon a narrow sampling of the biblical material and uncertain assumptions and inferences about that sample. Wilson has not established that in Genesis 1-11 genealogies seemed to have been created and preserved for domestic, politico-jural, and religious purposes. Why? According to Wilson's terminology, Near Eastern genealogies function in the domestic sphere when they are part of personal names like “\_\_\_\_, son of \_\_\_\_.” They function in the politico-jural sphere when they're used to legitimate royal and professional office holders like the king lists. And they function in the religious or cultic sphere when they are part of an ancestor cult. It's striking that none of these functions applies to the genealogies of Genesis 1-11. According to these definitions they function neither domestically, politico-jurally, or religiously. Although Wilson thinks that the linear genealogies in Genesis 4 and 5 function in the religious sphere, you have to admit there's no trace in Genesis of an ancestor cult which is the way in which he defines religious function.

I see that our slideshow is ready to show, and so let me just say a word about what this features.

Jan and I just returned from a speaking tour of private English schools. We visited six schools in England: Wellington College, Harrow School, Eton College, Winchester College, Bedales School, and finally Canford School. These private boarding schools are among the most elite schools in Great Britain. They are attended by the children of wealthy families, although they do provide scholarships for the poor as well. But the education they give is unbelievable. These are for thirteen to eighteen year-old children, so they are teenagers. They are high schoolers, basically. And yet the education that they get there is just amazing. When we were at Eton, for example, I met members of the Theology and Philosophy Department, and they told me they have thirteen members of their Department of Theology and Philosophy, and that many of these have earned doctoral degrees. Now, remember this is high school! So it was a tremendous privilege to speak at these schools. This is where the future prime ministers, members of Parliament, even the kings of England are trained. Winston Churchill is one of the proudest graduates of Harrow, and Crown Prince William and Harry both attended and graduated from Eton. So this is a strategic group of young students that it was a thrill to meet.

My overall impressions of the trip were twofold. First of all was the amazing warmth of the reception that we received. The students were so excited that I would be speaking at their school. At Eton, when I finished my talk, the applause was so sustained and deafening that I finally felt I had to stand again and nod in appreciation because they were just so appreciative of this talk. So it's obvious that these kids are already accessing the material on YouTube and the Internet, and they were very excited to see me come and speak at their school.

The other impression that I had was the amazing reception that we had among the faculty at these schools. Again and again we met Christian teachers who thanked me so much for the work that we're doing and the resources that we're giving them. The *Kalam* cosmological argument is actually covered in the standard British textbook on religious education that is used in British schools. So these teachers teach on this material, and many of them had substantive questions to ask me. We had good discussions. I think influencing and encouraging these teachers to be bold for Christ and to stand strong for him – to model that for them – is as probably significant as any influence we might have had upon the students because these teachers will continue to influence generations of students to come.

The final thing that I wanted to say about the trip was that in addition to these schools I had the amazing privilege of being on a radio interview in London with Sir Roger Penrose, one of the greatest cosmologists of all time. His name is immortalized in the

Hawking-Penrose singularity theorems that established the Big Bang. For an hour and twenty minutes Penrose and I sat down together face to face talking about his metaphysical view of the world and my offering to him a theistic interpretation that would allow him to unite the three realms of the physical, the mental, and the abstract which he admits he doesn't know how to unify. We also talked about the origin of the universe and his conformal cyclic cosmology and the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life. It was fascinating to me that Penrose did not opt for either physical necessity, chance, or design to explain the fine-tuning. Rather he just preferred to be agnostic about the fine-tuning. He says, *I'm not denying it, but I'm not sure the universe is fine-tuned for life*. As I said to him, that just seemed to me a rather desperate alternative because the fine-tuning is so well-established and almost universally acknowledged. So this was in itself worth going to England for – to have this dialogue with Penrose. It will be aired later in the year in September. We'll let you know when that comes out.

We're going to show some slides now of the trip, and I'll give a little narration as we go through these to let you know what you're seeing.

We began our schools trip in London. This is the Tower of London. We toured it the first day to try to shake off the jetlag. We traveled with Michael Lepien and his wife, Jaclyn. He is the executive director of Reasonable Faith, and he filmed the events. Also with Peter and Heather May, our English friends. Peter helped to organize our previous two tours to the UK. Here we are at Canford School. This was the team. We traveled together in a minibus going to the various schools. This is the Tower of London again in London. A boat ride down the Thames just to try to get acclimated. We sailed under London Bridge and passed many other landmarks along the Thames. Tower Bridge.

And then the next day we visited the British Museum. Having been immersed in Ancient Near Eastern studies lately, I was very anxious to see the Mesopotamian and Egyptian exhibits at the British Museum. That was the Rosetta Stone in that slide which unlocked Egyptian hieroglyphics. These are pillars from the temple of Ramses. The book room at the British Museum. The antiquities that are housed there are just fabulous. This is an Egyptian cat, a statue, a beautiful figure. Oh, it didn't show his head! An artifact from the palace of Sargon which was relevant to Old Testament work. These are from Assyria. These are the kind of things that you see in the Mesopotamian exhibit. This is an Assyrian wall relief that display the sorts of panels that existed in the palace of Ashurbanipal. We also visited the Greek sections which had these Greek temples reassembled as well as figurines from the Parthenon. This is the famous so-called Babylonian map of the world – a gross misnomer that I've spoken of here in class. Here's a close-up of it. I specifically asked them to show me this. I wanted to see this artifact. On the backside of it that you see on the blue panel is the Epic of Gilgamesh that was discovered and translated by George Smith that we talked about in this class.



We went by the houses of Parliament so that Michael and Jaclyn could see these. Westminster Abbey, right across from the street where I debated Lewis Wolpert in Central Hall, Westminster.

Finally we embarked on our trip. Our first stop was Wellington College out in the gorgeous green rolling English countryside. This is the chapel at Wellington College at which I spoke. Again, this is a high school, folks! It's just unbelievable! Named for the Duke of Wellington; it's a permanent memorial to him. We had breakfast at a farm restaurant with a curly horn sheep. Then we went by Windsor Castle which is a stone's throw from Eton where my father marched on parade during World War II. That was especially meaningful to me. The rose gardens were in bloom while we were there and beautiful.

This is Roger Penrose (he's, I think, around 81 or so years old) prior to our interview. We sat down together in this format, and for nearly an hour and a half talked about these important metaphysical and scientific issues.

Then I spoke at Harrow which is near London where Winston Churchill was a student and graduated. These are very ancient rooms going back to the 1500s. This one in particular stems from the 1500s. On the wall students have carved their names over the centuries in the wood paneling, and you can actually see the name of Winston S. Churchill on that horizontal illuminated panel there where he carved his name.

On the campus at Harrow is St. Mary's Church. This church was founded by St. Anselm. Can you imagine? This is from the 11th century. This is the chapel in St. Mary's where St. Anselm himself must have preached and ministered. Some of the beautiful windows in the rooms. While we were there we could hear the sounds of a bagpipe as one student was taking bagpipe lessons. Another one of the chapels at Harrow; they have several. Here's the student with his pipes, and he serenaded us – it was wonderful.

Then we went to Eton. Eton College is, I think, head and shoulders above every other private English school. These are some of the buildings on the campus at Eton.

Here's the team at Peter and Heather's friends' – the Billingstones – in Southampton.

This is from Winchester College where after the lecture is over I'm typically immersed in conversation with students. Lots of unbelievers present, you could tell.

This is Canford, also has beautiful grounds in the English countryside. We had a special breakfast put on for us because we were speaking there in the morning. I was able to sit with students in metaphysics and philosophy who are hoping to go on in that field. At Canford they have this panel. It's a replica of an original panel that was brought here from the palace of Ashurbanipal II in Mesopotamia. They didn't know what it was – the kids were throwing darts at it. This is Canford again.

The last stop was the Oxford town hall where I gave a lecture on five reasons you should change your mind about Jesus. That was a great privilege. During the talk the electricity suddenly went “Pop!” and the whole room was reduced to darkness. I continued for a little while without amplification in the dark but then the authorities evacuated us to the street, and we continued our conversation with the students outdoors in the street.

So it was just a fabulous trip, and only the Lord knows how he's going to use it in the lives of these students and faculty.

## **START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* With your talk with Roger Penrose – I've always respected him; he's been great and very mature when it comes to talking about religion – I've always wondered what exactly is his stance. Is he a hardcore atheist or is he just strictly agnostic?

*Dr. Craig:* Agnostic I would say. He is not like Hawking or some of these other scientists who are really anti-metaphysical. He is extremely open to metaphysics. He talks about how there is a mathematical realm of abstract objects that is real – as real as the physical realm – and that there's a mental realm of minds, consciousness, that is as real as the physical and can't be explained in terms of it. So he has these three areas of reality, and he admits: *I don't know how to put these together*. This is the three mysteries of existence. So he's very metaphysical, and so I felt very free in talking to him about the metaphysical reality of God, an infinite mind that grounds the abstract realm and created the physical realm.

*Student:* I imagine you talked with him about the indispensability argument since you were discussing abstract objects?

*Dr. Craig:* I did not! He wants to know if I discussed this indispensability argument for the reality of abstract objects. I did not want to defend anti-realism. I wanted rather to offer him something that would enable him to unify his own worldview. Grant him the abstract realm of mathematical objects. The question is: How do you unify these three unconnected disparate realms of reality? I suggested all you have to do is extend the mental realm to include not just finite minds but an infinite mind whose thoughts are the content of the abstract realm and who created the physical world. So I was really trying to be very invitational in offering him something. And I should say that off camera after the interview he thanked me for this. He said, *I've never thought of extending the mental realm in that way. You've given me something to think about. Thank you*. So it was very positive.

*Student:* First off, the five reasons to change your mind about Jesus. Is that going to be on YouTube? Or did the electricity blowout kind of prevent that?



*Dr. Craig:* That was filmed, as I recall. Yes, Michael was able to film the event in Oxford. It was so funny because I kind of fought a little bit with the organizer of this event. He wanted to limit my time. He said, *You've got to end in 40 minutes*. And I said I need more time than that. I said, *If these high school students can listen to a talk that long, surely these Oxford students can*. He said, *No, it's got to be only 40 minutes*. So I actually had to cut one of my reasons. I only gave four reasons instead of five. But when the electricity went out during the Q&A, I thought, *Oh my goodness! It's really a good thing that I had to give this shortened talk, otherwise it would have gone out during the talk*. We wouldn't have had any opportunity to show the videos. So it kind of worked out well in the end.

*Student:* The other thing: what were some of the reasons you gave? Did you give the resurrection argument?

*Dr. Craig:* Yes. I used our Zangmeister videos in all of these talks, and so I talked about the meaning of life, the *Kalam* cosmological argument, the fine-tuning argument, the moral argument, and the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

*Student:* Were there any questions that kind of stumped you? Or did you get a feel that they were antagonistic, or were they welcoming and searching?

*Dr. Craig:* There were definitely antagonistic questions. Clearly there were lots of unbelievers present. What happened here that was a little bit unusual – it doesn't normally happen to me on U.S. campuses – is that people tried to raise political issues in which they would catch me in my word. For example, one of the students said, *You have compared the American record on abortion, or you've called it, the American Holocaust. Don't you think that this is demeaning to the Jews who suffered during the Holocaust in World War II*. And I saw no reason to back down. I said in National Socialist Germany millions of innocent lives – of innocent human beings – were killed wantonly for no good reason. And since 1973 in my country, nearly a million human beings per year have been killed wantonly by abortion on demand. And then I explained my position as a pro-life position based upon the intrinsic value of human beings and the indisputable biomedical evidence that the developing fetus is a human being. So I said the fetus is a human being that has intrinsic moral worth and is invested with intrinsic moral rights that cannot be overridden without some sort of moral justification. Which means abortion on demand is immoral. So I just stuck by what I had said. I think it is a kind of Holocaust.

*Student:* Were they receptive at all?

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, they were receptive, I think, as judged by the applause at the end. As I say, just tremendous applause. But that doesn't mean there weren't a lot of non-believing students in the audience anxious to confront me to raise objections. One student at Harrow I remember started spouting off one objection after another. I said, *Wait! Wait! I'm not going to be able to remember all of these objections if you don't let me handle*

*them one at a time.* And he insisted. He says, *I got two more*, and he kept going on. And then I realized – I recognized – these objections were just stuff from the Internet. I said, *You have been reading too much garbage on the Internet*, and the whole place just erupted in applause. I explained to him the minute he said that the *Kalam* argument commits the fallacy of composition I knew where this was coming because no credible philosopher would say this. This is garbage from the Internet from people who don't understand logic or logical fallacies. I encouraged him to read *On Guard*, and we placed a copy of *On Guard* in each one of the libraries at these schools. They were so grateful for doing that. So it was definitely a mixed audience of both Christians and non-Christians.

**END DISCUSSION<sup>1</sup>**

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Total Running Time: 38:19 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)