

§ 9. Excursus on Creation of Life and Biological Diversity

Lecture 24

New Testament Authors' Use of the Literary Adam

To review what we said last week, there are several crucial distinctions that we need to keep in mind as we explore New Testament teaching about the person of Adam. You will remember we distinguished between the literary Adam of the Genesis stories and the historical Adam. We distinguished between truth-in-a-story and just plain truth. And we distinguished between using a text illustratively and using that text assertorically to teach a certain truth.

We need to keep these distinctions in mind and therefore to be cautious about using New Testament citations of Old Testament passages lest we fall into overly easy proofs of Old Testament historicity. We need to do this because otherwise we are going to find ourselves committed to the existence of Jannes and Jambres, for example, or to the authenticity of 1 Enoch. So we cannot, for example, simply prove Jonah's historicity by citing the words of Jesus: "just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the belly of the earth three days and three nights." If Jesus is using this text illustratively then that doesn't commit him or us to the historicity of Jonah. Obviously, that doesn't mean Jonah isn't historical, but what we are cautioning against are overly easy proofs of historicity simply on the basis of New Testament citations of Old Testament texts.

So returning to our list of texts that we read last week concerning Adam in the New Testament, we find that some of them plausibly involve an illustrative use of the stories about Adam in Genesis. Most importantly, I think that Jesus' own statements about Adam are plausibly illustrative. In Matthew 19:4-6, we have the following:

[Jesus] answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

Notice that in this passage Jesus begins by drawing attention to the literary figure of Adam – "Have you not read. . .?" he begins. He then quotes Genesis 1:27, "male and female he created them" and then he weds that statement with Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and the two become one flesh." This then forms the basis for his teaching on divorce. Jesus is exegeting the story of Adam and Eve to discern its implications for marriage and divorce. He is not asserting its historicity.

A clear example of illustrative usage is 2 Corinthians 11:3. Paul says, “I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” Here the use of the conjunction “as” (*as the serpent did this so also in your case*) shows that Paul is drawing a comparison. He uses the story of the Fall as an illustrative analogy to the dangerous situation of the Christians in Corinth. The historicity of the story is neither germane nor asserted. Other examples are less clear. Take for example 1 Timothy 2:13-14. Paul says, “For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” This looks like an assertion of a historical fact. But the verse could be plausibly interpreted illustratively. Paul is describing what the story says; he is basing his teaching about women’s teaching authority (or lack thereof) in the church on his exegesis of the story of Eve’s creation and transgression in Genesis. Similarly, his statement in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9, “For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” sounds and may be assertoric. But it could plausibly be taken as purely literary instead. Paul is here summarizing what the story says, how Eve was created as Adam’s helper, and basing his teaching on his exegesis of that story. So a number of these texts, I think, can be interpreted illustratively.

By contrast the genealogy of Jesus found in Luke 3 which terminates in Adam, the Son of God, is clearly intended to be assertoric, just as the genealogies in the primeval history in the book of Genesis evince a historical interest in people who actually lived. In fact, Luke really adds nothing to our knowledge of Adam that we have not already acquired from our study of Genesis. Similarly, Paul’s statement before the Areopagus in Acts 17:26, “[God] made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation” seems to be assertoric in nature. It is describing the historical advance of peoples throughout the world from their common historical origin in Adam. Doubtless the reference to the “one” in this verse is to Adam, not to Noah, as Paul’s contrast between Adam and Christ in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5 illustrates. The duality is Christ and Adam, not Christ and Noah. Paul’s teaching thus commits anyone who follows the apostolic teaching to a historical Adam. Moreover, notice that Adam is here conceived to be, as in Genesis, the progenitor of the entire human race on all the face of the Earth, wherever and whenever people may have lived, not merely a couple that has been selected out of a wider mass of humanity to fulfill God’s calling.

START DISCUSSION

Student: When a text is used illustratively and assertorically, are those things mutually exclusive or is it possible that they could share both forms?

Dr. Craig: I don't think they're exclusive, no. But if it is used illustratively, my point is we can't just assume that it is being asserted as fact as the many examples we saw in the New Testament itself such as Jannes and Jambres, the well that followed Israel through its forty years of wilderness wandering, and other examples that we looked at last week. So one would need to look at the context in order to discern whether or not this is not merely illustrative. And remember as well the distinction we made between believing something and asserting it. It could well be the case that the author believed it, but he's not asserting it – he's not teaching it. For example, I would have no problem thinking that the authors of the New Testament believed that the sun goes around the Earth, that they believed in geocentrism. But they don't teach it. So our interest is not in simply what they believe but what did they actually teach or assert. And when a text is used illustratively we cannot simply assume that it is also being used to assert or teach a certain fact.

Student: To separate these two statements seems to be unfair because as we say . . . well, the assertive statements are based on illustrative statements. Do you think . . . if they are not then they are not truth.

Dr. Craig: I'm not sure I understand the question. Can you rephrase?

Student: Yes. An assertorical expression has to have an illustrative basis, otherwise they are not truth. So if we're talking about truth, whether they speak assertorically or illustratively . . .

Dr. Craig: All right. Let me try to distinguish these more clearly. You can clearly assert something without using it illustratively. When you say, "I'll be at home this afternoon if you want to phone" – that's not an illustration of anything. That's a simple assertion. You can use something illustratively without asserting it. For example, you can say, "Just as Robinson Crusoe had his Friday to assist him in his work, so also I have someone who assists me in my work." That would be illustrative and not assertoric. On the other hand, you could use a text in both ways. You could pick something that is a genuine fact and assert that as well as use it to illustrate it. That may be what Paul's doing in these passages in 1 Timothy where he says, *Just as Adam was formed first and then Eve and Adam was not deceived but Eve was deceived*, that could be both using that as an illustration and an assertion of fact. But I'm just alerting us to the fact that we mustn't simply assume too readily that what is being used to illustrate a point is being asserted.

Student: I still don't know how anybody (people, mortal) that can assert something that has no basis. How can a mortal assert something that has no basis?

Dr. Craig: We make false assertions all the time. Right? To assert something is to declare it, to offer it as true. But obviously we're not infallible so we can make false assertions. Now, we don't believe that the Scripture makes false assertions because we believe it's inspired by God. Therefore, everything that the Scripture asserts is true.

Student: That's right.

Dr. Craig: Yes. But we've got to be really careful about this or you're going to find yourself committed to the authenticity of 1 Enoch or to the existence of Jannes and Jambres or these other New Testament illustrations drawn from mythology and Jewish folklore. And nobody wants to be committed to that.

Student: But the Bible didn't . . . somehow I have problems separating the two.

Dr. Craig: Well, this is not an idiosyncratic . . .

Student: If God inspired the Scripture, then all the assertions should be inspired by God. So there is no untruth in the Scripture. So all the assertions should have the basis of illustration. The language is the limitation. We may illustrate something incompletely and then derive an assertion from there, but there is some kind of spirit (I mean the Holy Spirit) inspires, so it has to be a truth.

Dr. Craig: If you mean that to use a text illustratively is to commit yourself to the truth of that text, then you're going to be in real difficulty in dealing with the texts that we talked about last week where these New Testament authors refer to people and events from Jewish folklore and mythology that no one wants to be committed to. So when theologians or biblical scholars talk about the doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy the doctrine is that everything that Scripture teaches is true or everything that Scripture asserts is true but they would say (as I do) that when it says that as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses so these false teachers are men of corrupt faith that it's not asserting the existence of Jannes and Jambres. It's just an illustration, like when I say, *His adopting that proposal is going to be a real Trojan Horse for our cause*, and I'm not thereby committing myself to the reality of the Trojan Horse.

Student: But we can't really deny that either as the talking donkey. We can't deny that there is some kind of communication between Balaam and the donkey. Whether it's audible or not, we don't . . .

Dr. Craig: I just don't see that as relevant at all. What we're talking about here is New Testament authors' use of other literature. And you're right. In Jude, for example, Jude gives several illustrations of false teachers. I've only mentioned a couple of them. But he does mention Balaam, and he says that these false teachers have fallen into Balaam's error. What I'm suggesting is that you cannot use this as an overly easy proof of the historicity of Balaam because Jude is citing a number of illustrations, some from the Old Testament but also some from the pseudepigrapha and other apocryphal Jewish folklore. So you can't say this one's historical and this is a proof of it, but that one's not historical and it doesn't prove that. That would be two-faced. And if you agree with me that we don't want to be committed to things like the authenticity of 1 Enoch then you'd better say

that even though Jude uses Balaam as an illustration of false religion, this is not a proof that Balaam was a historical incident.

Student: I see the proof of what you're saying. That you may not be able to take illustrative – if you take that. But your example from Luke – Luke being the physician, Luke being the one who says, *I'm giving you everything in order as exactly as it was*, for him to give the genealogy and say Matthew was the son of Eli and then which, of course, in the Greek “the son of Matthew of Eli” is likened exactly to Seth being of Adam – there's no differentiation. He's not giving an example; he's giving a historical record.

Dr. Craig: Well, let me just interrupt lest you go off on a tangent. You may have misunderstood me. What I said here in the lesson was by contrast the genealogy of Luke 3 is intended to be assertoric just as the genealogies in the primeval history have a historical interest. So I'm agreeing with you. When you have the genealogy in Luke that terminates in Adam, that's very different than an illustrative use of Adam such as you have in some of these other texts. I think in Luke you definitely have a commitment to a historical person.

Student: OK.

Student: If the apostle, for example, is trying to establish a doctrine, if it's only an illustrative use of the citation wouldn't that in some way demolish the force of the argument in some way? If he wasn't asserting there was a real Adam and Eve, but as Spock said to Kirk, it seems to lose its force as an argument.

Dr. Craig: That is a question that is much debated by biblical theologians. When we get to 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5 (which we will either do in the remainder of this lesson or next week), there I am going to argue that the argument that Paul gives depends upon there being an actual historical person. But in these other uses that I've just shared with you, I don't think that that's so clear at all. In fact, in some of them I think it is just illustrative. But of course this illustration is inspired by God. This is a God-breathed illustration just as if God were to inspire me to say “That's a Pandora's Box.” But that doesn't commit me to the historicity of Pandora's Box. But that illustration could be given me by God. That could be inspired. So the question will be: does Paul's argument depend simply on the authority of the text that he's using or does it actually need to have a historical person back there? I think that that will be most clear when you get to 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5.

Student: In the King James Version for Acts from Mars Hill, Paul says “made of one blood.” That is probably more accurate “one man” (meaning Adam). I think the translators knew it was illustrative and so they are saying God says if he withdrew his Spirit all flesh would die, and so the life of all people is from one blood. Life is in the

blood. So they translate it “of one blood.” So all mankind are the same. They came from God's life originally.

Dr. Craig: It depends on the different Greek variants of that text. I think the text that is most commonly accepted simply says “from one” though there are variants that would read “blood.” The real question there is is it referring to Adam or is it referring to Noah? Because when you think about Noah and his family, it's true that all the families of the Earth descended from him, too. But I think that the clear playing off of Adam and Christ against each other in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5 shows that in Acts 17:26 Paul is not contrasting Noah. He's thinking of everything as from Adam.

Student: I agree with you. In fact, like you talked the other day, I think God reemphasized and God made man in his image in Adam. He could have had humanoids, but then at that time he crowned him, and that's why he's the first Adam and Christ is the second.

Dr. Craig: We'll talk about that more when we get to 1 Corinthians and Romans.

Student: I'm just thinking about something that would maybe document an illustrative use. When Paul referred to the unknown god, would that be kind of like it? Because he wasn't saying that this idol is real. That's what came to my mind.

Dr. Craig: Ah! That's very nice. I hadn't thought of that. When Paul says to these Athenians, *I see you're very religious. You even have this altar to this unknown god, and therefore what you worship in ignorance, him I proclaim to you.* Well, I don't think Paul really thought that he was proclaiming the unknown god, and certainly those who dedicated that altar didn't think it was to Christ. But Paul uses this in a brilliant way illustratively to proclaim the Jewish monotheism and Christ.

Student: It seemed to be a way to relate to the people. So in a sense, like using those other examples that are not historical, using it in a way that people can relate to it, so he's speaking to the people where they're at.

Student: Another example from Paul would be he quotes the Greeks' own poets. They believed that they were divinely inspired, but that doesn't mean that Paul thought that those texts were true. Not only not literally true, I'm sure he didn't think that they were inspired either. But he quoted them illustratively because these were things that those people believed, and he was trying to show them that their own beliefs should make his arguments persuasive.

Dr. Craig: Yes, you have in Paul's usage not only the use of illustrations from Jewish folklore but you also have, as you say, the citation of pagan authors. But I didn't appeal to those examples because the quotations from Aratus and these other Greeks don't commit you, or even mention, any sort of entities like Jannes and Jambres or the well that followed Israel around in the desert and so forth. So I just didn't choose to use those. But

it's certainly true that the New Testament quotes not just Jewish pseudepigrapha and apocrypha but even pagan authors as well.

END DISCUSSION

Let me introduce the next section. The next section is going to be on 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45-46 and then Romans 5:12-21. I would encourage you to read those passages sometime during the week in your devotions so that you'll be ready to think about them next week.

The Old Testament scholar John Collins has said that it is difficult to make a case on the basis of the texts we've dealt with this morning for the assumption of Adam and Eve's historicity. These texts don't rely upon an actual historical person for the validity of Paul's argument. But, Collins says the case is different when it comes to 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5 (not to mention Acts 17:26). In these crucial passages in 1 Corinthians and Romans Paul lays out his Adam Christology. We'll not try to go into this in great depth into the theology of these passages, but what we are going to do is restrict our attention to what these passages imply with respect to the historical Adam. That will be our focus.¹

¹ ?Total Running Time: 27:48 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)