

§ 9. Excursus on Creation of Life and Biological Diversity

Lecture 22

The Central Truths Expressed in Genesis 1-11

In our lessons together we have argued that the figurative and metaphorical language of the primeval narratives as well as certain inconsistencies within narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 make it plausible that these narratives are not to be read literally. The author has given to us stories of the creation of the world and of mankind's origin and rebellion against God which embody certain important truths expressed in a highly figurative language. Since the Pentateuchal author has an interest in history he intends for his narrative to be taken at some level as historical – to concern people who actually lived and events that really occurred. But those persons and events have been clothed in the metaphorical and figurative language of myth.

It's probably futile to try to discern to what extent the narratives are to be taken literally – to identify which parts are figurative and which parts are historical. Therefore, I think that the objections of someone like Kenton Sparks, who regards the narratives as completely unhistorical, to be a combination of history and theology I think is unfair. Sparks demands if the author of Genesis uses mythical imagery to describe the people and events then which images are symbolic and mythical and which are closer to historical reality? Did a serpent speak in the Garden? Was the first woman made from Adam's rib? Was there a worldwide flood? I see no reason to think that the viability of a genre analysis of Genesis 1-11 as mytho-history should depend upon or imply the ability to answer such questions. The author simply doesn't draw such clear lines of distinction for us.

What then are some of those central truths expressed in the primeval history? The following ten truths come almost immediately to mind. I'll state each of them, and then I'll make some extemporaneous remarks on each one.

1. God is one, a personal transcendent creator of all physical reality, perfectly good and worthy of worship. It is impossible to exaggerate the difference between the pagan myths of Israel's neighbors and this fundamental truth of these Hebrew narratives. The pagan myths of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt are, to speak candidly, incredibly crude and morally vile, often disgusting. I realize that that is incredibly politically incorrect to say in our day and age. You're supposed to respect the myths and the literature of every culture and not to impose your standards upon them. This is some of the literature that is earliest in the history of the human race, and it might seem chauvinistic and arrogant for a modern Westerner to make a judgment like that upon these ancient pagan myths. But I take solace in the fact that the judgment that I've made here is the same judgment that was made by the ancient pre-Socratic Greek philosophers of the myths that they inherited. The early Greek philosophers criticized the myths that they had inherited from

antiquity because of the crude and primitive descriptions of the deities featured in them and because of the immoralities that these deities were involved in. They felt that these myths were not truly worthy of a proper concept of God. So what I say in saying that there is just a world of difference between these Hebrews stories and these pagan myths is not a result of modern Western chauvinistic mentality. Rather, it is a critique which could be and was exercised by my philosophical colleagues and predecessors in ancient Greece. This is a fundamental difference between the stories that were told by these Hebrew authors and those that were in the pagan myths. In fact, when you place Israel in its ancient context, I must say I am just astonished – I'm bewildered – that they could have come up with such an exalted and noble concept of God in the midst of this sea of pagan polytheism. It almost makes you believe in divine revelation. Where else would they get this? It is so counter-cultural. So that is the first point – that God is one, a personal transcendent creator of all physical reality, perfectly good and worthy of worship.

2. God has designed the physical world and is the ultimate source of its structure and lifeforms. In this respect these Hebrew narratives will contrast with modern naturalistic theories of the origins of life and biological complexity which do not see them as the result of intelligent design or planning but simply the result of blind physical processes. Here the Hebrew view is quite different in saying that there is a transcendent designer of the physical world and ultimately he is the source of its structure and the lifeforms that populate the biosphere.

3. Mankind is the pinnacle of the physical creation, a personal (if finite) agent like God and therefore uniquely capable of all Earth's creatures of knowing God. Man alone is a personal agent like God and therefore capable of having a relationship with God, something that none of the other creatures of the world are capable of doing. In this respect as well, the Hebrews stories are in radical contrast to the pagan myths of Israel's neighbors. In these myths the gods have typically created human beings to serve as slave labor for them – to do the back-breaking work of digging the irrigation canals and raising the crops. John Walton, an Old Testament scholar, has put it very well when he says these pagan deities do not love mankind – they *need* mankind. These pagan deities need man to feed them and to work for them and to do the labor that these gods don't want to do. They don't love mankind; they need mankind. Contrast the God of the Bible. He needs nothing! He's a transcendent, self-sufficient, creator of all, but this God loves mankind and seeks out a relationship with him. So, again, we have a difference between these Hebrew stories and the pagan stories that is like night and day.

4. Mankind is gendered; man and woman being of equal value with marriage given to mankind for procreation and mutuality, the wife being a helper to her husband. Again, in our day and age, this is politically incorrect in identifying gender roles though it does

affirm the equal value of man and woman before God. But it's very interesting that in the creation narratives of man, midway through it no longer speaks of the man and the woman but it begins to speak of the man and his wife so that this is talking about a marriage relationship and provides the fundamental basis for marriage in God's created order. This is God's design for human beings and for human sexuality – that it will be in the context of the marriage relationship.

5. Work is good, a sacred assignment by God to mankind to steward the Earth and its resources. Work is not the result of human sin. It is not the consequence of the Fall. Rather, prior to the Fall man is given work assignments to carry out in tilling the Garden so that work is good. This is something that man needs. It is a sacred assignment that God has given to mankind to take care of the Earth and the creatures in the Earth. So this provides, I think, the basis for a proper view of the environment as well as a proper view of work.

6. Human exploration and discovery of the workings of nature are a natural outgrowth of man's capacities rather than divine bestowals without human initiative and effort. Again, this is in sharp contrast to pagan myths. In the Mesopotamian myths, advances in technology and arts and crafts and tools are gifts of the gods to mankind. They are not human inventions; rather the gods simply give these things to mankind to do his work and to live. In fact, there's one myth in Mesopotamia called *The Hymn to the Pickaxe* (or *The Ode to the Hoe* would be a different translation). What this is is an ode of praise or a hymn for the pickaxe that Enki (the god) has given to mankind to dig the irrigation canals and to do mankind's work. It is as though this is some great technological divinely bestowed gift to mankind, and so the pickaxe is praised as this wonderful divine gift that the gods have given to man to do his work. By contrast to that, in the Genesis narrative what you discover is that various descendants of Adam and Eve are said to be themselves the discoverers of things like metallurgy, of music, of domesticating animals and raising livestock. These are not divine bestowals upon man; rather, these are the result of human ingenuity and invention. Of course ultimately the capacity to do those sorts of inventions comes from God, but these are the result of human ingenuity and effort. I think in this sixth point we have the biblical foundation for science. This is the ratification of the scientist's quest to understand the workings of the universe as well as the foundation for medicine and all of the sorts of explorations of the workings of nature that then are such a boon to mankind and to civilization. So this is a sharp difference between the pagan myths and the Hebrew narratives.

7. Mankind is to set apart one day per week as sacred and for refreshment from work. This is the basis for the Sabbath commandment then later in Israel. We're not to be working all the time; we're to take a pause every week from our work for refreshment and

also as a sacred day for the Lord. This point would be in contrast with the modern view of work and the danger of workaholism.

8. Man and woman alike have freely chosen to disobey God, suffering alienation from God and spiritual death as their just desert, condemned to a life of hardship and suffering during this mortal existence. This, I think, is a central lesson of the Fall. Both parties are guilty of rebellion against God, of disobeying him, and this brings alienation and spiritual death. That is, I think, symbolized in driving them out of the Garden. No longer do they exist in the Garden in close fellowship with God, but now they're driven out of the Garden. This sort of alienation from God just is spiritual death. They didn't drop over dead immediately in the story when they ate the fruit, but they died spiritually in being alienated from God and expelled from the Garden. That being thrust out of the Garden condemns them to a life of hardship and suffering as we see in the curses upon the ground and upon the woman in her increased pain in childbearing. It teaches that this life is not meant to be a bowl of cherries. Therefore, the Christian isn't surprised when people suffer terrible diseases and calamities and accidents. This is our lot in this world until we go home to be with God in glory and receive a resurrection body that will be free from every disease and infirmity. So we shouldn't be puzzled or bewildered at the horrible suffering and shortcomings of this finite existence. On the contrary, we should expect it because I think that is one of the central lessons of the story of the Fall.

9. Human sin is agglomerative and self-destructive resulting in God's just judgment. As you read the primeval history, sin goes from bad to worse, from the sin in the Garden to Cain's murdering Abel to the sort of rampant evil that precedes the Flood and leads to God's judgment. So this sin, in the words of the German commentator Gerhard von Rad, reaches avalanche proportions in the pre-Flood era and then is justly judged by God. So human sin is agglomerative – it accumulates, it's self-destructive, it destroys us, and it ultimately does result in God's just judgment.

10. Despite human rebellion against God, God's original purpose to bless all mankind remains intact as he graciously finds a way to work his will despite human defiance. One of the lessons of the primeval history is that even though people repeatedly sin and rebel against God, God always responds with a gracious alternative – a remedy at least partially. When Adam and Eve sinned and they're expelled from the Garden, nevertheless God provides them clothing to take care of them. When Cain sins by killing his brother Abel, God puts a mark upon Cain to protect him against revenge from others about him. After the Flood, God spares Noah and his family so that creation can begin again. So again and again although sin is inevitably followed by God's judgment, God's judgment is always tempered by grace. The lesson of the primeval narrative, I think, is that God hasn't given up on his original plan for which he created Adam and Eve – namely, to bless all of mankind. That plan remains intact. He hasn't abandoned it in order just to bless Israel, the

elect people, the seed of Abraham. Rather, his plan is to fulfill the original intention through Israel. Israel is merely the means by which God will achieve his ultimate and original intent of blessing all of mankind despite mankind's rebellion and defiance.

So those are just a few of the fundamental truths which are taught by the primeval history of Genesis 1-11.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Maybe I'm quibbling here but your point that human beings are the pinnacle of God's physical relation – I'm a little bit skeptical of human exceptionalism or anthropocentrism. I'm not saying I believe in aliens or not, but obviously he could have created – I mean maybe if you're going to Area 51 with all those other people – but maybe we could attenuate that claim and say we are the pinnacle of Earth. I've been always kind of tripped up about Jesus having a human body when I consider maybe if he's created . . .

Dr. Craig: What I'm trying to capture here is the doctrine of the image of God. Man is created in the image of God. I am very open to the idea that there could be extraterrestrial intelligent life who would also be image-bearers, but I cannot imagine that they would be more worthy in God's sight than his image-bearers here on this planet. They might be equal, but I can't imagine that they would be more. I mean, even the angelic beings are not more like God than we are in the sense of being his image-bearer. I'm very open to that idea, but given that we are in God's image it does seem to me that this gives us a worth that is not able to be excelled because it enables us to know God which is an incommensurable good.

Student: So you'd say it has a sort of intrinsic maximum to it?

Dr. Craig: Yes.

Student: I agree that mythology was inspired for the Bible. My question is where does the mythology of the others come from? Could it be a human perspective of the fallen angels who became mediators between God and man? Because even Isaiah says, talking to us, why do you keep feeding that troupe? That's what the ancient myths wanted – us to live out their emotions.

Dr. Craig: I think that Scripture actually speaks to this issue in Romans 1. This is what Paul writes there. He says,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without

excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles (Romans 1:18-23).

Then it describes the moral degeneracy into which they plunged. This is, I think, the biblical view of these pagan polytheistic religions. There is a kind of general revelation of God in nature around us that all persons can and have perceived, but it is suppressed, distorted, twisted, and so you get these polytheistic myths such as we've been describing and the immorality that often goes with them.

Student: I agree exactly. It makes us slaves to them, too. When you change the image of God to that, you become a slave.

Dr. Craig: Isn't that interesting? You are absolutely right. We talk about being slaves of sin – right? – or Paul does in Romans. But in these pagan myths, by distorting the concept of God it turns us into slaves because that is what they created us for – just as their chattel. It is remarkable.

Student: Isaiah addresses that. He says that we actually live out their desires. He says why do you keep feeding that troupe? Doing the things of the flesh, is what those mediators have become. Christ provides a way to remove all mediators from God and man when you live a new life.

Dr. Craig: Thank you.

Student: Among the ten qualities you just went through, which I think is all great, in the space between all of those ten details I don't see a lot of wiggle room for mythological or metaphorical details just kind of sprinkled in among these literal interpretations.

Dr. Craig: Oh my goodness! I thought you would accuse me of exactly the opposite! That I've stated such general truths that they'd be consistent with virtually anything. I think there is lots of room here for the kind of ambiguity that Sparks protests against. Was there a talking snake in the Garden? Was there magical fruit hanging on the tree? Were there literally cherubim posted at the entrance of the Garden to keep Adam and Eve from going back in? Was there a worldwide flood? All of that is left open by these ten truths as I've stated them. So I think these are marvelous truths. I'm sure you will agree. These are profound deep truths for which we could be appreciative. But I think they leave it very, very open as to how literally you take the narratives that express these truths.

Student: Just, for example, with the snake – the serpent. Within the framework of the narrative itself, you stated that the existence of the man and woman was literal and their marriage was literal, but those passages are not so far removed from the snake showing

up within the same narrative context. The snake has all the same literal manifestations as the man and the woman in the way that I see it.

Dr. Craig: Let's think again about why I said I think we are committed to a historical Adam and Eve. It was on the basis of the genealogies. The function of the genealogies is to show some sort of historical interest. That is significant because it would be very easy to interpret Adam as every man. The word *adam* in Hebrew just means "man," and so it would be very natural to read these as just myths about Man with a capital-M. But I think the genealogies prevent that and compel us to say, no, these are real historical figures. But then I've left a lot of wiggle room beyond that, I think you'd have to agree.

Student: One of your points was that women are of equal value (I think that's what you said) to men. It seems like in Genesis 1-11 almost all the action is taken by men, and so I'm wondering what points support your view there.

Dr. Craig: All right! You have pulled a thread that can be very controversial! The reason I say they're created of equal value is because they are both created in the image of God. It says, "In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." So both the man and the woman are in God's image and therefore of equal value. I've already said that they are given to one another as man and wife, not just as man and woman. She's called his wife. But then it seems to me also clear, again unacceptable as this may be in contemporary Western culture, that the wife is created to be a helper for her husband. It would have been inconceivable in patriarchal Jewish society to imagine a myth in which it is the woman who is created first by God in the Garden, and God says, *It's not good for her to be alone. I'm going to create a helper to be with her*, and so he creates the man to help her. That would have just stood things on its head in a patriarchal society. So I think that, like it or not, the way the fundamental truth that is taught here is that even though they are equal the woman is created to be his wife and helper to assist him in the work that he has been called by God to do. Some contemporary commentators have tried to avoid this implication by pointing out that the word "help" or "helper" can be used of someone who is superior. For example, God is the helper of Israel and yet God is obviously not submissive to Israel. This seems to me to be a fundamental hermeneutical mistake. You cannot determine the meaning of a word in a context by isolated word studies about how it's used elsewhere. Just as in English, of course the word "helper" can refer to a superior party. You can say the United States helped Great Britain when it was under attack in World War 2 and helped to free the world. But that doesn't mean that when it says that Eve is created to be Adam's helper in the Garden that she is superior or isn't meant to be his subordinate and assistant. So you cannot determine the meaning of words by isolated word studies. Context, context, context is all-important, and I think in the context here it's pretty clear that Eve is created to be subordinate to Adam as his helper. Notice that this is a pre-Fall condition. The wife's subordination to her husband is

not the consequence of the Fall and of sin. This is part of the divine design prior to the Fall. So even though husband and wife are of equal value before God and being joint heirs of the grace of life, nevertheless in the economy of God it seems to me the wife is submissive to her husband. And that would be very similar to the way in which Jesus Christ, though fully divine and a member of the Trinity, is submissive to the Father in his mission and role here on Earth.

Student: Are you leaving open the possibility that Adam and Eve were two individuals of a population that their children just happen to be the only survivors?

Dr. Craig: No, I'm not leaving that open. I know that this is a very popular view. We've talked about it earlier in this class. All of the lessons are transcribed and posted on our website so that you can consult those, but I gave a three-point critique, as I recall, of the view that Adam and Eve were not the original human pair from whom all other human beings on this planet are descended. I think that the attempt to interpret the story in such a way as to be compatible with a human origin from a wider population of hominids that numbered, say, eight to ten thousand is not compatible with the story.

END DISCUSSION

All right. Now, if what I've said is correct, then I think that we should not be turning to the Bible for scientific details concerning the creation of life and biodiversity including the origin of man. Rather, we are free to follow the scientific evidence where it leads.¹

¹