# EXCURSUS ON CREATION OF LIFE AND BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

**Table of Contents**

Lecture 1: Hermeneutical Principles and Concordism ........................................... 3
Lecture 2: The Literal Interpretation ......................................................................... 11
Lecture 3: A Critique of the Literal Interpretation .................................................... 18
Lecture 4: The Gap and Day-Gap Interpretations .................................................... 25
Lecture 5: The Day-Age Interpretation .................................................................... 32
Lecture 6: The Days of Divine Proclamation Interpretation .................................. 40
Lecture 7: The Literary Framework and the Functional Creation Interpretations ........ 50
Lecture 8: A Critique of John Walton’s Functional Creation Interpretation .............. 57
Lecture 9: A Critique of John Walton’s Functional Creation Interpretation, Part 2 ...... 67
Lecture 10: The Monotheistic Hebrew Myth Interpretation ...................................... 75
Lecture 11: An Assessment of the Monotheistic Hebrew Myth Interpretation .......... 83
Lecture 12: Examining the Supposed Parallels Between Genesis and Egyptian Myths 92
Lecture 13: Did Genesis Borrow From Babylonian Myths? ..................................... 99
Lecture 14: Etiological Motifs in Genesis 2 ............................................................... 106
Lecture 15: Genealogies in Genesis 1-11 ................................................................. 115
Lecture 16: Genealogies in Genesis 1-11 (continued) ............................................. 125
Lecture 17: The Genre of Mytho-History ................................................................. 135
Lecture 18: Is the Biblical Primeval History To Be Understood as Literally True? ...... 144
Lecture 19: The Plasticity and Flexibility of ANE Myths ......................................... 154
Lecture 20: Why Think Genesis 1-11 is Mytho-History? ......................................... 163
Lecture 21: Why Read Genesis 1-3 Figuratively? .................................................... 174
Lecture 22: The Central Truths ExpRESSED in Genesis 1-11 ................................. 184
Lecture 24: New Testament Authors’ Use of the Literary Adam ............................. 201
Lecture 25: Paul’s Use of Adam in 1 Corinthians ................................................... 208
Lecture 26: Paul’s Use of Adam in Romans 5 ......................................................... 218
Lecture 27: Scientific Evidence Pertinent to the Origin and Evolution of Biological Complexity

Lecture 28: Is Genesis 1 in Conflict With the Theory of Evolution?

Lecture 29: Methodological Naturalism

Lecture 30: Three Aspects of the Evolutionary Paradigm

Lecture 31: Examining the Thesis of Common Ancestry

Lecture 32: Evidence for the Neo-Darwinian Mechanisms

Lecture 33: Inadequacies of the Neo-Darwinian Mechanisms

Lecture 34: Progressive Creationism – Integrating the Scientific Evidence with the Genesis Narrative
Lecture 1: Hermeneutical Principles and Concordism

When most people think of the doctrine of creation, they think exclusively of the creation-evolution debate. But I hope that our study of the doctrine of creation over the last several months has helped you to see how much richer the doctrine of creation is. Still, the question of how God created life and the biological diversity around us is an important and interesting aspect of the doctrine of creation. So I want to now take an excursus from our survey of Christian doctrine to discuss this specific issue.

Let's begin with the interpretation of Genesis chapter 1. As we saw, Genesis 1:1 is a statement of God's creation of the entire universe *ex nihilo*. Beginning with verse 2, the first chapter of Genesis then goes on to describe God's creation of a wonderful environment for human beings to live in – a habitable Earth where man might live. We want, first of all then, to take up the interpretation of the remainder of Genesis 1 after verse 1, particularly in conversation with what modern science and the biological theory of evolution has to say about the origins of biological complexity. So let's begin by reading the first chapter of Genesis beginning with verse 2.

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

And God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

And God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.
And God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the
day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and
years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the
earth.” And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule
the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set
them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the
day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw
that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds
fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.” So God created the great
sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm,
according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God
saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply
and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was
evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds:
cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it
was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the
cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground
according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and 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.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created
him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to
them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have
dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every
living thing that moves upon the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you
every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree
with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the
earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth,
everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.”
And it was so. 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.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the
seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the
seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day
and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In order to interpret this passage correctly we have to follow some fundamental hermeneutical principles, or principles of interpretation. A fundamental hermeneutical principle that is important in this regard is interpreting a writing according to the literary genre or type in which it belongs. Considerations of genre are absolutely critical to the interpretation of a literary text because if the genre of that literary text is of the sort that isn't intended to be taken literally then you will misinterpret it if you do interpret it in a literal fashion. For example, when the psalmist says, *Let the trees of the wood clap their hands before the Lord*, he's not trying to teach botany. This is of the genre of poetry, and it would be a disastrous misinterpretation of the Psalms to apply a literalistic interpretation to what the psalmist says. Or, again, think how inappropriate it would be to apply a literalistic hermeneutic to the book of Revelation where the monsters and other figures represent nation-states or alliances of nation-states. They are symbolic. When I first became a Christian as a teenager, I thought that the book of Revelation was describing literal seven-headed monsters that were going to come out of the ocean and attack mankind. But, as you begin to understand the type of literature that the book of Revelation is, then you understand that Jewish apocalyptic literature is highly symbolic, and it is figurative, and that therefore it would be a mistake to take it literally. If you interpreted the book of Revelation literally you would fundamentally misunderstand it. So when we come to Genesis chapter 1, considerations of genre will be important in deciding how to interpret it correctly.

Another hermeneutical principle that we should observe here is to try to determine how the original author and audience would have understood the text. We should examine the account on its own basis as the author and original audience would have understood it. A great many Christians today follow a hermeneutic that has been called *concordism* which involves reading modern science into the text of Scripture. For example, some Christians have claimed that the Bible predicts the invention of television because it says that when Christ returns every eye will see him, and that's impossible on a spherical Earth and therefore the Bible must be predicting the invention of television which will televise the second coming of Christ so that everyone will be able to see him. They're reading modern science into the biblical text. Or, again, more relevant to Genesis 1 and the creation account, some Christians read texts like *the Lord stretched out the heavens* to be a reference to the expansion of space predicted by the contemporary Big Bang model according to which space is expanding as time goes on. It seems to me that it is absolutely wrong-headed to think that this is what the original author had in mind. When he said that the Lord stretched out the heavens, he's probably thinking of a tent which is
spread out, and in the same way that the tent has been erected so God is responsible for creating the heavens overhead.

The obvious danger of concordism, apart from misunderstanding the text, is that it runs into the danger of reading obsolete science into the text. You can imagine some 17th or 18th century Newtonian physicist reading the Scripture in light of Newtonian physics which are now out of date so that that understanding of Scripture would be obsolete. Every generation would be reading its science into the text. Rather, we need to understand the original text as its author and his audience would have understood it.

Now, I'm obviously not saying that we should not engage in the product of seeking an integrative understanding of science and the teaching of Scripture. On the contrary, such a project is vital, I think, if we're to have an informed and relevant theological worldview. We need to have a synoptic worldview which takes account of the findings of modern science as well as theology. But that's a later project. The first project is the task of interpreting the text itself, and rather than trying to impose modern science onto the Genesis account (or to read it in light of modern science), we want to bracket as it were what we know of modern science – set that aside – and try to read the account as it would have been understood by the original people who read it. I think when we do that, a number of different competing interpretations of the Genesis account emerge. What I'd like to do beginning this morning is to go through some of these competing interpretations with you.

A helpful website that will expand on what I say here is to be found at http://pcahistory.org/creation/report.html. This is a website that is put up by the Presbyterian Church in America which reviews the history of interpretation of the creation account in Genesis and provides a very nice survey of the history of interpretation and the various alternative interpretations that have been offered down through the years, as well as an assessment of each interpretation’s strengths and weaknesses. So if you're interested in the subject that we're going to briefly survey in class, I think this is a nice website to go to if you want to read more.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* Who is the author of Genesis 1?

*Dr. Craig:* I'm leaving that indeterminate. Traditionally, it has been ascribed to Moses, but the conviction of modern scholars is that the account uses sources, whether written or oral. I'll say something about that in a moment. So we're not to think that Moses simply sat down and wrote this freehand without any sort of sources. He was the heir of either oral or written traditions, and nobody knows how far back those really go. Most scholars today would date the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible, which include the Genesis account) to be compiled after Israel returned from exile in Babylon which would
be then in the 5th century BC which is pretty late. But, as I say, if it incorporates these traditions that go back, they could go back for hundreds of years previously. There is a sizable number of scholars who think that the primeval history in Genesis 1-11 so-called isn't as late as being a post-exilic writing – that it could have been from around the time of David or Solomon. So it's all very, very uncertain in terms of authorship and date, but fortunately I don't think that that's going to affect fundamentally our interpretation of the text as we have received it.

**Student:** I think you said that the most important thing is to understand what the original author had in mind, and no matter how far back it goes, it does go back to the beginning of time. So either this was made up by Moses or there was some revelation and God is the author of Genesis.

**Dr. Craig:** In saying that God is the author of Genesis as well as the rest of the Scripture, we shouldn't think of divine inspiration of Scripture on a dictation model. That's the way Muslims understand the Qur’an, for example – that it was literally dictated to Muhammad and Muhammad simply wrote down what God said. But Christian theologians unanimously reject the understanding of inspiration as dictation. Look again back at the very beginning of Defenders class when we talked about doctrine of inspiration. The idea there is that the Scriptures are also the product of human beings, and as such they reflect the idiosyncrasies, the education, the vocabulary, the traditions of the individual human authors. How that works out is a really good question that we discussed when we did doctrine of revelation. Let me just recap that because I do think it's relevant. What I argued there is that via his middle knowledge God knew what these different authors would write if they were in certain circumstances. So by selecting particular people and having them in those circumstances he guarantees that they wrote what he wanted them to write and it becomes his word to us. But it is fully a human product in that sense reflecting all of the personal peculiarities of the person. I think the only relevant question that you'd really be raising would be this: if it is, say, post-exilic, would that have a fundamentally different worldview than if it were pre-exilic? That I doubt very much. I think for these ancient peoples, the difference between being written in 1000 BC and being written in, say, 450 BC is just not going to be significant.

**Student:** Let me try to explain what was passed down to me from some very old people when I was very young. You had touched on something they used, too, to explain Genesis. They used the example in Revelation saying that in Revelation the seven-headed monster and anything coming out of the sea was coming out of peoples. Water represents life. They use that in several places. So my question is: in accordance to . . . do you see it as they did which is that Genesis 1 is teaching of this creation and not the angelic creation? That the waters you see initially or from that prior creation, the life of that angelic creation, and this is describing the new creation – what he's going to do and how
he's using it. This is like every creation – God paints a pattern of what has gone before, because he loses nothing and he keeps everything reconciled and whole within himself.

Dr. Craig: Help me to understand the view you're describing. It sounded to me like the gap theory of the old Scofield Reference Bible – that verse 1 describes a prior creation which then, through a Satanic fall, fell into degradation and decay. So when verse 2 begins – *the world was without form and void and darkness was on the face of the deep* – this is describing, as it were, the aftermath of this terrible fall of this prior creation and now is God's recreation anew of this cosmos. Is that the interpretation you are referring to?

Student: It is very close to that, I guess. I'm not sure how I'd differentiate it other than it's like saying God's creating this creation (the Big Bang, space and everything) and the waters that are immediately . . . it's not really H₂O waters that he's talking about in verse 2. He's talking about the prior life. It's just like the beast comes out of the ocean in Revelation. Water represents life and the firmament . . .

Dr. Craig: OK. We'll talk about this interpretation later on when we look at our various possible interpretations. But I do want to warn against, again, not only scientific concordism, but I also want to advise against what one might call theological concordism – that is to say, trying to interpret Genesis 1 in light of Revelation. You can't impose the symbols and categories of the book of Revelation with its apocalyptic imagery on the book of Genesis, unless Genesis is apocalyptic literature, too, perhaps, which it's not. I don't think anybody would hold that. So we need to be careful to let the text stand on its own – have its own integrity – rather than imposing these interpretations from the outside.

Student: When we're talking about authorship and when Genesis was written, it seems to me there's not a whole lot of debate that the Ten Commandments were written by Moses and that he got those from Mount Sinai. Correct?

Dr. Craig: Well, everything is up for grabs in Old Testament studies. Some people (minimalists) today deny that there ever even existed a monarchy of David and Solomon, and that the legends of Exodus are not historically reliable either. So everything is up for debate among these Old Testament scholars.

Student: Sure, especially on a secular level, but as we understand Scripture, most Christians believe that the law of Moses was written by Moses. What I'm referring to is Exodus 20:8-11. It says, *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall not do any work or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant, or your cattle, or your sojourner who stays with you, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the Earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the*
seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. So it seems like by the time Moses wrote this, or he got the law, and if that's based on the six days of creation . . . they had to have had that story by then. Correct?

Dr. Craig: Clearly. Yes, that's right. But, again, we don't know the final date at which the Pentateuch was assembled. But you're quite right in saying that in the book of Exodus the author clearly knows this prior story and refers to it. We'll talk about that, because the verses that you quoted, I think, are some of the best evidence in favor of the literalist interpretation of Genesis 1 because, as you say, this is the Pentateuchal author’s own comment on the Genesis creation narrative, and he says God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. So that would be, I think, a proof text that could be used for the literalist interpretation because there you have the Pentateuchal author's own reflections upon this narrative in Genesis 1, whoever that author might have been. Good point. We'll talk about that later on.

Student: When we talk about the creation days, you mentioned when he created the sixth and rested on the seventh, one of the things that I've actually been discussing Genesis these past couple of weeks with my friends is I've never understood what the light was supposed to be in the first verse. He said, Let there be light. The reason why I ask this is because everyone, when they discuss Genesis, it's always a debate between young Earth and old Earth. One of the most, I think, common argument you're ever going to hear from an old Earther is it can't be literal because the sun and the moon is created on the fourth day which is supposed to represent a twenty-four hour cycle. A lot of times I hear . . . God already had the light when he said, Let there be light. So you don't need that. To me, that always puzzles me because that doesn't make any sense. I just want to know when, in the first verse when he says, Let there be light, what is that supposed to represent? Is that like an actual time cycle when it starts?

Dr. Craig: We'll talk about this because the question you're raising is a very important one in understanding it. He's pointing out that the first creative act of God in Genesis 1 is the creation of light. Now, you could have light created that would be not the result of the sun. That's conceivable. But it says that, God called the light day, and there was evening and there was morning, one day. There it doesn't seem to make good sense to say that there could be evening and morning – day and night – if there was no sun at that time because day and night is caused by the Earth's revolution on its axis. So this is, I think, a real problem for understanding Genesis in a literal way as we'll see, and we'll talk about that later.

Student: One of the things about creation . . . it almost seems like the flood is never really taken into consideration. That was a major event for the planet, and nobody knows because – what? – there were eight human beings on the Earth at the time when it
happened or whatever floating in a boat because everybody else died. We have no idea of what kind of effect that could have had on the Earth geologically or even biologically because, remember, if everything was killed except for seven of the clean animals and two of the unclean animals. If God had an idea about how to repopulate the Earth, he was the one that could have selected which one of those animals got on the ark also. Are you following what I’m saying? I’m saying the flood might have a major effect on what we see now. So when we look at something, are we looking at what was pre-flood or what is post-flood? I mean when we’re looking at something biologically or geologically or anything like that.

*Dr. Craig:* If I understand the question right, it would seem to me that the question you're raising is a question of paleontology. Isn't it? When we discover these fossilized remains or early strata in the Earth's surface, are these post-flood or pre-flood if there was a universal flood? This is one of the most significant scientific challenges to understanding the flood story literally. I think what you are highlighting – and I do want to emphasize this – is that the account in Genesis 1 of the creation of Earth and also the creation of humanity in chapter 2 is really piece of the same cloth that goes all the way to chapter 11. Genesis 1 to 11 is typically called the primeval history because it sweeps across the whole of human history from the creation of the universe until the call of Abraham. Then all of a sudden it's as though someone stomps on the brakes and the narrative screeches to a halt almost and then you have the call of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and their progeny and the call and creation of the nation of Israel. Then you're really on historical footing there, whereas this other material in chapters 1 to 11 is prehistoric. Not in the sense that there's no record of it in Genesis, but in the sense that it records ages of time that was before historical writing ever originated. These accounts are describing events that are that old. So the same question about “Should we interpret Genesis 1 literally?” arises with respect to this flood narrative, as well. And the Tower of Babel narrative, as well. Are these to be understood as literal historical accounts? So the question begins to balloon up to a proportion that we're not going to be able to deal with in this class. But you're quite right in saying that it is all interconnected, I think. The same scientific challenge that exists to understanding Genesis 1 literally is going to exist with respect to understanding the universal flood literally, as well. That will be difficult.

**END DISCUSSION**

That brings us to the end of the class. We're out of time. What we'll do next week is to take up the first of several rival interpretations of Genesis 1, and this will be the literal interpretation of the passage.¹

¹Total Running Time: 35:04 (Copyright © 2018 William Lane Craig)
Lecture 2: The Literal Interpretation

Last time we began our excursus on the doctrine of creation and the origin of life and biological diversity. We are looking at Genesis chapter 1 with a view toward understanding the various interpretations of Genesis 1 that have been offered.

The first interpretation that we want to consider is the most straightforward interpretation of Genesis 1 – what we could call the literal interpretation (sometimes called the 24-hour day interpretation). For example, my doctoral mentor, the great systematic theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, cites the eminent German Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad in support of the scientific character of Genesis chapter 1. Pannenberg argues that, primitive as it might be, nevertheless the intention of Genesis 1 is to give a scientific account of the origins of the world and of life. This is what von Rad has to say in his *Old Testament Theology*.

Before I read the quotation from von Rad, a word of background will be helpful in understanding what he has to say. Old Testament scholars have identified a number of hypothetical sources behind the Pentateuch. One of these is the so-called P document – a hypothetical written source that is supposed to have been written from a priestly perspective; that is to say, the perspective of someone involved in the Levitical sacrifices that are described in the book of Leviticus. Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 is usually identified as based upon this hypothetical P source. Von Rad will refer to this priestly document, and so that's what he's talking about when he says the following:

> This account of Creation is, of course, completely bound to the cosmological knowledge of its time. But it is a bad thing for the Christian expositor completely to disregard this latter as obsolete, as if the theologian has only to deal with the faith expressed in Genesis 1 and not with its view of nature. For there can be no doubt that the Creation story in the Priestly Document seeks to convey not merely theological, but also scientific, knowledge. It is characterized by the fact, which is difficult for us to understand, that here theological and scientific knowledge are in accord with no tension between them. The two sets of statements are not only parallel, but are interwoven in such a way that one cannot really say of any part of Genesis 1 that this particular statement is purely scientific (and therefore without importance for us) while that one is purely theological. In the scientific ideas of the time theology had found an instrument which suited it perfectly, and which it could make use of for the appropriate unfolding of certain subjects – in this case the doctrine of Creation.²

Pannenberg thinks that such primitive science has now been overtaken by modern science, and therefore it needs to be corrected. But Pannenberg finds motivation in the biblical author’s approach to trying to integrate theology with a scientific view of the world. The science of the P author is now obsolete and no longer valid, but nevertheless his project of trying to integrate theology with science is a worthy one, and we should follow his example in trying to integrate theology with the science of our day.

Similarly, young earth creationists take the aim of Genesis chapter 1 to be to communicate scientific information about the origin of the world and humanity. The difference between young earth creationists and theologians like von Rad and Pannenberg is the young earth creationists take the account to be accurate. God created the world in six consecutive 24-hour days about ten to twenty thousand years ago. This interpretation reads the text in a *prima facie* way. That is to say, it takes the text at face value; it takes the text literally to say what it says.

This raises the question as to what do we mean by “literal?” By literal, I mean that it's not to be taken figuratively. The young earth creationist, Jonathan Sarfati, in his commentary on Genesis 1 to 11 says that young earth creationists are perfectly prepared to recognize metaphors and other figures of speech in Genesis 1 to 11. For example, when the flood narrative says that the windows of heaven were opened, they don't imagine this to mean that there are literal windows in the firmament. Rather, they recognize that this is a metaphor for rain. So by “literal” Sarfati means merely the grammatico-historical meaning of the text which doesn't exclude figurative language.

The problem with Sarfati’s characterization is that it ignores genre and is so general as to be almost useless. Even poetry should be interpreted literally in that sense, namely the grammatico-historical sense. What we want to know is whether Genesis 1 to 11 is to be read as a literal account of what actually happened.

Sarfati does defend a non-figurative interpretation of Genesis 1 to 11 on the grounds that it is of the genre of history. He identifies the genre of Genesis 1 to 11 as history. Now we're getting somewhere. The key chapter in Sarfati's commentary justifying his view that Genesis 1 to 11 belonged to the genre of history is chapter 2 entitled “Genesis is History, Not Poetry or Allegory.” Immediately one notes an insufficient range of alternatives. We may all agree that Genesis 1 to 11 is neither poetry nor allegory. These chapters are prose narrative. But that doesn't imply that they belong to the genre of history. Sarfati tends to conflate narrative prose with history. For example, he observes that the early chapters of Genesis frequently use a construction in Hebrew called the “*waw*-consecutive.” *Waw* is the Hebrew word for “and.” In the *waw*-consecutive you have a verb in the imperfect tense. This is a singular mark of a sequential narrative. A narrative typically begins with a perfect tense verb, and then it continues with imperfect
tense verbs. Applying this to Genesis 1, the first verb in Genesis 1 is *bara* – create. In the beginning God created. That’s in the perfect. The subsequent verbs are in the imperfect, and this is exactly what one would expect, Sarfati says, from a historical narrative. But it’s also what one would expect from a non-historical narrative. Myths are narratives as are folk tales and legends. They relate a story involving a sequence of events, but they’re not historical narratives. Sarfati conflates narrative style with historical narrative.

In the section of his chapter entitled “Numerical analysis of the literary genre of Genesis,” he cites a statistical study of the verb forms in narrative and poetic texts. The study shows that Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 is statistically classified as narrative with a probability of 0.9999 percent. From this he concludes, “This analysis shows that Genesis is almost certainly historical narrative and not poetry.” This is a *non-sequitur*. From its being narrative, it doesn’t follow that it is history; only that it’s not a poem. It is narrative prose, but it doesn’t follow that it’s history.

Safari goes on to ask: if Genesis were history, how would you expect it to look? He says we can answer that from the style of the undisputed historical books in the Old Testament like Exodus, Joshua, Judges, and Genesis chapters 12 to 50. This argument, however, backfires, for such a comparison is precisely what leads scholars to differentiate Genesis 1 to 11 from such historical narratives. For example, the prominent evangelical Old Testament commentator, Gordon Wenham, observes that when Genesis 1 to 11 is compared with Genesis chapters 12 to 50 a striking difference emerges. Chapters 1 to 11 are full of parallels with ancient Near Eastern traditions so that it looks as though Genesis is reflecting these oriental sagas both positively and negatively. Genesis 12 to 50, by contrast, are quite different, says Wenham. Abraham and his descendants are the exclusive concern of these chapters, and there is no suggestion that the patriarchal stories are adaptations of oriental sagas. Hermann Gunkel, who was one of the earliest proponents of the view that Genesis 1 to 11 has a background in ancient Near Eastern myths, in his book *The Legends of Genesis* (1901), contrasted the early chapters of Genesis precisely with the Old Testament historical books and he remarks, “Contrast these narratives with Israelitish historical writing such as the central portion of the second book of Samuel, the most exquisite piece of early historical writing in Israel.”

Sarfati’s mistake may be that he restricts his analysis of literary genre to grammar and style. Those are the two elements that he considers in determining genre – grammar and style. But we must also reckon with the function of a literary text in the culture in which it was related. This is precisely the burden of Old Testament scholar John Collins’ new book *Reading Genesis Well*, which I highly recommend to anyone interested in this subject. Collins’ criticism of those who insist on what is called the “plain meaning of the text” which ignores function apply directly to Sarfati’s analysis.
The question is whether the text is of the type that intends the reader to take it literally. Von Rad gives no evidence at all for his view that Genesis 1 is primitive science. He simply asserts it. Clearly Genesis chapters 1 to 3 are intended to be historical on some level at least. Adam and Eve, for example, are presented in chapters 2 and 3 as the first couple of the human race – the progenitors of the entire human race. Adam and Eve are treated as historical individuals, not just symbols of mankind but as actual people who are connected to descendants by the genealogies in Genesis 1 to 11 and finally to indisputable historical figures like Abraham. And we mustn't overlook, after all, the central figure of Genesis 1 to 11, namely God himself. God is clearly not meant to be just a symbol or a mythological figure, but a real personal agent who created the world and humanity and then goes on to call the nation of Israel to be his special people. So the central figure of the Genesis narrative is a literal personal individual who is the creator of the world and the God of Israel.

On the other hand, the Genesis narrative is undoubtedly also meant to be symbolic or metaphorical in certain respects. For example, the name Adam (the name of the first man) just is the Hebrew word for man. And Eve is interpreted by the author to mean the mother of all living. So Adam and Eve are not just historical individuals, but they also represent humanity. Adam is, in a sense, every man created by God. In the creation story that we have in Genesis 2 we clearly have metaphorical or anthropomorphic descriptions of God. God is described as walking in the garden and looking for Adam and Eve and saying, “Where are you?” And they're hiding from God, and God must find them. Or, again, when God creates man, it says that he fashions him out of the dust of the earth and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Clearly this is not intended to be a kind of literal CPR that God performs on Adam by blowing into his nose. So there are also literary and metaphorical devices that are plausibly being used in these chapters as well.

In fact, the whole narrative in Genesis chapter 1 is an incredibly crafted piece of Hebrew literature. It is really unique. As I already said, it is not poetry. It is not a hymn. But it's not just straightforward prose either. Collins calls it exalted prose. It is a highly stylized piece of writing with a certain parallelism that is characteristic of poetry. For example, you have repeated again and again “and God said . . . and God made . . . and it was so” on the various creative days. It’s a carefully stylistically structured chapter that exhibits a great deal of literary polish. Even the number of the Hebrew letters in Genesis 1 is carefully chosen. So it's not just a simple police report or a scientific report of what happened. Therefore, most evangelical exegetes will say that these narratives are meant to be taken in a sense that is both historical and figurative. The underlying historical events actually happened, but nevertheless the narrative is told in poetic imagery or figurative speech that shouldn't be pressed for literal precision.
So Genesis 1 seems to be a kind of historical but figurative genre of writing. That is to say, it covers historical events but using poetic or figurative language to describe them. If that's correct, then it would be making unwarranted demands on the text to interpret it literally; in particular it would be unwarranted to press the Hebrew word *yom* for day to mean that the world was created in six consecutive 24-hour days.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student*: Just for contextual reasons, when you say Genesis is not a straightforward prose, what does that mean?

*Dr. Craig*: In this case, what I mean is that it's highly polished. It exhibits, for example, this parallelism and other artistic qualities. It's not a poem. It's not Hebrew poetry. But it exhibits some of that style of poetry like the parallel lines, the repetition, the structure, the numbering of the letters. Many scholars have pointed out the recurrence of the number seven in the narrative, for example, as being perhaps theologically significant or multiples of seven. It's a highly stylized piece of writing. It's not like a police report so to speak.

*Student*: Ordinarily, when we think of something being metaphorical or analogous to something, there's something literal that it's being compared to. I'm not sure if that . . . could you comment on that not really being the case with Genesis? So, for example, when God calls the sea “the sea” and calls the Earth a name, I don't imagine that there's some literal event where God is giving a proper name to something or something that's analogous to that.

*Dr. Craig*: I think that that would be a good example of figurative language. God, in the beginning of the chapter, is a transcendent being beyond the universe who is not like the anthropomorphic deities of Israel's pagan neighbors – these humanoid deities cavorting with each other and doing physical things. God transcends the entire material universe and brings it into being by his word. So in that sense God doesn't have vocal cords so as to speak and say *I'm going to call this Earth* or *I'm going to call this day*. This is clearly, I think, as you say, a figurative language applied to God. Moreover, there's no reason to think that God would speak Hebrew. The narrative is told in the language of the author who's writing, and we read it in the language of our English Bibles. But God himself doesn't speak Hebrew, I think we can presume. In fact, Collins pointed out to me at a recent conference that there are certain kinds of anachronisms in Genesis 1 to 11 that also show its non-literal character. One example of this would be when Adam is presented with Eve as the helper that is suitable for him, he cries out, *This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man*. The Hebrew words there for “man” and “woman” (*ish* and *ishah*) in fact didn't exist prior to the time of the monarchy. This is a development linguistically in Hebrew around 1000
BC or so. So Adam, in the primeval history, couldn't have made this pun because that didn't exist. It's an anachronism in the language of the author. So I think that these narratives are making deep theological points for us to understand, like, for example, the equal value of man and woman before God, the fact that the stars and the sun and the moon are not astral deities to be worshiped, they're mere creatures made by God. Human beings are made to know God and to fellowship with him. They're not created (as in Babylonian myths) as slaves to do the grunt work of the gods and to feed the gods. These Hebrew stories, even taken figuratively, are so different from these gross and often vile polytheistic myths of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. So they can make these theological points, I think, independently of interpreting a lot of the narrative literally.

*Student:* Just a fun nugget, in the Hebrew language I remember how Adam (adam) is made from the dirt, from the earth. The Hebrew word (one of them) for earth and the dirt is *adamah*. So Adam from *adamah*.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, very good. What he points out is that the very name “Adam” resembles the Hebrew word for “earth,” *adamah*. Adam is created out of the dust of the earth, and there is a kind of pun there as well on the name of Adam. There's again a kind of symbolic significance there. It's not just a straightforward narrative that Adam was made out of dirt.

*Student:* Last week we were talking about the author of Genesis. I think this is a relevant continuation. From my understanding of the Chinese history which is long, the way history is captured is many, many revisions. In the beginning, maybe people communicate by tying knots on the rope and then they start drawing pictures. But the idea is preserved. God is able to move people to care about certain things they want to preserve. There is the ancient Book of Changes (*I Ching*) that was revised many, many times. Confucius did the last revision. So I figure maybe Genesis is also how things are important that people find a way to preserve and then God can move people to kind of get a little more revision with more understanding as he revealed more to them. I wanted to hear your opinion about this.

*Dr. Craig:* I think that what you're saying is certainly plausible. I'm not yet offering a critique of the literalist interpretation or endorsing a different interpretation, but just trying to say there's a range of alternatives here. I think what you've said is very plausible, and we'll talk more about that when we get to other non-literal interpretations. Just this week I was reading about Chinese mythology, and this is an area that, for Westerners, is as yet very under-explored and more work needs to be done on the kind of comparative stories that you have in the ancient Near East and those that are existing in China.
Student: I'm sure you're familiar with the work of John Walton at Wheaton. I've been reading a lot of his work lately. It's interesting. One of his theories is that Genesis is, of course, history, but that it's also an allegory of God setting up the earth as a temple – that he sets it up as the Garden of Eden as his dwelling place, there's the six days of work and one day of rest, and that the Earth and the universe are his temple. He also talks about that verb bara. Of course, in Hebrew each word has a lot more work than English verbs do, but he talks about that as being something where God is more ordering and defining and naming and putting things into their roles. Then when he rests on the seventh day, the rest is not really him kicking back in a hammock and resting at the beach. It's more like his rest is that peace that we get when everything is as it should be. I wonder what your opinion of Walton is.

Dr. Craig: We'll be talking about Walton’s so-called functional interpretation of Genesis chapter 1. So hang onto that until later. As for the temple motif, although I tend to be rather skeptical of this, there are a good number of scholars including Wenham who do think that the Garden of Eden is meant to be a sort of symbol of a sanctuary in which God would fellowship with man and woman in this pristine state, and they had to be, of course, driven out of it after their fall. So that would be an additional non-literal element in the narrative if you did accept that.

END DISCUSSION

With that we will close today. We'll resume this discussion when we come back in January.³

³Total Running Time: 31:12 (Copyright © 2018 William Lane Craig)
Lecture 3: A Critique of the Literal Interpretation

We're talking about various interpretations of Genesis chapter 1, and we have begun our discussion of the literal interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis. Last time I explained that most evangelical exegetes will say that these narratives are meant to be taken in a sort of figurative and yet historical sense. The underlying historical events actually happened, but nevertheless the narrative is told in poetic imagery in figurative speech that shouldn't be pressed for literal precision. So if Genesis 1-3 is a kind of historical but figurative genre of writing (that is to say, it covers historical events but it uses poetic or figurative language to describe them) then it would be a mistake to make unwarranted demands upon the text by interpreting it literally.

In particular, I think, for example, that it would be unwarranted to press the Hebrew word יומ (yom) for literal precision to mean that the Earth was created in six consecutive 24-hour days. For example, in Genesis 2:4 we have this word יומ used in a clearly metaphorical way. In Genesis 2:4 we read, “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created in the day that the Lord made the Earth and the heavens.” In this verse it refers to the entire creative week of Genesis 1 as a day. So in the Genesis account itself we find that it uses the word יומ (day) in a metaphorical sense to describe the entire creation week and not just a 24-hour period of time.

One of the best proof texts to which literalists can appeal for thinking that a six-day creation is literal in Genesis 1 comes from another book of the Pentateuch outside the book of Genesis – namely Exodus. If you look at Exodus 20:9-11 you find the Pentateuchal author reflecting back upon Genesis 1 and he says as follows in Exodus 20:8-11:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

Here the passage says that God made the heavens and the Earth, the sea, and all that is in them in six days. So literal creationists will say that this shows that Genesis 1 is, in fact, intended to refer to a literal week of six consecutive 24-hour days. But I think that that may be pressing the passage too hard. What the Exodus passage is stressing is the pattern that is set down in Genesis 1 – the pattern of God’s laboring on six creative days and then resting on the seventh day. That pattern is the same that Israel should observe in its literal workweek. But that isn't to say that because the pattern is the same that the periods or the
durations described in Genesis are also therefore exactly the same duration as our ordinary calendar days. Notice how this sabbath commandment is repeated in Exodus 31:12-17:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.’ It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.”

Notice that this passage refers to the seventh day as the day of God's sabbath rest. But when you read Genesis 1, the seventh day is not a 24-hour period of time. It does not come to an end with the phrase “and there was evening and there was morning, the seventh day.” Rather, God is, in a sense, still in his day of sabbath rest. He is no longer creating. So if the seventh day, though referred to as “a day” and as the model for Israel’s sabbath day, isn't to be taken literally, then why should the other days before it be taken to be literal 24-hour periods of time?

Those who hold to the literal interpretation will often say that when an ordinal number is used with the word יומ (like “second day” or “third day” and so forth) that then it always refers to a 24-hour period of time. But I don't find this a convincing argument at all. First of all, there's no grammatical rule in Hebrew that says when יומ is used with an ordinal number it must refer to a 24-hour period of time. If no such examples are to be found in Hebrew literature that we have, that could simply be accidental. It could simply be a reflection of the fact that our stories or sources in Hebrew are relatively limited and there just isn't any occasion on which you have an expression like “second day” or “third day” being used in a metaphorical way. So it's not really a valid point grammatically speaking. It can simply be an accident of history or literature that we don't have passages where an ordinal number is used with יומ to refer to something other than a 24-hour period of time.

Secondly, however, the claim is, in fact, just false anyway. We do have passages where יומ is used with an ordinal number to refer to a non-literal day. Hosea 6:2 would be such an example. Hosea 6:2 says, “He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the
third day, That we may live before Him.” Here the days are clearly not 24-hour periods of
time. Rather, the third day represents the time of God's restoration and healing of Israel
after having wounded and rent Israel through his judgment. So it’s simply false that yom
is never used with an ordinal number to refer to a non-literal day. Hosea 6:2 clearly does.

But thirdly, I think that the claim here on the part of the literal interpreter is simply
missing the point entirely. The point is that a 24-hour day can be used as a literary
metaphor. Even if yom always refers to a 24-hour day, that doesn't even address the
question of whether a 24-hour day couldn't be used metaphorically. Let me give an
analogy. Take the English word “arm.” Now, in English, the word “arm” has two senses.
In one sense, it refers to a limb of the body attached to your shoulder with a hand on the
end. This would be your arm. But in another sense, the English word “arm” can refer to a
weapon. For example, we might refer to someone who is carrying a “concealed arm” or
we might talk about “an armed man.” When we talk about an armed man, we don't mean
a man who has limbs. We mean a man who's carrying a weapon. So the word “arm” in
English can have these two different meanings. Now, very often the Scriptures will use
the word “arm” in a metaphorical sense with respect to the Lord. For example, it will say
something like this, The arm of the Lord was with them. When I say “the arm of the
Lord,” I'm clearly using the word in the sense to mean a limb. I'm not talking about the
Lord's having a weapon. I'm using the word “arm” in the ordinary sense of an appendage
or a limb. But that doesn't mean that it's to be taken literally when you apply it to God (as
the Mormons do) and think that God has some sort of a humanoid body. Rather, it's a
metaphor when it's applied to God. When the Scriptures say that the arm of the Lord was
with the people of Israel, what it means is something like that God's power was with them
or that he was strengthening them or that God's favor was upon them with strength and
might. In saying that “arm” means limb, if you could show that everywhere the word
“arm” is used in Scripture it means a limb, that wouldn't do anything to show that the
word is not being used metaphorically to refer to something else. In exactly the same
way, even if yom is always used in Scripture to refer to a 24-hour day, that doesn't even
begin to address the question of whether a 24-hour day might not be used metaphorically
for something else. So I don't think that these arguments in favor of the literal
interpretation are at all compelling.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Is there any problem interpreting it as 24-hour days for the first six days of
creation?

Dr. Craig: I'm not saying that the literal interpretation is invalid or untenable. I think that
it is a tenable interpretation. They could be read this way. But I am saying that it's not
obligatory. I don't think that Bible-believing Christians have to read it literally.
Student: A couple of comments. First, I would say that if you go to the Genesis account when he details the first few days of creation, man wasn't there. We weren't there. I mean, whatever they wrote down was not from their own experience. If God told them, This is the way it was done, that's fine. And God could have created the world exactly as we see it in a split second. I mean, he's capable of more things. We don't need to go there. My comment is in the book of Deuteronomy. He also talks about the seven-year period in terms of doing your cropping, your farming, and he says six years you do all your planting and sowing and reaping; on the seventh you let the land sit and do nothing. Not only does he do that, but then he goes on to say, And you do that for six times. So he carried it from six and seven years up to forty-eight and forty-nine years. And the seventh year is the year of Jubilee – the fiftieth year. So it seems to me it's more like a pattern and not so much meant or intended to be taken literally. I'm not saying you can't but what's the purpose?

Dr. Craig: I find that very helpful, and I'm glad you've drawn our attention to it because it's not simply the workweek that has this six plus one pattern but, as you also say, the crop rotation and the Jubilee year. You also let your slaves go free or your indentured servants. There it's not the duration of the time so much as it is the pattern that's important. That's very helpful.

Student: What do you think, or what's your comment on, that it repeats “in the evening, in the morning” was the first day. “In the evening, in the morning,” the second day.

Dr. Craig: Good question. I am persuaded that that is indicative of a 24-hour day. There the day seems to go from morning until morning and that is a 24-hour day. But, as I say, that doesn't even begin to address the question of whether 24-hour days can't be used metaphorically for something else. So that would be like someone's trying to prove every time “arm” is used, it's a limb, and so therefore it's to be interpreted literally as a limb. What I'm suggesting is these 24-hour days that are described in Genesis needn't be interpreted literally even though I think you're quite right that that expression “and it was evening, and it was morning, a second day” does indicate that it's talking about a day and night 24-hour period.

Student: It's interesting to me – talking about that – that it says “evening and morning” because Hebrews never would have referred to evening to morning as a day. That's actually the night hours. It's telling us right away there's something poetic or non-literal happening there because it would have either been evening to evening the first day, or it would have been morning to evening the first day. But it never would have been evening to morning.

Dr. Craig: It's very curious, isn't it? I'm going to say something about that in a moment, but in this expression “it was evening, and it was morning” it is the evening of one day
and then the morning is the morning of the next day. So it would be, for example, the 
evening of the second day but then the morning is the third day. It is curious and seems to 
be reckoning the days from morning to morning but expressing it in this way that, as you 
suggest, it was evening and it was morning.

Student: I was also going to mention, as far as trying to interpret this literally, it is 
interesting there are four different literal translations of the word *yom*. So it doesn't have 
to be a 24-hour day. It can be any hours of a day like when we say that Jesus was 
crucified on Friday – that was day one because it's just a few hours on Friday. It can be all 
of the daylight hours of a day. It can be the 24-hour day. Or it can be a finite but limited 
period of time in the past, like we would say “back in the day of Abraham Lincoln.” So 
even among people who want to insist on a literal interpretation, there are four literal 
interpretations. So the longer period is certainly possible.

Dr. Craig: Yes, well, I think here the expression about the evening and the morning is 
telling in terms of he's thinking of a 24-hour period.

Student: I was always intrigued with, when you go back to the creation days, on the 
seventh day it says we're still in God's rest, the seventh day. It always intrigued me 
because . . . I don't want to go as far as asking if that's a proof text but is that a proof text 
against a literal interpretation?

Dr. Craig: I am going to come back to that in a moment, and I think it does tend to cut 
against the literalist interpretation because the seventh day isn't a 24-hour period of time.

Student: It says we’re still in it, too.

Dr. Craig: We're still in the seventh day of God's sabbath rest where he ceased from 
creation.

END DISCUSSION

That forms a nice segue to the next section.

Let me offer some critique now indicates of the literalist interpretation. What I want to 
argue here is that there are indications in the text itself that six consecutive 24-hour days 
are not intended by the author. I want to emphasize: I'm saying this not on the basis of 
modern science (this is not concordism), but rather on the basis of the text itself wholly in 
abstraction from what modern science might have to say.

For example, we've already referred to the fact that the phrase “and it was evening and it 
was morning” is not mentioned with respect to the seventh day. That suggests that the 
seventh day is still ongoing. God is still in his day of sabbath rest. He is no longer 
creating new things. God is still resting from the work of creation. So if this seventh day
can be more flexibly understood then why couldn't the others be more flexibly understood as well?

Moreover, notice that throughout the first chapter of Genesis that evening is mentioned before the morning, as has already been said. The evening marks the first day and then the morning is the morning of the following day so that it is reckoned from morning to morning. A problem that has bedeviled interpreters from earliest times is the fact that God doesn't make the sun until the fourth day. But if that's the case then how could the previous days have been 24-hour days marked by an evening and a morning if there wasn't any sun to create solar days? One young earth creationist whom I have read on this writes:

> It is only in the last few centuries that astronomers have realized that a day/night cycle needs only light plus rotation. Having day and evening and morning without the sun would have been generally inconceivable to the ancients.

Now, he takes this as therefore indicative of divine revelation – God put something into Genesis 1 that the ancients themselves would never have realized and understood. But, you see, that's concordism. That's to say that you read Genesis in light of modern astronomy which teaches that the Earth rotates on its axis – something that the ancient author and audience would not have understood or said. I think it's better to just take this non-literally – that it's a figurative story that needn't be taken in a literal fashion.

Furthermore, notice something very peculiar when it comes to the third day. In Genesis 1:11-12 we read:

> Then God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them”; and it was so.
> The earth brought forth vegetation . . .

Notice here it does not say that God simply said, *Let there be trees and plants bearing seed and bearing fruit*. Rather, he says, *Let the Earth bring forth these things*, and then the Earth brought forth vegetation, fruit trees, and so forth. We all know how long it takes, for example, for an apple tree to grow from a tiny sapling to a mature fruit bearing tree which will blossom and bear apples. If the author were thinking here of a 24-hour period of time, he would have to be imagining something that would look like time-lapse photography where you would have the seed sprout and the little plant burst out of the ground and suddenly grow up into a tree, the blossoms would flower, and then the fruit would pop out on the tree. I simply can't persuade myself that that's what this ancient author of Genesis is imagining. It would be like a film being run on fast forward if the Earth would bring forth vegetation bearing seed according to its kind, and fruit trees bearing fruit according to their kinds, in a literal 24-hour day. I think it's very plausible to
think that the author here is not imagining this happening in a literal 24-hour period of time.

Also notice that when God creates Adam and Eve this appears to involve more than a 24-hour period of time. Because he goes on in chapter two to describe Adam’s activity on this day in naming all of the animals that God brings to him – the hundreds and thousands of animals that must have been known to ancient Israelites. Getting acquainted with their habits, realizing that he is alone, that there is no mate fit for him among these animals, falling asleep, Eve's finally being created, and then when Eve at last comes and is presented before Adam, he exclaims, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh! The word here “at last” indicates that some period of time has gone by. There has been a period of waiting. Elsewhere this phrase is used in the book of Genesis to indicate a long time of waiting. So that would again suggest that the author didn't see this description as being necessarily transpiring in a 24-hour period of time.

For these and other reasons, I think that one can quite legitimately approach Genesis 1-3 with greater flexibility than the literal interpretation would allow. This would imply that the creation account is not meant to be transpiring over six consecutive 24-hour days. Again, this isn't to say that a literal interpretation is illegitimate. It's a perfectly feasible interpretation of Genesis. But it is to say that we shouldn't box ourselves in to thinking that this is the only legitimate interpretation. Young earth creationists who regard anybody who takes a non-literal view of these passages as somehow an unbiblical compromiser or courting heresy, I think, are simply mistaken and overly narrow. There are good indications in the text itself (wholly apart from considerations of modern science) that the text is not meant to be taken literally.

Historically, it's interesting that many of the church fathers and rabbis down through history did not take Genesis 1 to refer to six consecutive 24-hour days. People like St. Augustine and Origen and Justin Martyr and others of the church fathers took these not to be 24-hour periods of time. So there's always been among rabbis and Christian church fathers a range of interpretation. Some of them do take the passage literally, but others take it figuratively. It has never been a touchstone of orthodoxy to ask whether or not you believe that the world was created in six 24-hour days. So, although the literal interpretation is one legitimate interpretation, I don’t think that it's the only one.

With that, we are out of time. We'll begin next time by taking any questions that you have over that critique.4

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4 Total Running Time: 29:23 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)
Lecture 4: The Gap and Day-Gap Interpretations

Last time we looked at the literal interpretation of Genesis chapter 1. Today we want to turn to a quite different interpretation which has been called the “gap interpretation.” This is a view that was popularized by the old Scofield Reference Bible. It holds that there is a gap of time between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis chapter 1, and that all of the evidence of fossil life, extinct life forms, and so forth were from an ancient world that existed prior to the state described in Genesis 1:2 and which came under God's judgment and was destroyed. What is described in verses 2 and following then is God's re-creation (in effect) of the world after a long gap. So this view would say that all of the evidence that we have in contemporary science of ancient geological periods, prehistoric life, and the antiquity of life forms is from that pre-gap world.

What might we say by way of assessment of this theory? I think that there could well be a gap of time between verses 1 and 2 in Genesis chapter 1. Verse 1 describes, as we have seen, God's creation of the universe, or “the heavens and the Earth.” Then in verse 2 the focus radically narrows to God's activity upon the Earth – “and the Earth was without form and void” – and God's transformation of the Earth from an uninhabitable waste to a place which is fit for human habitation. So I think there could well be a gap of time between the creation of the universe in verse 1 and the transformation of the surface of the Earth into a biosphere suitable for human habitation.

Some young earth creationists, eager to maintain that God's creation of the universe in six consecutive 24-hour days, have insisted that there cannot be a gap between verses 1 and 2. Rather, God's creation of the heavens and the Earth in verse 1 must be comprised within the six days of creation. The issue that they are raising here is in effect: when did day 1 begin? Did day 1 begin with the creation of light in verse 3, or did day 1 begin with God's creation of the heavens and the Earth in verse 1? In support of the view that day 1 begins in verse 1 these interpreters appeal to the grammatical form of verse 2. They argue, as I have previously in our discussion of creatio ex nihilo that the first verse should not be thought of as a title for the entire creation account because it is linked to the second verse by the Hebrew word vav or “and” – “and the Earth was without form and void,” etc. So this is not simply a title but it is joined by this Hebrew conjunction to the second verse. But these scholars would point out that the grammatical structure of verse 2 is not the typical form in Hebrew of a sequential narrative which would be the conjunction vav plus a verb in the imperfect tense plus a subject of the sentence. This form is known as the “vav-consecutive,” and that is not the form that verse 2 takes grammatically. Rather, it is vav plus immediately the subject of the sentence – “and the Earth was without form and void” – followed by the verb in the perfect tense. So this is not a vav-consecutive and therefore does not describe the state of affairs in verse 2 to
follow chronologically on the state described in verse 1. These two states, then, are not temporally sequential, and therefore there cannot be a gap between them. Moreover these interpreters appeal once again to the Pentateuchal author’s comment in Exodus 20:11, “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them.” And Exodus 31:17, “for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested.” That comprises in the six days the events of Genesis 1:1 which says that in the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth. In [Exodus] 20:11 and 31:17 says, “in six days” the Lord made the heavens and the Earth. So the events of verse 1 must be included in day 1 since they are part of the six days of creation. So day 1 begins with God's creation of the heavens and the Earth in the beginning, and it ends with the morning of the second day.

I, myself, do not find these arguments convincing. I think that the most natural interpretation of the passage is that day 1 begins with God's creation of the light. Genesis 1:3-5 says,

And God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

What could be more obvious? The author says, “God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.” It seems to me that the most natural understanding of this is that this marks the creation of the first day.

Notice that when the author says “there was evening and there was morning, one day,” the evening refers to the fading of the daylight that God had created, and the morning refers to the morning of the next day. The evening doesn't refer to the primordial darkness and the morning to the creation of daylight for then there would be no morning for the second day. Evening refers to the evening of or the ending of the day light of day 1, not to the primordial darkness. So day 1 begins with God's creation of light.

I think that support for this view comes from the pattern of the other five days. Each day is marked by the phrase “there was evening and there was morning,” and then which day it is. Each day begins with a new morning after the evening of the previous day. There's no reason to make day 1 an exception to this pattern that is exhibited by all the other days.

As for the grammatical argument, it is correct that what follows chronologically on verse 1 is the state of affairs described in verse 3 – “and God said, ‘Let there be light.”’ What we have in verse 2 is a circumstantial clause giving background information to verse 3. This is called a “vav-disjunctive” construction. We can translate verse 2 as follows: Now the Earth was without form and void. It is a circumstantial clause describing the situation
that obtained when God in verse 3 began his creative work. I don’t think there's anything that would preclude a gap of time between the state described in verse 1 and the beginning of God's activity described in verse 3 when he acts to bring about an end to the state of primordial darkness and desolation.

As for Exodus 20:11 and 31:17, I think that the six-day creationist is pressing these verses too hard to make them say things that were not in the mind of the author. The author is thinking back on Genesis chapter 1, and he's referring to these six creative days related there. I doubt that it even entered his mind as to whether the first day began with verse 1 or verse 3. His statement is just a sort of general summary statement that doesn't mean to address the question of when the first day began. Notice if we do press these verses with a wooden literalness then it actually backfires on the six-day creationist. Exodus 31:17 says, “in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested.” But in Genesis 1 on this interpretation God made the heavens and the earth in one day – the first day. God made the heavens and the Earth, according to Genesis 1:1, on what they would count is the first day. Now, that would be a ridiculously literal interpretation of Exodus 31:17. But if we interpret the verse in a more natural way then when day 1 began just doesn’t come into view. It's not the author's interest. So it seems to me that there could well have been a gap of time between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:3.

Having said that, however, the idea that there was a prior life world before God's creative activity in verse 3 is utterly foreign to the text. The text to all appearances is describing God's initial creation of the biosphere, and on each occasion it pronounces the goodness of God's creative work. The idea that this is just all a repeat of something that's gone on before has absolutely no warrant in the text. Remember, this is supposed to be a pre-flood recreation. This isn't a recreation of the world after the flood. This is prior to Noah, and there's simply nothing in the text that would support a view like the gap theory.

Indeed, the gap interpretation seems to be an example of concordism at its very worst. Under the pressure of the existence of prehistoric life and a geological time and the vast age of the universe, one reads things into the text like a prior world and a gap that were not at all intended by the author. So this is guilty, I think, of this flawed hermeneutic in terms of how we interpret Genesis 1.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* I want to use a different perspective to look at the seven days of creation. We all kind of look at it in time, but what if we just take the time away and God's creation actually is in classification or put in the boundary into the first day, light and darkness, the second day, water above and water below, the third day sea and the land, the fourth day is the boundary of the time where he set the rhythm of year and season. So the fifth day is a boundary of species in the ocean and in the sky. The sixth day is boundary of
species on the land. And the last is boundary of male and female . . . in their proper course.

_Dr. Craig:_ All right. Very good. You have anticipated one of the later interpretations that we're going to talk about in this class. Those who champion what is often called a literary framework view will take the view that the chronology of the story is not meant to be taken seriously or literally; this is a literary structuring of creation. You've specified it in terms of boundaries; others will say it's a classification in terms of spaces and then the things that populate those spaces, but this isn't meant to be interpreted chronologically. I want to put that off until we get to it because we will be talking about it. But the view that you are expressing is not unusual or aberrant. It is one that is very much in the conversation today. So we'll come back to that.

_Student:_ I was wondering if you are familiar with John Sailhamer’s take on the gap theory – that the gap is not in between verses 1 and 2 but it's actually found in the word “in the beginning.” That the word “beginning” itself means a block of time as opposed to a moment of time.

_Dr. Craig:_ You've expressed it very well. John Sailhamer was my colleague at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the Old Testament Department. His contention is that the word in Genesis 1:1 “in the beginning” refers to a period of time, not to an instant of time. It would be much as if we would say something like “in the beginning of the Trump administration, the mandate in Obamacare was repealed by Congress.” There the word “beginning” doesn't mean the first instant of the Trump administration. I'm not persuaded by Sailhamer’s arguments that it has to be that way. I think that he's right that the word “beginning” is flexible and could refer to, for example, the first year of a king’s reign or something of that sort. But I don't see any reason that the word “beginning” can't be shrunk down to refer to say the first second if you wanted to. It's an indeterminate amount of time. He admits that. So there's no basis for saying that this beginning means a sort of long period. It seems to me the beginning could be the first moment of creation at which God created the heavens and the Earth. So I'm not persuaded that Sailhamer has shown that the word “beginning” has to refer to a long protracted interval of time even if it does refer to an interval rather than an instant.

_Student:_ In my own study of the word I seem to come to the opposite conclusion that the word does always refer to the first part of the whole of something in comparison to its length. So it's even referred to as “bring the first fruits of your” . . . it's like the tithe.

_Dr. Craig:_ That would be analogous to my Trump illustration where the beginning of the Trump administration refers to something like his first year or the first several months, but it's not the whole tenure. That would be in line with what you're saying – “beginning”
could specify an indeterminate interval of time that is near the front end – the earliest part of some longer duration.

_Student:_ He gives a good illustration in Jeremiah 28:1 which says, *In the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah in the fourth year in the fifth month.* And Zedekiah’s reign is 11 years long, so four years and five months into his reign is still considered the beginning. It is the same exact construction in the Hebrew “in the beginning” there.

_Dr. Craig:_ Yes, you are making the same point that I was. Very good.

_Student:_ I just want to know what verse you were referring to in Exodus.

_Dr. Craig:_ There were two verses. 20:11 and 31:17.

**END DISCUSSION**

Let’s go on to the next interpretation which is the day-gap interpretation. The first one is the gap interpretation; now we want to look at the day-gap interpretation. The day-gap interpretation holds that what we have described in Genesis 1 is six 24-hour *non-consecutive* days. There are long gaps of time in between God’s creative acts. So, on day 1 God miraculously creates, for example, the land. And then there’s a long period of time during which things might evolve. And then he begins to bring into existence various life forms and allows them to evolve. And then he intervenes again on another creative day and miraculously creates, for example, land animals and allows them to propagate for a long period of time before he intervenes again and creates humanity. So you have six 24-hour days, but these days are separated by long intervals of time during which time the things that God has created may develop and evolve.

What might we say by way of assessment of this interpretation? Again, I think one has to say that there’s nothing in the text that would suggest the day-gap interpretation. On the contrary, each morning is the morning of the consecutive day. Each day ends with the evening and then the morning of the following day is when the new day begins. Given that we’re talking about the evening of a day and then the morning of the next day, there isn’t any room for a gap. One day follows immediately upon the heels of the other. So I don’t think that there’s anything in the text that would indicate that there are gaps of time between these six days. Indeed, that seems to be ruled out by the pattern of evening and morning.

The motivation behind this view seems to be once again a desire to reconcile the text with geological time and limited evolutionary development of life forms by reading gaps into the text in order to extend the past and allow for limited evolution during the gaps. Insofar as this view tends to be motivated by an attempt to reconcile Genesis 1 with modern science, it again represents the flawed hermeneutic of concordism once again.
Ironically, it doesn't even do a very good job at that! Because modern science indicates that the animals, for example, were not created in just a 24-hour period of time, but rather over millions of years. The idea that all aquatic life, for example, was created in 24 hours and that there was then a period of non-creative development and then another 24 hour period millions of years later when all terrestrial life was created just flies in the face of the fossil record. So insofar as the day-gap interpretation is an attempt motivated by the desire to find concord with modern science, it really doesn't do a very good job.

But all of that is beside the point anyway because at this stage you'll remember we're not asking about what the right scientific view is of the origin of life or biological complexity. We're simply asking the hermeneutical question: what does this ancient text teach? The day-gap interpretation doesn't really find any support in the text. There isn't a clue that this ancient text is intended to teach that there were long gaps of time in between the days. Indeed, quite the contrary. This is a view that's read into the text, and I think even contrary to the text because of its pattern of “evening and morning, one day.”

START DISCUSSION

Student: I think those that might support the view, which would include John Lennox in his book Seven Days That Divide the World, he tended towards this view.

Dr. Craig: So is Lennox not what I would call a day-age theorist? That the days represent long ages of time?

Student: It's hard to find in that little book that he wrote, but towards the end he leans towards the intermittent days view, what I call it. What he would say is that the fulfillment of what God said was not done in the 24 hours but was done during the gap of time in between.

Dr. Craig: OK. I think that's a quite different view than the one that we're thinking of here. The view that is suggested here seems to be that we have six days of revelation (or divine declaration) but not necessarily, as you say, the fulfillment of that declaration or revelation on that 24-hour period. That would be yet a different view that we'll have to talk about later.

Student: I like to treat this subject kind of positively. My comment is if you look at when God told Moses to tell the Hebrews that he was taking them out of Egypt, they tended (after the first few plagues) to doubt that, and they got very (as my Bible says) dispirited because it didn't happen right away. Is it possible that God said, *Let there be light,* and there was light not instantaneously but at some point after that? Would that fit in with the linguistics?

Dr. Craig. With that specific example, I don't think it would work because, again, the text says, *God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light, and he called the light Day.*
There just doesn't seem to be any reason to think that there was a long period of time. That comes close to the view that was just expressed here that God said, *Let the Earth bring forth vegetation, fruit trees bearing seed after their kind, and fruit after their kind* – one could well imagine that that might take place over a long period of time in accordance with what you've suggested.

I hope that you're not dispirited by what I've been sharing here! I want to give a survey of different interpretations, but that doesn't mean they're all good or insusceptible to criticism. Too often in the church we have Bible studies where people are just supposed to share how they understand or what does it mean to them and it's all subjective and there's no attempt to give any objective assessment of the views. I think we can do better than that. I think some interpretations are less plausible than others and open to criticism. But there shouldn't be dispiriting. I hope that it will increase your interest in the text and in understanding it.

*Student:* Just to finish up on what you said. I have so many things in the Bible that I've read and that I don't understand. I always put them up on the shelf in my “This I don't understand” library which is absolutely full of things up on the shelf that I don't understand because I'm not God.

*Dr. Craig:* I've got a shelf like that, too! I think that every thinking Christian will have those questions on the shelf.

**END DISCUSSION**

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Lecture 5: The Day-Age Interpretation

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

START DISCUSSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Dr. Craig*: As I say, my information is that it's been one that's been held by some of the church fathers and then down through history by various commentators. But I am at a loss to name specifically at this point who they might have been. I didn't anticipate that question.
Student: I’ve got a quote here from Augustine to answer the question. From the *City of God* he wrote (and this is in, I guess, about 410 he wrote it):

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

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

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

In *Confessions*, Augustine noted that for the seventh day Genesis makes no mention of an evening and a morning. He deduced from this omission that God sanctified the seventh day, making it an epoch extending onward into eternity.⁶

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

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

Student: Yes.


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

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

Student: Going back to the previous day-gap. I re-read *Seven Days To Change the World* by John Lennox. Great book. He pointed out in connection with this that the first five

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⁶ The student is reading from the document “A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy” by Hugh Ross, pages 13 and 14. That document provides citations for the Augustine writings it quotes. A copy of this document can be found at: [https://alta3b.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/matter-of-days.pdf](https://alta3b.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/matter-of-days.pdf) (accessed February 13, 2019).
days don't have the definite article *ho* for saying “the day” for the first five but only the last two. So he makes the point that the grammar would allow for extended days, whether you would take this view or not. Anyway, that was his point.

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

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

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

**END DISCUSSION**

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

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

**START DISCUSSION**

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

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

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

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

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

_Dr. Craig_: He certainly could. As you say, the creation of Adam and Eve, or the sun, the moon, and the stars doesn't seem to be the result of a long process. But the third day to me is just so striking that God doesn't say, *Let there be fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind; let there be vegetation bearing seed after their kind.* Rather, what he declares is, *Let the earth bring forth vegetation bearing seed after its kind and fruit trees bearing fruit*
after its kind. And it was so. The earth brought forth these things. There you do not seem to have a sort of instantaneous creation of the biosphere on the Earth but rather a gradual generation of the vegetation from the ground.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Student: Before I was saved, I was kind of one of those people that believed in evolution. Praying and asking God, “Did you create it all?” he brought me to this verse and revealed to me that seeds don’t evolve. He actually put the seed within the fruit. He created the tree with the fruit and the seed in it already.
Dr. Craig: Is that what you are suggesting? That's not what I read in the text. It says, *Let the earth bring forth the vegetation, plants yielding their seed, and fruit trees bearing their fruit.* It sounds like a very natural process to me.

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

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

Student: You said peaches that have a stone?

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

Student: But the pit would be the seed right?

Dr. Craig: Yes.

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

Dr. Craig: Yes.

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

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

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

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

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

Dr. Craig: Except that it doesn’t say that. If it said, *Let there be fruit trees with fruit on them and let there be plants with seeds in them,* that's what I would say it teaches. But it doesn't say that. It says that the earth brought forth these things; that they grew up out of the ground.
Student: A lot of translations don't make day 3 sound very good. There's actually two Hebrew verbs there that's used. The New American Standard says, *Let the earth sprout sprouts.* The noun and the verb are the same. It means new growth. And then verse 12 says, *And the earth produced,* which is the same word on day 6 – that the earth produces land animals as well. So it's, *Let the earth sprout plants.* That word “yielding” is actually the Hebrew word *dasha* – so it's causing or making seeds. So it’s, *Let the earth sprout plants that make seeds* is what it's saying. Not let there be trees with the seeds in them. It's, *Let the earth sprout.* And then it says, *and the earth produced.*

Dr. Craig: OK, good. Thank you.

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

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

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

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

**END DISCUSSION**

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

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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. 8
Lecture 7: The Literary Framework and the Functional Creation Interpretations

Today we turn to a new interpretation of Genesis chapter 1 which is called the literary framework interpretation. The literary framework view has been very ably explained and defended by the French biblical scholar Henri Blocher in his book *In the Beginning*.\(^9\) According to this view, the author of Genesis is not interested in chronology. He is not attempting to relate one day after another in a chronological fashion. Rather, the days serve as a sort of literary framework on which he hangs his account of creation. He wants to describe how God creates all of life, all of the world, and he uses the framework of a week of six days as a literary structure on which to hang his account. But he doesn't intend for this six-day week to be taken literally in a chronological fashion.

Now, ever since the Middle Ages, commentators have noticed that there seems to be a sort of parallelism between days 1 to 3 and days 4 to 6. Blocher maintains that on the first three days God creates the domain (or the space) for a certain thing to inhabit, and then on the second three days he creates the occupants of that space or domain. So, for example, on day 1 he creates day and night, and then on day 4 he creates the sun, moon, and stars. On day 2 he creates the firmament which separates the waters above from the waters below. Corresponding to this is day 5 when he creates the sea creatures which will live in the waters below and the birds which will fly in the sky above. And then, on day 3, we have the creation of the dry land as well as the vegetation, and parallel to that is day 6 in which God creates the terrestrial animals and finally man. So 1 and 4 are correlated, 2 and 5 are correlated, and 3 and 6 are correlated. Notice that on days 3 and 6 you also have a parallel in that you have a double creation on those days. On 3 you have both the dry land and the vegetation created by God, and on day 6 you have both the terrestrial animals as well as man created on day 6.

So the idea of the literary framework hypothesis is that the first three days described the habitats or the domains, and then on the second three days he describes the denizens or the occupants of those domains. So the creation account is not intended to be chronological. It’s thematic. The creation week is a sort of thematic or literary framework on which he hangs a non-chronological account of creation.

What might be said by way of critique of this interpretation? Well, I think we have to admit that this is an extremely interesting view which deserves careful consideration. But I have to confess to being skeptical about the alleged parallelism between days 1 to 3 and days 4 to 6. A closer reading of the text seems to reveal that these are not, in fact, exactly correlated.

parallel. For example, what corresponds to God's creating the sun, moon, and stars on day 4? It's not the separation of day and night. It's the creation of the firmament on day 2. On day 2, God creates the firmament. On day 4 he places the sun, moon, and stars in the firmament. The literary or verbal connection between the two is indisputable. So really 4 describes the inhabitants of the domain created on day 2, namely the firmament.

Moreover, what corresponds to the creation of the sea creatures on day 5? Well, again, it's not the waters above and the waters below. It's the creation of the seas on day 3. Now, admittedly, there are waters above and waters below that are separated on day 2, but the waters below are not gathered into seas until day 3 when the dry land appears and the water then gathers into seas, and it is in the seas that the sea creatures are created. Therefore, that's again the parallel between the domain and the inhabitant of that domain.

Finally, on day 3 we have God creating not only the dry land but also the vegetation which seems to be the inhabitant of the dry land. Both of them are created on the same day. I think it would be a real stretch to say that vegetation is the domain that's inhabited by animals and man. It seems to me that this parallelism that has been constructed is not something that's really there in the text but rather it's imposed on the text by the mind of the interpreter.

Fortunately, I don't think that the literary framework interpretation stands or falls with whether we see the framework in terms of parallelism of domains and inhabitants. When we get to the functional creation interpretation we'll see another option for understanding the correlation between the days, but it does not seem that Blocher’s interpretation is one that does justice to the text. Nevertheless, I do think that the idea of a literary framework is interesting and deserves consideration.

Moreover, I'm not convinced that the chronology in the narrative is not to be taken seriously. The chronology on the literary framework view is meaningless, but surely the idea of numbering the consecutive days with ordinal numbers (2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th) and the progression from desolation and lifelessness up through life (plants, animals, and then finally man) does seem to suggest chronology. There seems to be a temporal development going on here. I think it's hard to resist the impression that the narrative intends to portray a temporal progression that finally ends with God's resting from the work of creation on the seventh and the final day. Blocher admits that creation over a period of time is a common motif in ancient creation myths, so why think that the motif is here non-chronological? Mere parallelism between the days doesn't suffice to disprove any interest in chronology on the part of the author.

So, for those two reasons, I find myself rather skeptical of the literary framework hypothesis.

START DISCUSSION
Dr. Craig: Let's explain the terms here in case people didn't hear what was asked. He said: *Is this an example of exegesis or eisegesis?* Now, what does that mean? Well, *ex* means “out of” and so this would be to draw the meaning of the text out of the text. *Eis* is the Greek word meaning “into” and so the practice of eisegesis would be reading things into the text. We sometimes call this reading between the lines. The question here is: Is Blocher’s literary framework view an example of eisegesis? I said I don't want to be uncharitable. It's not as though the view is indefensible. It's just that I'm not persuaded that these parallels really exist. In that case it does seem to me that one is reading the parallelism into the text and that it's not actually found there. For example, day and night are not the domains or the space that is inhabited by the sun, moon, and stars. They are in the expanse or in the firmament, and so that correlation just doesn't seem to exist. And vegetation isn't a space or a domain. That you would expect to be over here. If I were making a parallel, I'd say he created the dry land then over here he created the vegetation to inhabit the dry land. But that's not the way it is. So I do think that there is a kind of reading in here.

Student: Though I disagree with the framework view because I think the days are literal instead of metaphorical, as a way of supporting it, day 4 does use terminology from day 1 when it says the purpose of the lights is for separating the day and the night so there is that phrase that's repeated from day 1. The birds are specifically spoken of as flying across the face of the firmament or the expanse. So there's a connection there.

Dr. Craig: Before I forget your points, let me just respond briefly. You're quite right. One of the functions of the astral bodies is to mark the difference between day and night, but my point is that day and night isn't a domain. It's not a space that's inhabited by the sun and the moon though you're quite right that they have the function of marking it. Similarly, I didn't deny that you could make a parallel here of the birds with the firmament. My complaint was more with the sea creatures.

Student: The way I’ve heard it is not so much as domain. It's more like it could be domain but then the second part is what is filling the domain. So, in other words, the sun, moon, and stars are the cause of the lights; the sea creatures, the birds are the things that are filling the sky and the seas.

Dr. Craig: That sounds like inhabitants and domain to me, and I don't see that sun, moon, and stars which caused the night and day to be inhabiting them. They're placed in the firmament or in the expanse. They caused the day and night and measure it.

Student: I sort of semi-explained last week that my interpretation of the firmament – what’s expanding – is the view of the heavens. So the firmament is limited on day 2. On
day 1, if you had been there on day 1, you wouldn't have been able to see what was causing the lights because there was no firmament at that point.

Dr. Craig: Yes, I understand.

Student: So, yes, there is day and night, but we're still talking about heavens. Anyhow, on 3 and 6, animals and man do live on the dry land, and of course are specifically said to eat the vegetation, and the vegetation that's mentioned on day 3 are specifically for – two of the parts of it – are that which is for mankind.

Dr. Craig: Yeah. Again, my complaint wasn't that there isn't some correlation here between 6 and 3, but that the correlation is more naturally between the second element of 3 and the first element of 3. That's where it seems to me you have domain and then the inhabitant created. The vegetation, to me, seems out of place if we're talking about domains and the stuff that fills the domain.

END DISCUSSION

Let’s turn to the next interpretation which is called functional creation. The Old Testament scholar John Walton in his book The Lost World of Genesis One has defended a view which he calls functional creation. This view has, as of recent years, I think become quite influential. Again, the author's name is John Walton, and of his many books The Lost World of Genesis One makes this case. Walton maintains that the notion of creation in the ancient Near East has been universally misunderstood by contemporary scholars. We understand creation to be about how material things come into existence when, in fact, in the ancient world it was really about specifying the functions that material things should carry out. It wasn't about the creation of those material things, but about specifying the function they would fill. Walton gives the very engaging illustration of a restaurant. He says when does a restaurant begin to exist? He would say it is not when the original building was constructed. That building might have been originally a warehouse, for example, and now there's been some urban renewal and the building has been renovated and turned into a restaurant. The restaurant begins to exist when that building starts to function as a restaurant – when it gets a license, opens the doors, and begins to carry out the functions of a restaurant. And to say that the restaurant began to exist in, say, 2013 doesn't mean that that's when the building was created. It may have been there for a long time. His claim is that Genesis 1, similarly, is not about God's bringing the earth, the land, the vegetation, the animals, etc. into existence. Rather, it's about his declaring their functions in the created order relative to humanity. The seven days are taken to be literal consecutive days during which the universe is inaugurated to

function as God's cosmic temple in which he will dwell. The seventh day is the climax of this inauguration. When God comes to reside in his temple, it is not the end of God's creative work whereby he brings these things into existence. Rather, it is that the functions of everything have now been fully specified, its functionaries have been installed to carry out those functions, and so now God comes to reside in his cosmic temple which is the world.

Walton claims that the functional creation interpretation is a literal interpretation of the text. It is not figurative or literary. It is about seven literal consecutive days of creation. It's just that creation didn't mean what everyone has taken it to mean. Genesis 1 is to be literally interpreted, but it is wholly about functional creation – about specifying the functions that things should fill, and it is not about the creation of material things.

What might be said by way of critique about the functional creation interpretation? First of all, I think there is a desperate need for terminological clarification concerning this view. Walton draws a very firm dichotomy between what he calls material ontology and functional ontology, or between material creation and functional creation. Unfortunately, this terminology is nowhere clearly and carefully defined, and as a result it tends to be extremely misleading and inaccurate. When Walton talks about material creation, it is far from clear exactly what he understands that to be. One might think that he means simply the coming into being of a physical object through God's causation. God causes the physical object to come into being. But it seems that Walton means more than that by material creation. He seems to think that if God creates a material object, he must do so ex nihilo; that is to say, out of nothing. Material creation for Walton seems to mean not merely that the object comes into being at that point but that it comes into being from nothing. It seems to me that this is obviously mistaken. It's wrongheaded. For example, the efficient cause of a chair doesn't have to create the material out of which the chair is made. When a carpenter makes a chair, he is the efficient cause of the chair, but the lumber is the material cause of the chair. Now, the question is not whether God creates the various organisms in Genesis 1 ex nihilo. There's no reason to make such a claim. On the contrary, in fact, God says of the plants and the animals “let the earth bring forth, etc.” And the creation of man described in Genesis chapter 2 involves God's forming the man out of the dust of the earth. So there isn't any reason to think that creation in Genesis has to be creation ex nihilo. Rather, the question that we're interested in is whether Genesis 1 describes God as the efficient cause of the objects described, whether he uses pre-existing material to make them or not. Or does God merely specify the functions of objects that are already there? Do you see the question? The question is whether Genesis 1 describes God as bringing into being the things that are described whether he uses material or not, or does he merely specify the functions for things that are already in existence?
I think that we have to guard here against erecting false dichotomies. Just because a text speaks of God specifying an object’s function doesn't exclude efficient causation as well. Walton has to show that the text of Genesis 1 is concerned exclusively with functional creation. It is not enough to show that functional creation is involved. He has to show that efficient causation does not come into the picture at all, for if God is the efficient cause of the objects described then they come into being when God creates them whether he creates them *ex nihilo* or out of existing matter. So when we clarify the terminology, I think you can see that Walton has a considerable burden of proof. He needs to show that Genesis 1 involves only the specification of functions for things that exist and not God's bringing them into being at that time.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* This is a two-part question. The first is: does Walton deny *creatio ex nihilo*? And then the second part of the question is this (and this is just a random shot in the dark): do you think Walton might be some sort of mereological nihilist?

*Dr. Craig:* Let's think about the first one first. No, he doesn't deny creation *ex nihilo*. It is true that he thinks that Genesis 1:1 is merely a summary title for the entire chapter, so he would be, I think, of the view that Genesis 1 doesn't teach creation *ex nihilo*. But that doesn't mean he denies it. He doesn't deny it. He would simply say it's not taught there.

Now, your question was: is he a mereological nihilist?

*Student:* Yeah, because I could imagine him saying things don't really come into being; there's just these different arrangements of different particles and there isn't coming into being like a mereological nihilist might think.

*Dr. Craig:* Let's clarify the question. He wants to know if John Walton is a mereological nihilist. I'm sure John Walton has never heard of that, but he could be one even though he'd never heard the nomenclature. Mereology is the philosophical study of parts and wholes – how do parts go together to form composite things. A nihilist, as the name suggests, denies that there are any composite objects; that there really are no podiums or people or planets or chairs. These are simply fundamental particles (like quarks or electrons) arranged podium-wise or chair-wise or planet-wise, but all that exists is really just fundamental particles and there are no composite objects. Now, I don't see anything in Walton that would lead me to think he denies that there are composite objects. I think he most certainly does believe that there are composite objects like the animals, the plants, the sun, the stars. But he would simply say that what we have in Genesis is not the description of their creation. He's denying that what we have here is an account of how they came to exist. Rather, he thinks that it is simply God specifying what the animals are for, what the plants are for, what function the stars and the moon should fulfill, and so forth. So it's not a creation account at all in the way in which moderns understand the
word “creation.” It's just a specification of the function of these different objects which I think he would affirm are real.

Student: In reading his book, Walton makes an interesting statement that if you were to ask the ancient Near Easterners who the account was written to, whether they believed that God was responsible for the material creation, he thinks they would have said “yes” but he doesn't think the account teaches that. What I would like to ask him is if the Bible does teach that somewhere, where does it teach it if not in Genesis? That’s what I would want to ask him.

Dr. Craig: Alright. We're out of time, unfortunately, but we will be spending all of the next period on Walton’s view, and so you'll have an opportunity to ask further questions then.\textsuperscript{11}
Lecture 8: A Critique of John Walton’s Functional Creation Interpretation

Today we want to continue our discussion of John Walton’s functional interpretation of Genesis chapter 1. We ended last time by saying that Walton has an enormous burden of proof with regard to justifying his interpretation. He needs to show that Genesis 1 involves only functional creation and not also the creation of material objects at the same time. Otherwise, his view will reduce to the typical literal interpretation of Genesis 1 that God actually brings into being over the course of six 24-hour days the plants, the animals, the dry land, the astral bodies, and so forth. Walton needs to show that all God does during these six days is to assign functions to material objects.

Can he sustain this burden of proof? Let’s first look at ancient Near Eastern cosmology. Walton claims that when we look at ancient Near Eastern creation myths we find, “people in the ancient world believed that something existed not by virtue of its material properties, but by virtue of its having a function in an ordered system.” But does the evidence support this claim? I think that the answer is clearly no. Walton points out, “Nearly all the creation accounts of the ancient world start their story with no operational system in place. Egyptian texts talk about a singularity – nothing having yet been separated out. All is inert and undifferentiated.” Creation often begins with the primeval waters out of which dry land or gods emerge. You’ll recall that when we discussed creatio ex nihilo we saw that the typical form of these ancient creation myths was “When _____ was not yet, then _____.“ This is the type of form that Walton identifies in the myth of the founding of the Babylonian city of Eridu. This is what this ancient text says:

No holy house, no house of the gods, had been built in a pure place; no reed had come forth, no tree had been created; no brick had been laid, no brickmold had been created; no house had been built, no city had been created; no city had been built, no settlement had been founded; Nippur had not been built, Ekur had not been created; Uruk had not been built, Eanna had not been created; the depths had not been built, Eridu had not been created; no holy house, no house of the gods, no dwelling for them had been created. All the world was sea, the spring in the midst of the sea was only a channel, then was Eridu built, Esagila was created.

This typical form of ancient creation myths is what you find in Genesis 2:5-7:

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13 Ibid., p. 31.
14 Ibid., pp. 78-79.
. . . when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up . . . then the Lord God created man . . .

The descriptions of the primordial world in pagan myths were therefore not the descriptions of material objects according to which plants and animals and buildings and people all existed but merely lacked a function. Rather, they are descriptions of a state in which distinct material objects of these sorts do not exist at all. None of them existed at that time. This is especially evident in the Egyptian myths mentioned by Walton. Egyptian mythology was a form of monism or panentheism. It was an attempt to solve the ancient problem of “the one and the many,” that is to say, what is the unifying factor behind the multiplicity of things that we observe in the world. The monistic answer to this question was to say that originally there was a primordial, undifferentiated, single reality from which then multiplicity evolved or emanated. In these Egyptian myths you have such a primordial, undifferentiated, inchoate, characterless condition out of which then multiplicity evolves. It involves the creation of an orderly system of functioning objects that come into being. It involves the coming into existence of these objects and not just the specification of functions for material objects that were already present. So when Walton concludes, “consequently, to create something (cause it to exist) in the ancient world means to give it a function, not material properties,” he's drawing a false dichotomy which is foreign to these ancient texts.

When it comes to Genesis chapter 1, for this text to feature only functional creation we must imagine that the dry land, the vegetation, the trees, the sea creatures, the birds, the land animals, even man were all there from the beginning but they just were not functioning as an ordered system. But such a view is implausible (not to say ridiculous). It would require us to take as literally false all of the statements about the darkness, the primeval ocean, the emergence of the dry land, the earth's bringing forth vegetation and fruit trees, the waters bringing forth sea creatures, the earth's bringing forth animals, and God's making man. Notice that Walton cannot say that these things can't exist apart from an orderly system, for the moment that you say that then the functional creation view collapses into the traditional view of a six-day creation – actually bringing these things into being over those six days. That's the traditional interpretation. God both brings the things into existence and specifies their role in an ordered system.

Just how bizarre Walton’s interpretation is becomes evident in his statement that the material creation of the biosphere may have gone on for eons prior to Genesis 1:1 and then at some point in the relatively recent past there came a period of seven consecutive 24-hour days during which God specified the functions of everything existing at that

15 Ibid., p. 35.
time. Walton notwithstanding, this is the farthest thing from a literal interpretation of the text that you can have, which he claims his view is. It implies that all of the descriptions of the world at the beginning of and during that relatively recent week are literally false. If you were to ask what would an eyewitness have seen during that week, Walton either begs off answering the question or he admits that the answer is that the world before those seven days would have lacked only humanity in God's image and God's presence in his cosmic temple. In other words, everything looked exactly the same except that the people who existed then had not yet been declared by God to function as his vice regents on Earth, and God had not yet specified the cosmos to function as his temple. An eyewitness would not have observed, and they did not observe on his view, any change whatsoever in the world as a result of that creative week.

If we're to adopt a reading of the text which is so at odds with the text’s prima facie description of the world, we must have extremely powerful evidence, I think, for adopting such an interpretation. So we want to ask next what evidence Walton gives for a purely functional interpretation of Genesis 1.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* I want to dialogue about this from the reference of Proverbs 8:22-31. This is Wisdom speaking.

*Dr. Craig:* OK. Proverbs 8:22-31:

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth; before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight,

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16 Walton says that prior to day one, “The material phase nonetheless could have been under development for long eras . . .” He also claims, “Prior to day one, God’s spirit was active over the nonfunctional cosmos; God was involved but had not yet taken up his residence. The establishment of the functional cosmic temple is effectuated by God taking up his residence on day seven.” (Ibid., pp. 98, 85.)

17 Walton says, “I believe that this is a literal reading. . . . I believe that the reading that I have offered is the most literal reading possible at this point.” (Ibid., p. 170.)

18 Walton says, “The main elements lacking in the ‘before’ picture are therefore humanity in God’s image and God’s presence in his cosmic temple. Without those two ingredients the cosmos would be considered nonfunctional and therefore nonexistent.” (Ibid., p. 97.)
rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men.

Student: The first person is Wisdom, and he says he was before the foundation of the world. This is a possible view where this abstract – we can even say in the beginning was the Word – that Word can equip as this Wisdom. It's an abstract concept that we can think of as God's design. It was there before the material world existed, and God spoke that into material world. So in that view, the functional is actually prior to the material. I want to hear what you think about this.

Dr. Craig: All right. Great question. Clearly this is a reflection on the creation account, isn't it? You see the many parallels. When it speaks of Lady Wisdom here, this is, as you say, a literary personification of an abstract concept. Wisdom is an attribute or property of God, and in the Proverbs Wisdom is personified as a woman who then speaks. She says, *I was with God in the beginning*. It seems to me that the passage we just read clearly supports the view that these objects come into being; that they are created. It's not that they all existed and God merely assigns functions to them. Over and over again in the passage it says there were no depths, before the mountains had been shaved, before the hills. Over and over again it seems to say that there was a condition during which God existed with his Wisdom but all of these material things did not exist, and he brought them into being. It seems to me that this passage would run contrary very much to Walton’s functional view of creation.

Student: Considering your interaction with apologists and theologians around the world basically, how much influence do you think Walton is having? I know he's a prolific writer.

Dr. Craig: Yes, he is!

Student: Everybody that I talked to doesn't really follow his view of Genesis 1 so much as his views on Adam and Eve. I’m just curious what do you think his influence is?

Dr. Craig: I think, at least for a time, it was very extensive. When I was at sessions at the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature on Walton’s view, I was just shocked at how the panel acquiesced so readily in his views, and no one seemed to raise a critique or an objection, which to me are patent! These objections are obvious, I think. Since then, as we'll see in a moment, I think that with some passage of time and greater reflection there is now, I think, increasing skepticism about the viability of the functional interpretation because it requires you to draw this strong dichotomy between material creation and functional creation. He won't allow you to have both in these texts – just assignment of functions. The impression I get is that scholars now are saying that that dichotomy is a false one.
**Student:** We always talk about form follows function, or that you design something so that it functions for what you want it to do, I have a hard time distinguishing creating that dichotomy that you just said.

**Dr. Craig:** That is so interesting that you bring that up. Wasn't that the so-called Bauhaus school of architecture and art? That form follows function? As I recall anyway. I remember we studied this in college.

**Student:** We didn’t consider architecture real engineering, so . . . [laughter]

**Dr. Craig:** The idea of “form follows function” was to eliminate from your designs superfluous decoration that had no function. Things like a Rococo Church. If you've seen how they're just encrusted with decorations and cherubs and all sorts of fanciful things, and the form-follows-function school of thinking was, no, these non-functional elements should be eliminated, and you should create aesthetically pleasing forms that are functional. That seems to me to say that if a designer has a function in mind – for example, a pitcher. He wants to create something that will store and pour water. He will then create a pitcher that is simple, that has a kind of spout, that has a handle, that is able to hold a good amount of water, but he would not create, for example, a pitcher that is in the form of, say, a cow and the water pours out of its mouth into the glass. We’ve all seen pitchers like that. The form-follows-function would say that's a bad design. That seems to me quite consistent with the notion that God designs the world with certain functions in mind, and that then he creates the plants and the animals to carry out these various functions. What Walton’s view requires us to say is that there were these material objects already and that now God assigns functions to them. For example, the vegetation will now serve the function of food for the animals. And the animals will serve the function of controlling the ecosystem by having a viable biosphere. And man will have a different function. On his view, what Genesis 1 involves is seven literal, consecutive days of just assigning functions to things, but they're not coming into being. That seems to me to be just utterly implausible.

**Student:** I recall in a debate awhile ago, you made a comment where your opponent was thinking of God more akin to an engineer as opposed to an artist. How would someone like Walton makes sense of the ostensible waste?

**Dr. Craig:** OK, this does follow up on the last question. I wasn't endorsing the form-follows-function axiom. I was just explaining it. But you might say that the world involves a lot of excess decoration, doesn't it? Corals that grow on beautiful reefs that remain unseen. Wildflowers in the mountains that no one ever sees. Galaxies and stars that are beautiful but are never seen by anyone. So you might say that there is a lot of excess beauty and decoration in the universe that doesn't serve a function. There I am inclined to think that God is more like an artist than like an engineer in that he himself
enjoys the beauty of creation and so creates a beautiful world that reflects him even though we human beings may not see a lot of it, and it might seem to be excessive. I think Walton could say something like that as well. His view isn't that these functions are really narrowly defined like the function of a giraffe’s long neck is to reach the leaves in the trees. It's not that type of function he’s talking about. It's much more general than that. As I said, vegetation serves the function of food for the animals. But it's not implying that cacti have prickles on them or thorns on them as a way of warding off herbivores from eating them. He's not that specific.

Student: On his view, does he really think that God created the world at some point?
Dr. Craig: Yes, he does affirm that. He just says that the account of Genesis chapter 1 is not the story of that. If there was a creation of the world out of nothing, it took place sometime before Genesis 1.

Student: So God created everything but had no function.
Dr. Craig: That's what it seems to imply. That seems mad, doesn’t it? That God created all this stuff and left it sitting around for eons with no function and then finally, in the relatively recent past, he took seven days and declared functions for these things. That just seems contrary to the nature of a wise and provident God. I agree with you. I think it's a bizarre view.

Student: Picking up on Wisdom and Wisdom is there before the depths, to have design you have to have an actualizer. Two things to consider. Where is the angelic creation in relation to this as far as timewise and how it is actualized? And is God just adding more function with this latest creation? Does the fact that the things that are seen are temporal but they depict the things that are really real like spiritual. You have asynchronous reproduction first before you have bisexual, which is symbolic of God giving new hope. That’s how I see things. I could see how you could attribute this latest creation being a top one where everything's mapped to it and God's redeeming the prior fallen because the angelic fall.

Dr. Craig: Walton doesn't speak to those kinds of issues, and I think the reason is because he's not doing a systematic theology of creation. He is an Old Testament scholar who wants to interpret this particular passage in the book of Genesis. The question is very limited: what is this passage about? He thinks, when you read it against the ancient Near Eastern background, what it's about is the assignment of functions to things. He's just not addressing those sorts of deeper theological questions that you raised.

Student: I'm thinking about in order for something to be in existence, it seems like even if it's not functioning it would have the potential to function, like a light switch that’s not turned on yet. In order for something to have potential to function, wouldn't it have to
have other functions already in place? In other words, I'm struggling with the timeline here. Would Walton say that the creation of days were also the correct order of days for things to function properly? Things like a dependent relationship would be involved here. I'm not sure if my question is clear.

*Dr. Craig:* I think you're raising a really good point. It's kind of related to an earlier point, I think. It is very difficult to see how these functions could be assigned to things that were wholly non-functional. It didn't have, for example, working parts. I agree. I think that's right. The view is so bizarre that I wonder sometimes have I misunderstood him? But if you say that Genesis chapter 1 involves not only the assignment of functions but also the coming into being of these things then, as I say, it just collapses to the typical view of creation over six consecutive 24-hour days. Those traditional creationists wouldn't deny that God also assigns functions to things like the sun and the moon and the stars on the fourth day. That's very clear. So I think these questions that you are raising are all powerful objections to the view.

*Student:* I don't agree with it, but couldn't it be that he's saying that when these things are made their function is trivial, and then when they are given an assignment then it becomes significant? It's like if I have a hydraulic servo on my desk that adjusts the flaps on an airplane. Trivially it could be used as a paperweight. But that's a trivial function.

*Dr. Craig:* I don't think that is his view. You're suggesting a way perhaps to amend the view or save it, because the kind of functions that he says God assigns are so general that it's hard to see how they couldn't have been there. For example, the function of the sun is to mark the difference between day and night. On day one, you've got the day and night, and on day four he assigns that function to the sun. Or the function assigned to vegetation to be eaten by animals. It's so general that it's hard to see how he could say what you just said.

**END DISCUSSION**

Let's go on. I suggested we need to ask then what evidence Walton gives for a purely functional interpretation of Genesis 1.

His first argument is that the Hebrew word *bara* – the Hebrew word for “create” – concerns functional creation. He provides a chart listing approximately fifty passages in the Old Testament where the word *bara* is used. The objects said to be created include things like the heavens and the earth, sea creatures, people, the starry host, a cloud of smoke, Israel, the ends of the earth, north and south, disaster, a pure heart, and so forth. Incredibly, from this list Walton concludes, “This list shows that grammatical objects of the verb are not easily identified in material terms, and even when they are, it is
questionable that the context is objectifying them.”19 I should have thought precisely the contrary was true! Most of these objects in the list are easily identified as material objects. Now, admittedly, some are not material objects. For example, a pure heart – “create in me a pure heart O’ God.” Or Israel. Or north and south. Those are not material objects. But these are the exceptions. The three objects of bara in Genesis 1 – the heavens and the earth, the sea creatures, and man – are all clear cases of material objects. Just because they’re not created ex nihilo doesn't imply that they do not come into being at the moment of their creation. Apart from the possible case of Israel, none of the objects of bara in the Old Testament are existing things that are merely given a new function. Of the objects on the list, none of them (except perhaps Israel) is an already existing object which is then simply assigned a new function. Walton opines that the reason the functional interpretation of Genesis 1 is “never considered” by other scholars (itself a telling admission) is because they have been misled by “cultural influences of our material culture.”20 Hardly, I think. Such a claim impugns the credibility of scholars of the ancient Near East. I suspect that the reason that no one else has so interpreted the text is because it is such an obvious misreading of the text.

The Old Testament scholar John Collins says, “I agree with almost everyone else that Genesis records some sort of material origins, and I do not grasp exactly why Walton keeps making a distinction between material and functional.”

Walton’s next argument is that the creation account proper begins at Genesis 1:2. He says verse 1 (you will remember: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”) is just a summary of the whole week, not an initial act of creation prior to verse 2. He says creation does not involve bringing matter into being but just establishing functions.

It’s important to understand just how radical Walton’s interpretation is. We might think that he means that creation begins with the primordial waters in place and then over the next seven days God introduces order and functionality by making the dry land appear, having sea creatures and birds come on the scene, having vegetation sprout from the dry land, land animals come to be, etc. But that would not sustain his claim that only functional creation is involved. Even if these things are not created ex nihilo they would still be instances of creation just as the construction of a chair is the creation of that chair by a carpenter even though he uses material in the construction of that chair. No, if this account is to be exclusively functional as Walton claims then all of the plants and animals

19 Ibid., p. 43.
20 Walton says, “This is not a view that has been rejected by other scholars; it is simply one they have never considered because their material ontology was a blind presupposition for which no alternative was ever considered. . . . Most interpreters have generally thought that Genesis 1 contains an account of material origins because that was the only sort of origins that our material culture was interested in. It wasn’t that scholars examined all the possible levels at which origins could be discussed; they presupposed the material aspect.” (Ibid., p. 44.)
and even man must be there right from the start. So Walton, on page 169, affirms that prior to the seven days of Genesis 1, the dinosaurs and the hominids were alive and well only waiting to be given their respective functions. Even if we agree that creation-proper begins at verse 2, there's nothing in the text to support so novel an interpretation.

But is Walton right in thinking that verse 1 is not part of the creation process? He is not. And here I simply refer you back to our discussion of *creatio ex nihilo* earlier in the doctrine of creation. Walton does not, at least in this book *The Lost World of Genesis One*, interact with the exegetical arguments which support verse 1 as a statement of *creatio ex nihilo*. If that's correct then Walton’s claim that Genesis 1 is purely functional collapses.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* There's a blog that Walton has written that is BioLogos.org. Did you see this where he went through kind of point by point these objections?

*Dr. Craig:* No! I did not. Do you want to give us the link?

*Student:* He addresses here the questions of material objects non-functioning. He says that the idea of the sun existing but not burning or animals just lying in a comatose state are a misunderstanding of his position. He addresses what happened in the seven days. He says here the importance of *ex nihilo* – that’s kind of a big heading here. He talks about that some believe that Genesis 1 must be interpreted in material terms lest we forfeit the important doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. This is not true. The first observation to be made is that other passages in the Bible affirm God as creator of the material world and either imply or affirm that creation happened *ex nihilo*.

*Dr. Craig:* Right. We’ve already said that. The point that I'm more interested in is his claim that the animals are not lying about comatose, that the sun is not burning and producing heat even though it exists. It's very important to understand – there's a difference between what a person says and what his view implies.

*Student:* Or what he means by what he says.

*Dr. Craig:* I'm not claiming that Walton says that the animals were lying about comatose or the sun wasn't burning. But it does seem to me that this is what his view implies. What I want to know is what is his view if these animals are not lying about comatose and the sun is not burning and heating things? He does seem to affirm that they existed. Right? But just lacked their assigned functions.

*Student:* He says that they were performing their activities of hunting each other for food and operating and all these things before God gave them their name and function. Like you said, it really just comes back down to the literal interpretation.
Dr. Craig: To me, that is either backward causation – they were exercising their functions given to them later – or else, I want to know what changed as a result of that week of declaring functions.

Student: He talks a lot here about what it began doing once God declared the name of the function. It started functioning as sacred space. So he talks about that God wasn't really there until he created humans and inserted himself into the creation. Before that it wasn't fully functioning the way it does now.

Dr. Craig: That is a very different take on it, and is related to his view which we’ll talk about next time that the world functions as a cosmic temple in which God dwells. I'll say some things about that later, too. But thank you at least for alerting us to that website. I have corresponded with Walton personally and so was taking into account what he had personally communicated to me in his letter. But I had not looked at the BioLogos site. That would be very interesting.

Student: At least it seems like he's very aware of the objections and has at least made some sort of an attempt to answer them.

Dr. Craig: Yes, I'm sure he must be.

Student: What do you think Walton . . . it's such a bizarre view. It seems really hard to defend. He has to do all kinds of backflips logically in order to try to justify it. What do you think is his motivation for pushing this view? I mean what is he trying to accomplish with the view?

Dr. Craig: I can’t speak to his personal motivations. That would be to try to psychoanalyze him. But in terms of what does it try to accomplish, I think what it tries to do is to give a literal reading of Genesis 1 without committing you to Young Earth Creationism. Young Earth Creationism is sort of the bête noire of biblical scholars and theologians. It's just got to be avoided at all costs because it is so massively in contradiction to modern science, history, linguistics, and so forth. So interpretations are sought that would help you to be faithful to the text but to avoid saying that a few thousand years ago God created the world in six literal days.

Student: It just seems like he has other options.

Dr. Craig: Right! I hope that's what this class has shown. We have been surveying all of these options, and one of my goals is to just broaden your thinking on this – not to make you come to a certain conclusion but just to realize there are a lot of options out there that are available to be considered.21

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21 Total Running Time: 40:37 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)
Lecture 9: A Critique of John Walton’s Functional Creation Interpretation, Part 2

Today we will wrap up our discussion of the functional interpretation of Genesis chapter 1. According to that interpretation, you’ll remember, the six days of creation do not represent days during which God actually brought these things into existence, but rather these are six literal consecutive days during which God specified functions for various existing things.

On this view, according to John Walton (its principal proponent), days 1 to 3 establish various functions, and then days 4 to 6 establish functionaries, that is to say things that will carry out the functions established on days 1 to 3. So there is a kind of parallelism here such as we saw in the literary framework view but it’s interpreted differently. Walton argues that days 1 to 3 serve to establish the basis for time measurement (day and night), weather (the waters above and the waters below), and then food (the vegetation). Time, measurement, weather, and food – these functions are established on the first three days. Now, I don’t think that we need to dispute the point that those things are created for these purposes, but that obviously does not imply that the creation of the dry land, the firmament, and the vegetation is not also affirmed along with the specification of their functions. Walton has a particularly difficult time with the firmament. He thinks that ancient Israelites believed that there literally existed a solid dome in the sky which held up the waters that were above the Earth. He says if we take Genesis 1 as an account of material creation then it implies the existence of something, “that we are inclined to dismiss as not part of the material cosmos as we understand it.” Walton says, “We may find some escape from the problem, however, as we continue to think about creation as ultimately concerned with the functional rather than the material” (Ibid., p. 57).

Wholly apart from Walton’s mistaken claim that the ancients thought of the sky (or the heavens) as a hard dome, I think here Walton has clearly allowed modern science to intrude into his hermeneutics. The hermeneutical issue here is not whether the firmament is part of the material cosmos as we moderns understand it but whether it was part of the material cosmos as the ancient Israelites understood it. Trying to justify a functional interpretation by appealing to modern scientific knowledge that the firmament does not exist is an example of concordism, that is to say letting your biblical interpretation be guided by modern science, which Walton himself rejects.

START DISCUSSION

23 Walton says, “We may find some escape from the problem, however, as we continue to think about creation as ultimately concerned with the functional rather than the material” (Ibid., p. 57).
**Student:** Are we really looking at what the early Hebrews believed as the intent of the written word here? Or are we looking for truth?

**Dr. Craig:** That may be a false dichotomy, but we're looking for what they really believed. Let me back up. Let me not say what they believed; let me say what we're looking for is what the text affirms. Some people are willing to say that these ancient Israelites may have believed, for example, that the sun goes around the Earth, that the Earth is flat, and other sorts of things. That's what they believed, but that's not what's taught by the text. So what we're interested in is what did these ancient texts teach? What did they affirm? Walton thinks that if you interpret this text as involving the creation of material objects then you're committed to saying that there is this firmament – that there's this solid dome over the Earth like an inverted bowl in which the astral bodies are embedded, and therefore we should interpret this purely functionally, not as material creation. The point that I'm making here is that that's an illegitimate hermeneutic – that's concordism. It's letting modern science guide your interpretation of the text rather than what these people themselves affirmed and thought.

**Student:** Is there any relation between this and what some scientists have proposed as the water canopy above the Earth? The water canopy theory – is there any relationship?

**Dr. Craig:** I don't think that they would identify the canopy with the firmament. Indeed, some defenders of the view that the sun and the moon were already there before the fourth day would say that the canopy collapsed at some point and the waters crashed in upon the Earth. But they wouldn't say that the firmament was gone and the sun and the moon and the stars were no longer embodied in them. I think that that would be different – they are two separate things.

**Student:** Actually there are some Young Earth Creationists who take that position.

**Dr. Craig:** Thank you! OK. You mean they will identify the canopy as the firmament?

**Student:** They will identify the waters above the canopy as being a vapor canopy at one point, but most of the Young Earth Creationist organizations have rejected the idea now because they realize that if there was a canopy there you wouldn't be able to see the sun, moon and stars which was the purpose of the sun, moon and stars – to be able to be seen to mark time. So they've rejected the idea.

**Dr. Craig:** Now, then, correct me if I'm wrong here but, in that case isn't it true then that the canopy is something distinct from the firmament? Because the sun and moon and the stars are in the firmament so they would be beyond this canopy that then collapsed.

**Student:** It would be the waters above. They see the firmament as the space between. “Firmament” is often in most translations not the most favored word. “Expanse” is usually the word that's favored these days. They see the expanse as the space between
them and the waters above as having – some of them see – the waters above as having collapsed and being the flood waters. But, again, most of them have rejected the idea now.

*Dr. Craig:* That wouldn’t be identifying the firmament as the canopy. They would still be two realities. But Walton takes it to be a material object – a hard surface – which would be different than what someone earlier was talking about.

END DISCUSSION

Walton then argues that on days 4 to 6 the functionaries are established – the things that carry out these functions. Walton's view differs from Blocher’s literary framework view in that days 4 to 6 are not the creation of inhabitants of the domains or the realms that were created on days 1 to 3. But rather days 4 to 6 involve the specification of things which carry out the functions whose basis was established on days 1 to 3. So this is an interesting and different interpretation of the parallelism than Blocher’s view. I think it is in some ways more plausible than Blocher’s in that we saw that the things created on days 4 to 6 don't really occupy the domains on days 1 to 3. But it does seem that they carry out functions related to the things on days 1 to 3. The sun and the moon in particular seem to be established as functionaries for time measurement. But notice that this doesn't do anything to rule out the material creation of these objects along with the specification of their functions, which is what Walton would have to prove.

Walton also argues that the Genesis account represents God's coming to reside in the world as his cosmic temple. He notes that in the ancient world gods were conceived to reside in temples. So God's resting on the seventh day indicates that God comes to reside in the cosmos as his temple. The seven days of the creation week are a reflection of the seven days of dedication that were part of the inauguration of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

What should we make of this suggestion? I think the problem with this suggestion is that there's just no evidence in the text of Genesis that the author thinks of the world as God's temple or of God's resting as his coming to reside in his temple. In Genesis 2:2-3 we read,

> And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.

There's nothing there to indicate that on the seventh day God came to reside in the cosmos as a temple. Walton's view depends upon, I think, making a false equivalence between God's resting and his residing. On the functional interpretation, God doesn't need to rest because he hasn't been creating anything during the previous six days, and
therefore this notion that resting must equal residing is a result of this functional interpretation. Since God hasn't been working, he cannot cease from working on the seventh day, so it's simply his residing in the temple which is read into the text and is dependent upon this functional interpretation. On the traditional interpretation, the seventh day is a day in which God rests. It is the archetype for the Sabbath day during which we cease from work. So to justify his interpretation, Walton has to go outside of Genesis since it's not in the text of Genesis, which is, I think, in and of itself a dubious procedure. Different authors who are separated by perhaps centuries can have different perspectives. Walton appeals, for example, to Isaiah 66:1 to support his view. This says, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.’” I don't think that that supports Walton's view at all! What it says there is that it is heaven that is where the throne of God is (where God is seated), and the Earth is just his footstool. It doesn't support the view that God comes to reside in the Earth or the cosmos as a temple. Yahweh had a temple all right, and it was in Jerusalem. Look at Psalms 132:1-8,13-14.

Remember, O Lord, in David’s favor, all the hardships he endured; how he swore to the Lord and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob, “I will not enter my house or get into my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.” Lo, we heard of it in Ephrathah, we found it in the fields of Jaar. “Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!”

…

For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation: “This is my resting place for ever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.

Here you have the temple in Jerusalem described as the place where Yahweh dwells, not the cosmos as a whole. In fact, at the dedication of the temple as it’s described in 1 Kings chapter 8, Solomon recognizes that in a sense the temple itself was not a place where God actually dwelt – that the temple would be a place where God is manifest, but it is not a literal dwelling place of the Lord. 1 Kings 8:27, 30:

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! . . . . And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant and of thy people Israel, when they pray toward this place; yea, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place; and when thou hearest, forgive.

Here, again, Solomon, in dedicating the temple, recognizes that really heaven is the Lord's dwelling place, and he says, *When we turn to this temple and pray wilt thou please in heaven hear our prayer and answer.*
So I'm not persuaded that it's legitimate to read this into the text of Genesis 1 that it represents God's coming to reside in his temple.

As for the seven day motif, I think this is more plausibly connected with the practice of the Sabbath observance than it is with the dedication of the temple. It is because of the practice of Sabbath observance – resting on the seventh day – that you have the creation account in terms of a seven-day week. It may be well that the seven days of temple dedication reflect the Sabbath Day observance rather than the other way around.

So, in sum, I find Walton's purely functional interpretation of Genesis 1 to be implausible, not to say outlandish. The account, I think, is naturally taken to involve both material and functional creation.

**START DISCUSSION**

**Student:** One of the other points that Walton makes is that on the last day to complete the analogy of a temple – it being a temple – is that the ancients would have installed an image of the god – of God – in the temple. The parallel to that he uses is man – creating man in God's image.

**Dr. Craig:** There isn’t an image of God though in the temple. Right? What are you thinking of there? There is no image of God. Those are forbidden. With respect to man's being God's image, this leads to another point that I had thought to make but I omitted and that is: why think that if God is creating here a dwelling place that it's the whole world – that it's the cosmos – rather than the Garden of Eden? A lot of commentators have said that in creating the Garden of Eden there are a lot of similarities between the Garden and the tabernacle where God's presence dwells in the Holy of Holies. As you say, man is created as God's image that lives in the Garden of Eden. So if you do want to have this idea of God's resting being his residing, why not identify it with the Garden of Eden rather than with the cosmos as a whole? I'm not persuaded that that's right for the Garden of Eden either. It seems to me that the Garden of Eden is created as a habitat for man, but not as a place for God. It's not referred to, interestingly enough, as the Garden of God in Genesis, but it's a garden created as a fit place for humans to be. So I'm very skeptical of reading this into the text that we have here the creation of some sort of temple or dwelling place for God whether it be the Garden of Eden or the cosmos.

**Student:** I wanted to explore another possibility about this functional perspective. Could it be since God is spirit and he is showing us a progression of a spiritual-to-physical process? In the beginning the first day he actually separated life from darkness, and that is his intention to bring our dark spiritual state into the light. And the second day, he separated the heavens and Earth which he separated the position of Creator and creature so that we understand where we stand in reference to him in heaven. The third day, he separated land from the sea, and he commanded Adam and Eve to cultivate the land.
There's cultivating area that are separated from non-cultivation (that's just my guess). And the fourth day he set in the rhythm where we are going to observe the rhythm of seasons and days and months. Then he moves on with the creatures of the sea and creatures that fly – that started to show us his design in the biological system. There are common systems with the sea creature and the flying creature. Then the sixth day, the animals. All this intricate design in biological systems that he kind of . . . and Chinese people learn all kind of things, martial arts as well from the animals or their survival skill or something. I don't know whether he just did that for our learning. Do you think that is a functional . . .? And then he rested on the seventh day – he rested on his design and he rested on this progression. What do you think about that possibility?

**Dr. Craig:** I think we have to be very careful about spiritualizing this account. I don't think that this is in any way a sort of spiritualized account. It seems to me to be a very physical description of the way the material world comes about. Particularly, at the very beginning, the darkness doesn't seem to represent in Genesis 1 a force of evil. There's nothing sinister about darkness in this context. It's just nighttime, and God creates a world in which there's day and night. There doesn't seem to be anything in the darkness that would connote evil or something in opposition to God. With regard to the separation of the heavens and the Earth, although the word “heaven” can be used as God's dwelling place, in Genesis 1 it seems to be describing the part of creation where the sun and the moon and the stars and so forth are above us. It's not heaven in a spiritual sense. So it seems to me that the account from beginning to end is a very physical account of creation. It certainly does manifest God's cosmic design – that's certainly true – and it climaxes in man as the crown of creation. But the rest – the resting of God – it says very explicitly he's resting from the work that he had done during those six days. So I take it that on the traditional account he has been creating various things and on the seventh day he's finished. He's done.

**Student:** From Proverbs 8 that we read last week, apparently God has a blueprint of this design in his mind before anything happened. To bring that blueprint to reality, there is this process. It doesn't have to be this, but there has to be some kind of process to bring from unseen to the seen. So I thought this is a great way that he kind of expanded his Wisdom into his design.

**Dr. Craig:** I do think that you're quite right in thinking of Wisdom’s role in creation as being a sort of blueprint on which creation is built. It's not as though he sort of made it up as he went along. That may not be in Genesis but, as you say, in Proverbs you certainly do have this notion of the creation of the world in accordance with God's Wisdom. So I do think that's an important part if we want a full-orbed doctrine of creation.

**END DISCUSSION**
Let me wrap up by looking at the question as to whether or not creation in Genesis 1 cannot be both material and functional. This is what most people believe – that it's not an either/or; it's a both/and. But Walton resists this. He gives four objections against the view that Genesis 1 teaches both material and functional creation. But I think that on the basis of what we've already said, these objections can be fairly easily dismissed. Here they are.

Number one is that days 1, 3, and 7 have no statement of creation of any material component. Answer: This isn't surprising for day 7 – that's the day of God's rest! So of course he's not creating anything then. But on day 1, light is created. So that would be a material component. And on day 3, vegetation and fruit trees are created, and those are material components of creation. Remember, they don't need to be created ex nihilo in order to be created.

The second objection: Day 2 has a potentially material component (namely the firmament) but, “if this were a legitimate material account then we would be obliged to find something solid up there.” Answer: This is concordism! If the ancient Israelites thought that the firmament was a solid dome (which I don't think they did, but if they did) then they would have no problem relating such an account of material creation, and it would be illegitimate to use modern science to guide your interpretation of the chapter.

Objection number three: Days 4 and 6 deal explicitly only with material components on a function level. Answer: This might be the case for the sun, moon and stars admittedly, but it's clearly false for the animals when God says, *Let the earth bring forth living creatures.* And it's probably false for man as well when God says, *Let us make man in our image,* since man was not among the animals. He didn't exist at that time, and so needed to be created by God. So I think that days 4 and 6 do deal with the creation of material objects and not just functions.

Finally, objection number four is that on day 5 functions are mentioned and the Hebrew word for create (*bara*) is used. Answer: *Bara* is efficient causation – the production of the effect. And the material origin of birds and sea creatures on day 5 is clearly in view. Again, the creation of material objects like birds and sea creatures doesn't require that God created them *ex nihilo*.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* Could you go over the third objection again please? What was created?

*Dr. Craig:* What he says is on days 4 and 6 the account is dealing with material objects only in terms of functions. It's not talking about God's bringing them into being; it's just talking about their functions. And I am willing to concede the point for the sun, moon and stars – that it may well be that on day 4 God simply specifies the functions that these
already-existing astral bodies are to fulfill. But I don't think you can say that about the animals and man created on day 6. The animals are clearly brought into being on day 6 when he says, Let the earth bring forth, etc. And since man isn't among the animals, the creation of man must have involved the bringing into existence of something new as well. So while I'm willing to grant that day 4 deals only with the functions of the astral bodies, it seems to me on day 6 you just have indisputably the material creation of animals and man.

END DISCUSSION

There's so much more that one would like to say about Walton's view, but I think that this is sufficient to show that the functional interpretation is just not a plausible option.

Next time we will turn to the final interpretation which is, as I'm calling it, the Hebrew myth interpretation.24
Lecture 10: The Monotheistic Hebrew Myth Interpretation

Today we come to our eighth and final interpretive alternative of Genesis chapter 1. I'm calling this the monotheistic Hebrew myth interpretation. As a springboard for understanding this interpretation, I want to appeal to a book by a pair of evangelical scholars, Johnny Miller and John Soden, called *In the Beginning. . . We Misunderstood* published in 2012. Miller and Soden are professors at Columbia Bible College and Lancaster Bible College, both with doctorates from Dallas Theological Seminary. So they have conservative *bona fides* which are simply impeccable. They can't be accused of being radical liberal or progressive scholars.

They argue in their book that Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 is not to be taken literally. They rehearse the evidence against a literal interpretation of the text which we've reviewed already in this class when we discussed the literal interpretation. They also agree with the literary framework view of the French scholar Henri Blocher that the days are not chronologically ordered in Genesis 1 but rather are ordered in a kind of parallel or thematic fashion that doesn't imply a chronological week of days. Moreover, they agree with John Walton’s view that creation begins with verse 2 of the text and not with verse 1. In all of these respects their view is familiar and not new.

What is distinctive about their view is the way in which they understand the Genesis account in relation to ancient Near Eastern mythology. They maintain that the key to correctly interpreting Genesis 1 is to compare it with Egyptian creation myths. They also survey Mesopotamian myths and Canaanite myths as well, but they think that these bear few resemblances to Genesis 1. But they point out Israel was in Egypt for some four hundred years, and the Israelites had come to worship Egyptian deities. When we compare Genesis 1 to the Egyptian creation myths then very significant similarities, as well as differences, emerge. The differences help us to see the ways in which Israel sought to correct these pagan myths.

Reconstructing an Egyptian creation myth is extraordinarily difficult. They admit,

> There is no single Egyptian account known to date that describes the complete Egyptian perspective on creation. Instead, we have to put together a mosaic of bits and pieces recorded in various documents. These documents represent a mixture of times and theologies (covering more than two millennia), many of them in tension with one another, a situation that did not seem to bother the Egyptians. . . .

For the most part, Egyptian creation documents consists of brief statements and
allusions, scattered among many inscriptions (Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, the 
Book of the Dead, and other inscriptions). So there really isn't a creation story available in Egypt, but they cobble together these 
various inscriptions from tombs, from coffins, from various other monuments, and in that 
way try to construct a coherent picture of what these Egyptian theologians believed about 
creation.

They summarize the Egyptian creation myth in the following way, and I'm going to read 
now a very lengthy quotation of their summary of the view of creation in these Egyptian 
myths.

Before the beginning of creation, there was only an infinite dark, watery, chaotic 
sea. There was nothing above the sea or below the sea – the sea was all there was. 
Immersed in the sea, Atum (or Re or Amun or Ptah), the creator god and source of 
everything, brought himself into existence by separating himself from the waters. 
Egyptian cosmologies that view Amun as the creator, or even as one of the four 
initial qualities of the precreation matter (watery, unlimited, dark, imperceptible) 
from which creation emerges, would then also understand the wind to be present 
in the water, because Amun was also god of wind. Since Atum, Amun, and Re are 
all connected with the sun, light was then in existence, even though the sun itself 
had not yet risen.

While several means of creation are used interchangeably in the Egyptian 
accounts (including sneezing or spitting and masturbation), in many accounts 
Atum (or one of the other gods noted above) spoke the universe into existence. 
This new creation (or the "universe" as conceived by the Egyptians) began with 
the separation of the waters to create the atmosphere (a bubble of air, known as 
the god Shu, in the midst of this endless mass of water). Atum's command 
separated the surface of the waters in the sky (Nut) from the earth (Geb). The 
waters receded and the first mound of earth appeared. The sun (Re), already in the 
waters (Nun) before the separation of the atmosphere, rose for the first time as the 
main event of creation. And so the basic universe was formed – a bubble of light, 
air, earth, and sky in the continuing infinity of dark, motionless water.

The universe was actually composed of thousands of gods (all of which were part 
of Atum) in the Egyptian understanding, because "all the elements and forces that 
a human being might encounter in this world are not impersonal matter and 
energy but the forms and wills of living beings – beings that surpass the merely 
human scale, and are therefore gods." Into the universe, Atum commanded the

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creation of plants and animal life, Re formed man as his image, of Khnum fashioned man on a potter's wheel with the breath of the god (Re or Hekat or Aton) giving life to the image. In some accounts, man springs from the tears of the eye of Atum (the sun).

After speaking into existence the "universe" and its millions of gods with their towns, shrines, and offerings, Ptah rested with everything in order. . . .

In Egyptian theology, all of creation was done in a single day, which was called "the first occasion." At the end of the day, the sun traveled through the Duat (the Egyptian underworld) and fought the enemies of order to arise victorious the next day. [So when the sun sets, it goes through the underworld and fights with the deities of the underworld which would bring disorder until it rises again the next day.] Each succeeding day reenacted the creation event: the sun had won its victory over the enemies again and begun a new day of order.26

START DISCUSSION

Student: You say it's composite. Is there any one thing that's true of all of them?

Dr. Craig: That's a very good question because I can't emphasize enough that there is no coherent unified account. This is a mosaic that's been cobbled together by these modern scholars that represents different theologies from different Egyptian cities like Heliopolis, Thebes, and Memphis. They've cobbled it together, and these texts are spread over more than 2,000 years. So are there any elements that are common? I think, and we'll talk about this more later, that one of the most principal common elements would be what we could call monism – namely that multiplicity and diversity all emerge from an undifferentiated primal state of affairs. This was represented by water and darkness because water is so amorphous it can take any sort of shape in their thinking (they were unaware of the molecular structure of water, of course). So it seemed a suitable symbol to represent this undifferentiated absolute primordial condition in which there were no distinct things. What happens then is that the God brings himself into existence out of this state. It's not that he's uncreated. I looked at the text to see maybe they think he just came into being uncaused. No, the texts say he created himself. That would seem to be a common element to all of these. Then of course polytheism. These myths are more theogonies than cosmogonies. A cosmogony (as you can see from the word cosmos) is an account of the origin of the world. But a theogony (as you can see from the word theos which means “god”) is an account of the origin of gods. So these are, properly speaking, theogonies about how the gods come into being out of this primordial undifferentiated condition. Those would be a couple of elements that would be common to all of them.

26 Ibid., pp. 78-80.
Student: I believe you referred to Israel during the four hundred years they were in Egypt. Were you saying they could be categorized as polytheistic during the time they were there? Or some of them maintaining their monotheism that they got from Abraham?

Dr. Craig: I think what Miller and Soden are referring to is that some of the Israelites had figurines or statues of Egyptian deities in their homes and that therefore they had become infected with Egyptian religion. For that reason they think it shouldn't be so surprising if these old traditions underlying Genesis would betray some of the influences of these Egyptian religions. But I don't think they're suggesting that they were out-and-out polytheists.

Student: This was especially curious to me. I have a close friend of mine who's saying that Israel didn't become monotheistic until after Egypt and much later. So your reference to elements of polytheism in Israel in Egypt was especially curious to me. I was wondering how accurate that is.

Dr. Craig: I'm only responding to what their view of this is, and I don't think they commit themselves to so radical a thesis.

END DISCUSSION

Miller and Soden draw various points of similarity with Genesis, but also point out significant differences. What they maintain is that the goal of the author of Genesis is not to correct the physical descriptions found in these Egyptian creation stories, but rather to correct the theology of creation. For example, the author of Genesis, they say, completely demythologizes the natural world. He gets rid of all of these gods and goddesses and instead has a single creator God who is the source of everything else and who is not himself self-created or comes out of the primordial water but is rather a transcendent and sovereign deity. So they write,

. . . in most cases, the biblical writer uses common motifs to demonstrate the stark differences in the Hebrew presentation of God. In other words, the considerable differences show that Genesis is not copying but recasting the events of creation in order to argue strongly for a different theology.\(^\text{27}\)

So the people of Israel reject the polytheistic pagan myths and substitute for it, as it were, a Hebrew monotheistic myth about the Creator God of Israel. Here is how they summarize the Hebrew creation theology which is opposed to the creation theology of Egypt.

Moses does not directly dispute the events of creation, but he uses common Egyptian perceptions of creation to present a radically different and unique

\(^{27}\) Ibid., p. 98.
understanding of God and his relationship to man in this world. To summarize these distinctions:

1. *God in Genesis exists independently of creation and is not created or self-created.* . . .

2. *God alone transcends creation.* [There are no other deities, no other transcendent beings.] . . .

3. *God is sovereign over all creation.* [There is no sort of warring factions; no sort of obstacle to be overcome. Rather, God is completely sovereign over the created world.] . . .

4. *God alone is deity.* [Not only is there no account of the creation of gods, there is the clear implication that no other gods are created. So it's not simply that God is over the hierarchy of other deities, but there aren't any other deities. There are no other gods that God has created.] . . .

5. *Mankind has great significance and value as God's image.* Mankind replaces the sun as the central focus of creation and the climax of that creation. . . .

6. *Israel was to celebrate the rule of God in their lives by imitating their Creator in work and rest each week.* . . . This weekly respite presents a dramatic shift from the daily conquest of the sun god over chaos, his rebirth each morning, and the daily grind of uncertainty in each Egyptian day. . . .28

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* Just to clarify, the purpose of this idea here is to say that there's a possibility that the account of Genesis is not a literal account. It's more a corrective – just a theological corrective?

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, that's right. We shouldn't be surprised, on their view, if the Genesis account retains a lot of these mythological elements like the primordial darkness and the water, the Spirit of God or the wind moving over the surface, things of that sort because that would be the cultural background of Israel. But what the Israelites sought to correct in this was (I think we could say fairly) principally polytheism and replace it with monotheism. And that then results in a very different kind of God. Now it's not one that is self-created or created by other deities, but it's a transcendent God, a God who is over all creation. There are no other gods. The substitution of monotheism for polytheism represents a very radical break with these pagan myths.

*Student:* Later, are you going to maybe point out some biblical . . . how the Bible would address that concept itself?

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28 Ibid., pp. 110-111.
Dr. Craig: We will give a critical analysis of this view. Yes, certainly. We'll start that next week. But right now we're just trying to lay out fairly the view that they express.

Student: If I'm following this correctly, this isn't to be kind of confused with N. T. Wright’s view – this is not necessarily a polemic against the Egyptian mythology.

Dr. Craig: I am not aware that that is N. T. Wright’s view, but that certainly is a view that is popular among certain Old Testament commentators. I think, for example, of Gerhard Hasel who published a widely quoted article many years ago in which he argues that you can see the influence of Mesopotamian or Egyptian mythology in the creation account but the creation account in Genesis is meant (as you just said) to be a polemic against these views. So they reflect them in terms of their opposition to them rather than adopting certain motifs. That doesn't seem to be Miller and Soden's view. They would agree that there is this radical departure from polytheism and the substitution of monotheism, but they seem to be more blasé about leaving in place these other mythological aspects of the creation story so long as the theology is corrected. It's related. Both of those views (Hasel’s as well as theirs) would see that this should be read against this background – the cultural background of pagan mythology of Mesopotamia and Egypt. But the one sees it more as a reaction to it whereas (I think it's not unfair to say) on their view it assimilates a lot of it but radically departs from it in its monotheism. That's why I call this view (and this is my own label; this is not their label) – Hebrew monotheistic myth.

Student: Are we saying then that the understanding of who God is in the creation, although it was not fully understood by mankind going back to Abraham and so forth, when they went into Egypt they were influenced by the Egyptian religion and incorporated perhaps a lot of the beliefs of the Egyptian people, and when Moses or whomever wrote Genesis it was really to acknowledge where they had picked up these concepts but then to clarify or correct or redirect the thinking into a more accurate (as they understand that was revealed by God) of the actual creation story?

Dr. Craig: Almost. That was a very beautiful summary. I would say, except for the last couple words, that it was meant to correct the concept of God in these accounts.

Student: You said they think that verse 2 is the start of creation. Does that mean they would hold that verse 1 is the title?

Dr. Craig: I take it that that's right. We talked about this before. Many scholars think that verse 1, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the Earth,” is not the first event of the creation, rather it's a sort of title of the chapter much as you might have in a Study Bible where it would have the title of the chapter. That seems to be Miller and Soden’s view. I argued against that in an earlier class, but this is their view. That's important because if you say that view – the title view – then that makes Genesis look a little more like these Egyptian stories. Where do they begin? They begin with the primordial watery
darkness. And Miller and Soden are not unwilling to call this chaos even – that Genesis begins with a state of chaos. That is more plausible if you excise verse 1 and make it just a summary or a title.

Student: I was wondering what you thought of the idea that monotheism would have predated polytheism, and if it's possible that Moses used source material in giving us the creation account so that he may not have been the actual originator of the story. In which case, the Genesis story would predate Mesopotamia and even Egypt possibly. Then that would make this whole idea more of something God did in advance knowing that people would go this direction as opposed to responding to it directly.

Dr. Craig: I'm not sufficiently expert in the history of religions to be able to speak to that as to how far back a kind of primitive monotheism reaches. Certainly some people have defended such a view. But I do think we need to be very open to the idea that what we have in Genesis embodies very old traditions that go far back in advance of the Exodus. Nobody really knows the date of the composition of the Pentateuch or the time that Genesis was reduced to writing or how far back the oral traditions go. It's really conjecture. Any conclusions that are founded on giving firm dates to those sorts of things, I think, are rendered more uncertain by that.

Student: If I can channel my inner van Inwagen for a moment, I'll say the idea of a chaos is just unintelligible to me.

Dr. Craig: [laughter] You need to understand his background for this question! Peter van Inwagen is infamous – he's a Christian philosopher – for saying of views that he wants to criticize or disagree with, I just don't understand what you're saying. And in van Inwagen’s hands this is a devastating critique because you would think that an intelligent and informed person would understand the view. So when he says, I don't understand it, this is his way of saying your view is unintelligible. And you're saying that's the case with chaos.

Student: Yeah. I have no idea what's being . . .

Dr. Craig: Can you explain yourself as to why you find that difficult to understand?

Student: You talk about there being, for example, an infinite amount of water, or just water. But there's going to be empty space, a quantum vacuum, things like that.

Dr. Craig: I agree with you in large measure, and it is a source of irritation to me the way Old Testament scholars who are untrained in either science or philosophy throw around the word “chaos.” I’m going to argue later on that the state of affairs described in Genesis 1:2 is anything but a chaos. A chaos is an utterly lawless state in which anything can happen, and that is clearly not the state of the Earth in Genesis 1:2. I think it could be
used to describe these Egyptian myths if we take water and darkness to be merely symbols or representations (not literal) of this primordial, undifferentiated, monistic state.

**END DISCUSSION**

Let me wrap up here with a summary. The force of the title of Miller and Soden's book, *In the Beginning... We Misunderstood*, seems to be that we have misunderstood the type of literature that Genesis is. Their book raises the question whether Genesis is not also of the genre of myth as are the Egyptian accounts of creation. The difference between them lies not in their literary genre but rather in their theology. In contrast to the polytheistic Egyptian myths, Genesis is a monotheistic Hebrew myth. That will be the view that we will then begin to assess when we meet next week.  

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29 Total Running Time: 33:52 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)
Lecture 11: An Assessment of the Monotheistic Hebrew Myth Interpretation

Today we want to turn to an assessment of what I’m calling the monotheistic Hebrew myth interpretation of Genesis 1. You’ll remember we concluded last time by saying that the question raised by Soden and Miller’s book is whether or not Genesis belongs to the literary genre of myth as do the Egyptian creation myths. The difference between them would lie not in their literary genre but rather in their theology. In contrast to the polytheistic Egyptian myths, on this view Genesis is a monotheistic Hebrew myth.

What might we say by way of assessment of this view? The exploration of this question requires us to say a word about the nature or the character of myth. The biblical scholar J. W. Rogerson observes that today the range of meaning of the word “myth” is so broad that he says “the word can hardly be wrongly used!”

For example, on April 4 of 2019, I saw a Reuters news headline that read, “Major study debunks myth that moderate drinking can be healthy.” Here is the popular understanding of the word “myth” to mean a falsehood. This leads the eminent folklorist Alan Dundes to exclaim, “Nothing infuriates a folklorist more than to hear a colleague from the anthropology or literature department use the word myth to refer to anything from an erroneous statement to an archetypal theme.”

Rather, ever since the groundbreaking work of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (the famous Brothers Grimm whom you know from their study of fairy tales) there are three types of narrative which are studied by students of folklore, namely: myths, folktales (we often call them fairy tales but they're not all really about fairies), and legends.

Folktales are prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are regarded as fiction. The events that they relate may or may not have happened. They are not to be taken seriously as dogma or as history. They usually recount the adventures of animal or human characters and may be set at any time in any place. A good example of a folktale would be the story of “Little Red Riding Hood” or “Hansel and Gretel.”

In contrast to this, legends are set in a time that is less remote than the myths. In legends, the world was pretty much then as it is today. They are more often secular than sacred, and there principal characters are merely human beings. A good example of legends would be the stories of “Robin Hood” which have some basis in history but now have

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accumulated stories about that historical person that are not regarded as historically reliable.

Finally, according to Dundes, myths are sacred narratives which explain how the world and man came to be in their present form. Since this is so important, let me repeat that characterization: myths are sacred narratives which explain how the world and man came to be in their present form. Some features of this disarmingly simple characterization deserve comment. First, notice on this definition that a myth is a linguistic composition, either oral or literary. In contrast to common parlance then, specialists do not take the word “myth” to be synonymous with falsehood. Neither do they use the word “myth” in the popular sense to refer to some sort of idea such as “the myth of the noble savage” or “the myth of the self-made man.” Rather, a myth is a thing composed of words. It's a linguistic composition. Secondly, it is a narrative. That is to say, it's a story which will involve characters and a plot line. A myth describes a sequence of events. Thirdly, it's a sacred narrative. That is to say, it has religious significance in the culture in which it is embraced. That implies that it will have something to do with deity as one of its principal figures. It will be stories about God or gods. Fourth, it is assumed that it is a traditional narrative, one that's handed down over the generations. It's not a recent free composition. Accordingly, we could improve Dundes’ characterization by making this assumption explicit: a myth is a traditional, sacred narrative. Finally, a myth seeks to explain present realities by anchoring them in the past, understood to mean the pre-historical past. The origin of the world and of mankind are just two examples of such present realities, and the list could be extended. This key feature of myths is called by specialists “etiology.” It comes from the Greek word *aitia* which means “cause.” Myths are characterized by etiological motifs where some present reality (a natural feature of the world, or a religious practice, or mankind, or something of that sort) will be explained by tracing its origins back to this prehistoric age. This presence of etiological motifs is a key earmark of myths.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* One thing I've always misunderstood when it came to myths was I always took it as fiction, like these stories never happened. Just recently I learned that's not really the case. With that being said, I was always confused on what the purpose of a myth was for. What is the purpose of the writings, or why the Egyptians would use such stories?

*Dr. Craig:* That is the perfect question to ask! And the answer is the purpose is etiological. It is to ground present realities in a culture in these prehistoric roots. That is the function that myths play. So, for example, in John Collins’ recent book *Reading Genesis Well*, Collins would not say that the genre of Genesis 1-11 is myth. He would say the genre is prose narrative. But he would say their function is myth. They function as
myths in Israelite culture to ground present realities in the prehistoric past, in the primeval history of Genesis 1-11.

*Student:* One of the things that I was thinking about while we were talking about this differentiation of myth is the work that the authors that were a part of the Inklings did in terms of rehabilitating the concept of myth.

*Dr. Craig:* Can you explain to the class who the Inklings were?

*Student:* The Inklings were the unofficial group of writers in Oxford England that were composed of people like C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Dorothy Sayers, and other like-minded Christian lovers of mythology and fairy tales and things like that. I wanted to read a quote from J. R. R. Tolkien that I was thinking about that I just pulled up where in a letter to his son he said, *Of course, I do not mean that the Gospels tell what is only a fairy story, but what I do mean very strongly is that they do tell a fairy story – the greatest. Man the storyteller would have to be redeemed in a manner consonant with his nature by a moving story. But since the author of it is the supreme artist and the author of reality, this one was also made to be true on the primary plane.* So basically Tolkien and Lewis’ thinking – and this was one of the things that led Lewis to become a Christian – was that this was basically God's writing of this story – what's going on throughout the Bible but mainly in the Gospels – is the bringing forth into reality what all myths wanted. We created these myths because this is what we wanted all along – this kind of redeeming story. The supreme artist, God, brought into reality a true myth. So Lewis called it the true myth.

*Dr. Craig:* Thank you. In the quotation you read it was, I think, evident (or should have been evident to you) is that what Tolkien was calling fairy stories or fairy tales was really myth, whereas I've tried to differentiate between these according to current folktale studies.

*Student:* When he says fairy tale he means like a legendary story, myth. Any of those terms, they're basically using them to say the consciousness of storytelling in people which is mythopoeic in nature.

*Dr. Craig:* OK, thank you.

*Student:* Wouldn't it still have to be admitted though that even if you believed a myth there would still have to be some element of it that is not literally true?

*Dr. Craig:* That’s a future question that we will need to explore, won't we? First we want to ask what is the genre, and then we'll ask how do societies understand their myths? Do they take them as literal truth or figuratively? It's clear they believe them. They think they embody deep truths, but then that's a further question that needs to be explored.
Student: I wonder if there is crossover between these, or are they distinct from each other? Maybe I am misusing “legend” here but is there perhaps a point where a legendary figure (think of Moses, let's say) who is an actual historical figure but he is so famous or revered that perhaps things that aren't true about him might come into being and that he becomes an archetype for things to come and thus enters the realm of myth?

Dr. Craig: This is much discussed among theorists of myth. Many of the ancient Greek philosophers thought that the gods or heroes in these myths were actually historical persons at one point in the past who, as you say, have become in a sense mythosized, and they really were at one time historical. I think, if my memory serves me right, that that's called “euhemerism.” But that's a view that is largely discarded today. The line between legends (which are about purely human persons) and myths would be fairly clean cut. The closest to being on the boundary would be the stories of heroes like Hercules and other Greek heroes who were part man-part human (have a divine father and a human mother). Sometimes it's disputed as to whether or not we should call these heroic tales “myths.” But they are usually classed as myths because they still involve the gods as principal figures in the stories.

Student: I'm confused. I think saying that myths could be true does a disservice to our use of the word “myths.” Could I say that evolution is a myth?

Dr. Craig: This is a really interesting question because I have seen certain people say that evolution is a kind of contemporary myth that seeks to ground present realities (like the life forms we see today and ourselves) in the primordial prehistoric past. So it actually functions as a sort of myth. But that would be the sense, again, of an archetypal idea. Remember that I've talked about the myth of the noble savage or the myth of the self-made man. That's not a myth in the sense that the folklorist is using it where he's talking about literary compositions. But in that archetypal sense, I think that a good case could be made that it serves as a sort of modern equivalent of a myth.

Student: It's old enough. I'm old. I remember it when I was young and was taught to me when I was young. So it's got to be an ancient myth. [laughter]

END DISCUSSION

To recap, myths are sacred narratives which seek to explain how the world and man came to be in their present form. So understood, Genesis 1-11 clearly meet these criteria, I think. The primeval history of Genesis 1-11 is a traditional, sacred narrative which seeks to anchor present realities to the Pentateuchal author such as the world, mankind, natural phenomena, cultural practices and prevailing religious practices, in a primordial time. So on this definition Genesis 1-11 would belong to the literary type of myth.
Now, the claim here is not that Genesis 1-11 are derived from ancient Near Eastern myths. After the discovery and the publication of the Babylonian myths in the late 19th century, many Old Testament scholars went overboard in assessing their relevance to the Genesis account. There arose among Old Testament scholars the pan-Babylonian school that claimed that not only Genesis but even Greek mythology was derived from Babylonian myths. Today, however, few scholars defend the claim that Genesis 1-11 is based on pagan myths. The one exception would be the flood story in the neo-Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh. The Gilgamesh Epic evolved over thousands of years, but in the most recent recensions (the neo-Babylonian recension) the Epic of Gilgamesh contains a flood story that includes an episode about the survivor of the flood releasing successively several birds to see if the dry land had appeared and it was safe to exit the boat. But even here direct dependence of Genesis on the Epic of Gilgamesh is very difficult to prove because the episode about the birds was added later to the Gilgamesh story, being attested no earlier than 750 BC. 750 BC is the earliest we have of the episode of the birds included in the flood story in Gilgamesh. That may be after the biblical traditions arose. The biblical traditions could well be earlier than that.

Far too many Old Testament scholars fell prey to what the New Testament scholar Samuel Sandmel called “parallelomania.”32 Samuel Sandmel, in a very famous article “Parallelomania,” observed that in order to establish the dependence claims that these critics wanted to make they would need to establish three subsidiary claims. First, they would have to prove that the texts really are parallel – that there is a genuine parallel between the biblical text and these texts. Secondly, they would have to show that the parallels are to be explained by a causal connection between the texts – that the texts are causally linked. Thirdly, they would need to show that the causal connection is asymmetrical – that is to say, that the causal influence ran in only one direction (in this case, from the Babylonian texts to the biblical text). Doing this is extraordinarily difficult. Focusing on isolated similarities between texts courts the danger of cherry-picking. To give an illustration of cherry-picking, we all know about the terrible disaster that occurred when an airliner on its way from Massachusetts to New York crashed into one of New York's tallest buildings between the 77th and the 85th floors shortly after 9:00 a.m. setting it on fire and resulting in the loss of everyone on board and many office workers. The terrorist attacks of 9/11? No! Rather, the crash of a B-25 into the Empire State

Building on July 28, 1945. By cherry-picking details one can create the illusion of parallelism when in fact none actually exists.

I think that Miller and Soden are guilty of just this sort of cherry-picking. Consider their most important claim about the primordial states being a dark watery chaos in both Genesis and the Egyptian myths. How is the primordial state described in the first chapter of Genesis? Genesis 1:2 states, “the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.” This is alleged to resemble the primordial state in Egyptian myths. I am certainly open to following the evidence to where it leads, but I must say that I think Miller and Soden have been very sloppy in drawing alleged parallels between Genesis 1:2 and Egyptian creation myths.

START DISCUSSION

Student: If the flood predated the Tower of Babel, right?

Dr. Craig: Do you mean in the narrative?

Student: Yes. I'm wondering how the Egyptians would have a story of the flood? This isn't really a fully fleshed out question but the Egyptians had a story of the flood separate, and even the Babylonians have a story of the flood. If they were not cultures at that time ...? Noah and his family were the only survivors of the flood – the worldwide flood.

Dr. Craig: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Student: How are these separate narratives that the Egyptians have of a flood ...?

Dr. Craig: The Babylonians you mean.

Student: Sorry, the Babylonians in this case. How did the Babylonians have a narrative of the same flood if they were not the Babylonians yet, if that makes sense?

Dr. Craig: OK, you're asking a historical question whereas I'm asking a literary question. What we're asking is: is there a literary dependence of the Genesis account of the flood on these Babylonian flood stories? That's a literary story. That's a totally different question from asking where did the Babylonians get this story? You could say they just made it up – it's just a myth that they invented to explain present realities in their society, and this got copied by other cultures including the Israelite culture. Or you could say, as some do, that this is traced back to a memory of a very ancient flood event that was then subsequently handed down and remembered in Babylonian tradition and perhaps independently in biblical tradition. As I say, the closest resemblance of the biblical story to the Babylonian story is this episode about the birds being released to find the dry land.

33 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1945_Empire_State_Building_B-25_crash. I am indebted to Michael Licona for this example.
That doesn't appear in the original Epic of Gilgamesh. Indeed, the original Epic has no flood story at all. The flood story gets incorporated later, and then the bird episode gets incorporated even later. It's attested no earlier than 750 BC. Well, by that time it may well be that this story was already present in ancient Israel and maybe wasn't derived from these Babylonian narratives. So at this point we're not asking the historical question; we're just asking a literary question. And I'm just informing you that the wide majority opinion today is that there is no literary dependence of Genesis 1-11 on these pagan myths with the possible exception of this flood story in the Epic of Gilgamesh. What that would mean is that the creation account in Genesis 1 (which is our focus) is independent of Babylonian and Egyptian myths of creation.

*Student:* You talked about the three criteria that are necessary to show dependence. Could you give an example of two documents that do meet those criteria?

*Dr. Craig:* Oh my! Well, let's just think about the flood story and the episode of the birds. The claim here would be that these stories are indeed parallel. In the biblical story, Noah releases first a raven and then he releases one dove three successive times. So they're two birds – first the raven and then the dove three times. In the Babylonian story, Utanapishtim, the Noah equivalent, releases three birds. He releases a dove and then a swallow and then a raven last. So you've got similarities there but differences as well, don't you? So the similarities have led many scholars to say it looks like there's some kind of dependence here – that there's some kind of relation. The second factor would be that there's a causal connection between them – not just that they're similar, but that there's a causal connection. Here many scholars would say that they are so similar – the idea that there's a flood, there's a boat, there's a survivor of the flood who releases birds to find the dry land – these are so close that there needs to be some kind of causal connection between these. This couldn't just be by accident. And then the third factor would be that it's one way. And that's very difficult to show. How do you know that these are not independent narratives from some earlier tradition that arose independently of each other? Or, how do you know for sure that the biblical account didn't influence the Babylonian story? That might seem to be absurd except when you think that during the reign of Solomon around 950 BC you have a very significant cultural power in Israel that had trade with Mesopotamia, had ocean-going vessels, and had cultural influence. It's not impossible that some Babylonian scribe or merchant heard the story from Israelite traditions and incorporated it into the Gilgamesh account rather late in its evolution. That would just be an illustration of the difficulty and how one might go about trying to show literary dependence. Sandmel's point was that too often scholars seem to be afflicted with this paralleleomania where they draw these parallels without really showing these three features of the narratives.
Student: I was just wondering if there were any specific details in the Genesis account, in Genesis 1 and 2, that would defy the parallelosophers that seemed to be strangely absent from people who say that they closely resemble these mythologies? Something like creation _ex nihilo_ or something?

Dr. Craig: The fact that there's an absence of deities is perhaps the most striking. You don't have any theogony. You don't have any primordial combat between the gods. It's a monotheistic story with a transcendent God that is completely sovereign and differentiated from nature. In that sense it's very, very different. Now Miller and Soden recognized these differences, but they say, _But look at the similarity between the dark watery chaos that features in both of these myths_. Now to bring us back on track, that's what I want to challenge. I don't think that they have analyzed the situation carefully enough to show that these elements of the story really are parallel.

Student: There are two things that I wanted to seek your opinion. The first is that the Chinese ancient history actually combined the historical and literary together because as they try to document what's important they draw pictures. And those pictures become the meaning of their literature in form of character. So there may not be literature talking about the Genesis story, but the character itself reveals the Genesis story in many, many facts. The reason why they put a woman in front of the two trees – that is greediness. Or the revelation before two trees, that's revelation. All kind of things like this they compose and embed it in Chinese character.

Dr. Craig: If I might interrupt, while I understand that's the case with Chinese, that's not the same with Hebrew. Hebrew isn't a pictorial language. There the characters are not pictures of things as in Chinese.

Student: Right. The second thing is that after the Tower of Babel different cultures emerged. We can think of Noah's three sons and himself. They started different branches of people. And that down the line the grandchildren – the offspring – start to ask to trace what happened in the ancient time and there are at least four different interpretations. But then they all are consolidated to some kind of impression that is passed down through the line. So we can say that that's how each person recorded the detail in a little different way and yet they all kind of have the large same phenomena.

Dr. Craig: This is addressing the historical question that was raised earlier. I'm going to just leave that aside at least for now because that's not germane to the question that we're asking at this time. So we'll just leave that aside.

END DISCUSSION

What we'll do next time is I want to suggest two reasons as to why we should be skeptical about Miller and Soden's claim that there are significant parallels between Genesis 1 and
these Egyptian creation myths so as to show some sort of causal connection between them. That will be next week.\textsuperscript{34}
Lecture 12: Examining the Supposed Parallels Between Genesis and Egyptian Myths

Last time we looked at the way in which the notion of myth is understood by scholars of folklore. You’ll recall that we said that a myth is a sacred narrative which seeks to ground or anchor present realities in a primordial time. As such the first eleven chapters of Genesis would qualify as mythical. Let me say a couple of things about comments that were made in the discussion last week on which I had a chance to reflect afterwards.

Given the definition of myth that we're using – the folklorist’s definition – this is not the same sense that [J. R. R.] Tolkien and [C. S.] Lewis spoke of myth when they said that Christianity or the Gospel is the true myth. They're thinking of the notion of myth as a sort of archetypal idea which is truly embodied in the Christian faith and in the message of the Gospel. But the Gospels themselves – the four Gospels – are not of the genre of myth. They are not traditional sacred narratives which try to anchor present realities in some prehistoric time. Rather, scholars of the Gospels have determined that the genre to which the Gospels belong is ancient biography like the famous Lives of Greeks and Romans by Plutarch, and as such the Gospels have a historical interest in giving an accurate historical portrayal of the subject of the biography. So it's important to understand that in the sense in which we're using the word “myth” the Gospels do not belong to that genre. They are not myths. Rather, they are ancient biographies.

In the discussion as well someone asked if I could think of a good example of literary dependence that has been demonstrated since I expressed skepticism about the efforts of many Old Testament scholars to show the dependence of stories of Genesis 1 to 11 in ancient Near Eastern mythology. As I reflected on this at home, it occurred to me that there is one very good example of this, and this would be the Epic of Gilgamesh which is an ancient Sumerian-Babylonian poem recounting the exploits of Gilgamesh. The Gilgamesh story originally did not include a Flood story. The oldest versions of Gilgamesh have no Flood story; rather, this is to be found in another ancient epic Mesopotamian poem called Atrahasis. What scholars have found is that in the most recent or standard accounts of the Epic of Gilgamesh the Atrahasis Flood story has been incorporated into the Gilgamesh epic. Indeed, in some places it's verbatim (repetition) of the Atrahasis Flood story. Given the verbatim linguistic parallels as well as the similar context of the Flood story in Gilgamesh and in the Flood story in Atrahasis, this seems to be a truly genuine parallel between Gilgamesh and the Atrahasis Flood story. The Flood story in Gilgamesh seems to be borrowed from or dependent upon Atrahasis. Moreover, since the Atrahasis story is older (going back to at least the second millennium BC) whereas the standard version of the Gilgamesh story is much more recent, the causal connection between them cannot be from Gilgamesh to Atrahasis. Atrahasis is the older...
account. So the causal line would be drawn from *Atrahasis* to *Gilgamesh*. This would seem to be a case in which the criteria that Samuel Sandmel laid out for showing truly parallel texts in context with a causal connection between them that is asymmetric would seem to be pretty convincingly demonstrated. What we also saw that was very interesting is that neither the *Atrahasis* account nor the original Flood story in *Gilgamesh* after *Atrahasis* was incorporated into it included the episode of the release of the birds to see if the land was dry and it was safe to exit the Ark. That gets added to the *Gilgamesh* epic later on and is attested no earlier than about 750 BC. So that raises the question as to where the *Epic of Gilgamesh* got the bird episode which was added then to the Flood story borrowed from *Atrahasis*.

I explained last time that too many Old Testament scholars have succumbed to the affliction of parallelomania, that is to say trying to show that one narrative is dependent upon another by examining details taken out of context, and this results in cherry-picking that can be very misleading in demonstrating alleged independence.

Just this week in my reading I encountered a paradigm example of this sort of cherry-picking. In his book *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and the Bible*, Richard Clifford has this to say about the relationship between the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and Genesis 1-11, “Such kaleidoscopic reuse of traditional details may seem strange to modern readers, but ancient authors evidently liked to put familiar objects in new contexts.” Here Clifford actually appears to endorse cherry-picking, that is to say, comparing details of narratives without appeal to their context. He gives as his example certain details in the story of *Gilgamesh*. By way of background, Gilgamesh was a warrior king who was able to defeat every challenger that came against him. The gods made for Gilgamesh a close companion and aide named Enkidu who was originally a hairy wild man that became a bosom friend of Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh and Enkidu were, if you will, the Tom Brady and Julian Edelman of Mesopotamian mythology. Clifford draws the following parallel between the *Gilgamesh* story in Genesis:

> the naked and animallike Enkidu acquires wisdom from his seven-day dalliance with a prostitute. Afterward she clothes him and leads him to the city of Uruk and its king Gilgamesh.\(^{35}\)

That's the account in *Gilgamesh*. All right, are you ready for this? Here's the parallel with Genesis: “Genesis rearranges these same traditions to describe the institution of marriage!” Now, this is parallelomania, and to my mind constitutes the *reductio ad absurdum* of the cherry-picking methodology.

\(^{35}\) pp. 148-9.
Miller and Soden are guilty, I fear, of the same sort of cherry-picking, even if not as egregious. Consider their most important claim about the primordial state’s being a dark, watery chaos in both Genesis and the Egyptian myths. Genesis 1:2 says, “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.” This is supposed to resemble the primordial state in Egyptian myths. Now, as I said last week, I’m certainly open to following the evidence where it leads, but I think that Miller and Soden have been very sloppy in drawing these alleged parallels between Genesis 1:2 and Egyptian creation myths. I want to make two points about their claim of parallelism.

First, the two states, when examined in context, are not truly parallel. It's important to understand that in various Egyptian cosmogonic, or rather theogonic, myths, what's at stake is an ancient philosophical problem called the One and the Many. That is to say, how does one explain the underlying unity of the world behind the multiplicity that we observe in the world? These Egyptian myths seek to derive multiplicity from a primal monism. In these myths water and darkness symbolize the undifferentiated, primordial state of the unbounded One (with a capital ‘O’) from which all multiplicity emerges. For example, Coffin text 76 contains one of the earliest references to the qualities of the primordial state. Atum, one of the Egyptian gods, is here speaking in the first person and he says, “I am the begetter of repeated millions – out of the Flood, out of the Waters, out of the darkness, out of lostness.” Eric Horhung, an Egyptologist, in his book Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many, explains that the Egyptian language had a special negative verb form, one use of which was to describe how things were before creation, when something was not yet. He says the spatial nature of the world is negated. Earth and sky have not yet come into being. Before creation, there were not yet two things. There is “no thing,” that is, no matter. This is an expression of the Egyptian view that before creation there was just undifferentiated unity which could not be divided into two distinct things.

This primordial One is both everything and yet paradoxically also non-existent. Non-existence is one and undifferentiated. The creator God in these myths emerges from the non-existent, which marks the beginning of the process of things’ coming into being by differentiating himself into the plurality of millions of things. According to Horhung, the non-existent signified, negatively, that which is inchoate, undifferentiated, and unlimited, and, affirmatively, it is that which is absolute or fundamental. In contrast to the non-existent, existent things are clearly defined and are restricted by boundaries and distinctions. The Jewish commentator Nahum Sarna suggests that the reason that water

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seemed to the ancients the appropriate representation of the primordial state was because of its amorphous nature.

In contrast to this monistic picture, the state of the primitive Earth in Genesis 1:2 is not an undifferentiated unity or chaos (despite the careless statements of many commentators), much less is it non-existent. It is just a primeval ocean cloaked in darkness. It is not unbounded or universal but rather it exists on the Earth which is distinct from God. It is covering the land which will eventually emerge from it. It has a surface over which the Spirit of God is moving, and therefore it is bounded. It is not characterless. It's the same water that will eventually fill the seas and in which marine life will thrive. It's the same water that will fall from the sky as rain and nourish the land. It is not unordered or chaotic. It has the typical properties of water with which ancient Israelites would have been familiar, such as liquidity, weight, surface tension, solubility, buoyancy, and potability. The primeval ocean is no more a chaos than is a ravaged desert landscape which the Bible also describes as without form and void. The Hebrew expression is tohu wabohu. The only other place besides Genesis 1:2 that this is found in the Bible is Jeremiah 4:23 where it describes the land as the judgment of God has fallen upon it. Reading from Jeremiah 4:20 and following:

Disaster follows hard on disaster,
the whole land is laid waste. . . .
I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;
and to the heavens, and they had no light.
I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,
and all the hills moved to and fro.
I looked, and lo, there was no man,
and all the birds of the air had fled.
I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,
and all its cities were laid in ruins
before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

Jeremiah is here describing a war-torn land as an uninhabitable waste. Similarly, the primeval Earth was an uninhabitable waste. The New Testament scholar David Tsumura has rightly said that the phrase tohu wabohu “has nothing to do with primeval chaos.” It simply refers to the Earth as an unproductive and uninhabited place. Just how wrong-headed it is to see this primeval state as chaos is evident from the Genesis story of the Flood found in Genesis 7:17-24. The Flood returns the Earth to its primeval condition –

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this desolate waste of water – but it is obviously not (again, despite many commentators careless statements) a state of chaos. The state of the Earth when Noah's Ark was floating on the surface of the waters is not a chaos. The sun and the moon and the stars are still shining above. The boat is floating on the surface of the waters. The waters are filled with marine life and the boat is full of animals and men. The waters cover the mountains which will eventually emerge from beneath the surface of the water and be seen as mountains. This is definitely not chaos.

An ancient Israelite would probably have pictured the state described in Genesis 1:2 to be like a pitch-black night out on the Mediterranean Sea when no moon and stars were visible. This was a condition which seafaring peoples known to Israel (see Genesis 10, for example. In the table of nations, it lists many seafaring peoples with whom Israel was familiar) as well as during the monarchy (see 1 Kings 10:22 concerning Solomon's fleet of ocean-going vessels that sailed out of the Gulf of Aqaba) [would have experienced.]

Both these seafaring peoples and the Israeli sailors would themselves have been familiar with this condition on a pitch-black night out on the open sea. This state of affairs is wholly unlike the primal monadic condition envisioned in Egyptian mythology. The state in Egyptian mythology is much more akin to the Greek philosopher Plotinus' One, which is beyond being and is the source from which all multiplicity emanates. In fact, the primeval state that is described in Genesis 1:2 much more closely resembles the state which is described in North American Indian creation myths which feature a kind of primeval ocean in darkness than these Egyptian myths. Therefore, I think Miller and Soden have been all too quick and careless in drawing these supposed parallels.

The second point of criticism is that the claim that the primordial darkness and watery deep of Genesis 1:2 show the influence of Egyptian creation stories is rendered uncertain, not merely by the fundamental difference between them, but also by the fact that these same motifs of primordial darkness and water are so widely disseminated in creation myths around the world. According to the biblical scholar K. Numazawa, myths about the world's origin in which the Earth and sky were originally combined as one, whether as water alone or as a featureless substance or as a cosmic egg, “can be found among practically all peoples,” being found, for example, even among North American Indian tribes. According to these myths, a formless substance existed in primordial darkness until its separation from the Earth and sky, which marked then the beginning of the universe. Common to nearly all the myths is the idea of utter darkness before the separation of sky and Earth, when light appeared for the first time. If you're interested in seeing some of these myths, take a look at the multi-volume work edited by Louis

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Herbert Gray and John Arnott MacCulloch, *The Mythology of All Races*. This is a 13-volume work published between 1916 and 1933. It is somewhat dated now but still useful in giving a survey of the world's mythologies. Scholars who appeal to Egyptian influence upon the Genesis creation account have often failed to consider just how widespread the favorite motif is among the world's peoples. Their inductive sample, in other words, is too small.

Myths tap deeply into the human psyche, and so we shouldn't be surprised to find that similar myths exist among unrelated peoples throughout the world. In order to demonstrate a causal connection between myths it will be necessary to exclude the possibility that similar myths arose independently, which is very difficult to do. Minimally, the theorist engaged in comparative studies of Genesis 1-11 needs to widen his comparison class beyond myths which have a possible causal connection with the primeval narratives so as to be sure that an alleged parallel and causal connection really exists rather than simply mere similarity. The need to do this is especially urgent when the similarities are isolated elements in vastly different contexts like monistic Egyptian theogonies.

By way of summary then, the claim that Genesis 1-11 shares with ancient Near Eastern myths a common concern to anchor present realities in a primordial time is not securely grounded by attempts to show dependence of the biblical stories on Babylonian or Egyptian predecessors. The attempt to prove such dependence is fraught with conjecture and uncertainty. Rather, the claim is grounded in the commonality of themes and etiological concerns in the various myths.

The overriding point is that the classification of Genesis 1-11 as belonging to the category of myth is not to be grounded in exploring alleged parallels between the Genesis stories and the Egyptian and Babylonian stories. Rather, it will be grounded in showing that Genesis 1-11 explores similar themes and has similar etiological motifs of anchoring present realities in prehistoric times.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* I agree with everything you said. I was going to bring up a notion that happened to me several months ago. I was helping a guy who comes to the Lord again in prison, had gotten out and gotten a job at Napa Parts. He lost it. His wife had been falsely accused by her mother. He was in terrible shape. But the guy had a glow about him. He was trusting in the Lord. I got out of the car, didn't have a coat on, it was cold, and he said, “Don't have a coat?” I said, “I'm just rushing in.” So I started talking to him. I helped him out, and he said, “The Lord has blessed me. He took away this job and got me another one.” He had an appointment to go get that, but didn't have a way to get there. So I drove him around that day and the next day. Ended up to get him out of debt and
everything like that, $1,000. But he showed me such amazing things. He was saying God showed him . . . he was wondering how Moses could write Genesis. Then he said this, “then I realized he was alive then.” I said, “I don’t think you mean that. Jesus was alive.” “No, no. God is in him. And so God was alive and could tell him what happened in Genesis.” And so the narratives – the myths – can be created and would have points of accuracy as God chooses to enlighten people because his Spirit is just like God says if he drew all his Spirit all flesh would die and so Moses is able to tell you . . . and so it's common to a lot of myths because it's trying to tell us things deeper than we can comprehend.

Dr. Craig: I want to say, with regard to Miller and Soden, that I am really open to the evidence that they would bring forward. I don't see any incompatibility with saying an inspired author (inspired of God) might draw upon motifs from pagan myths and, as you say, express truths thereby. But honestly I'm just not convinced. When I look at these Egyptian myths, these scholars don't seem to understand what's at stake in them. I often wonder what in the world can a philosopher like me bring to this discussion with these Old Testament scholars and Assyriologists. I think this illustrates it. These people, I don't think, have ever heard of the philosophical problem of the One and the Many which occupied ancient philosophers. And I wonder if they've read Plotinus either, because once you are familiar with those you see that what's described in these myths isn't anything like the orderly state that is described in Genesis 1:2 and again after the Flood. So I don't have a problem with saying that an inspired author might draw upon these sorts of things, but I'm just skeptical that this has been demonstrated.

END DISCUSSION

I have asserted that Genesis 1-11 exhibit the same concern with etiology, that is to say trying to anchor present realities in a primordial time, but I haven't actually demonstrated that. I've asserted it, but I've not shown it. So what I want to do when we meet next time is to show that Genesis does share with ancient Near Eastern myths common themes like the creation of the world, the creation of mankind, the universal Flood, and so forth, and that it also exhibits this etiological concern to ground realities that are present to the author of the Pentateuch in the primordial past of the primeval history in Genesis 1-11. That will be our discussion for next time.39

39 Total Running Time: 31:21 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)
Lecture 13: Did Genesis Borrow From Babylonian Myths?

We saw in our study of Miller and Soden's book *In the Beginning We Misunderstood* that they rightly discount the importance and influence of Mesopotamian myths upon the Genesis creation story. They think that Egyptian myths are reflected in Genesis 1, but we've seen that that case, I think, is overstated. I do want to say something today however about Mesopotamian myths and why scholars think that these are not a significant influence upon the Genesis creation story. I think this is important not only for the sake of completeness but also because one does frequently still find (especially on the popular level) people saying that Genesis 1 is borrowing from ancient Babylonian myths of creation, particularly the myth called the *Enuma Elish*. The words *Enuma Elish* are simply the first words in Akkadian of this Babylonian epic poem. This has been referred to in the past as the Babylonian Genesis because of its creation account.

The story, or the poem, tells of the god Marduk who becomes ascendant over the other gods – the head of the Babylonian Pantheon – by defeating and destroying the goddess Tiamat who is sometimes portrayed in the myth as a goddess (woman) or, other times, apparently as a dragon. Let me just read to you the opening lines of the *Enuma Elish*:

> When the skies above were not yet named
> Nor earth below pronounced by name,
> Apsu, the first one, their begetter,
> And maker Tiamat, who bore them all,
> Had mixed their waters together,
> But had not formed pastures, nor discovered reed-beds;
> When yet no gods were manifest,
> Nor names pronounced, nor destinies decreed,
> Then gods were born within them.
> Lahmu and Lahamu emerged their names pronounced.

Here it describes this primordial condition in which the goddess Tiamat and the god Apsu mingled their waters together which is probably a metaphor for sexual relations because Tiamat then, as a result of this commingling with Apsu, gives birth to the gods that are named in the epic. The story then tells of how the god Marduk battles against Tiamat, kills her, and then creates the world out of her carcass.

As I say, most scholars today, in contrast to past generations, would say that Genesis 1 does not exhibit the influence of this myth, but you will find on occasion scholars who assert the contrary. For example Peter Enns in his book *The Evolution of Adam*, published as recently as 2012, says that there are quite a number of commonly agreed-upon
similarities (in his words) between Genesis 1 and the Babylonian epic. A similar position is taken by the biblical scholar Kenton Sparks in the book *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither?* published in 2015. So even in recent years there are still some scholars who are claiming that Genesis 1 bears significant similarity to the *Enuma Elish*. Here is the list of seven similarities that Peter Enns gives. I'd like to go through these with you this morning.

Number one, he asserts that in both accounts matter exists independently of the divine spirit. Secondly, in both accounts darkness precedes creation. Thirdly, in the Genesis narrative, the Hebrew word *tehom* (which is the Hebrew word for “deep”) is linguistically related, he says, to the Babylonian word *Tiamat*. So *tehom* and *Tiamat* are linguistically related, and this is the name of the goddess who symbolizes primordial chaos. The fourth similarity is that in both light exists before the creation of the sun, moon, and stars. Number five, in the *Enuma Elish* Marduk fillets the body of the slain Tiamat to form a barrier to hold back the waters above from escaping. He divides her body in two and with one half of the carcass he creates a sort of canopy or skin to keep back the waters above. In Genesis 1, the sky is depicted as a solid dome over the Earth to keep the waters above where they belong. Number six, the sequence of days of creation is similar in both accounts including the creation of the firmament, the dry land, the luminaries, and finally humanity. And finally, number seven, all is followed by divine rest.

I'm sure you would agree at first blush that that's an impressive list of similarities. But the problem is that upon closer examination these alleged parallels are frequently questionable and in some cases downright spurious. Let's look at each one of them.

The first, you remember, was that matter exists independently of the divine spirit. The claim that matter exists independently of the divine spirit is not true in the *Enuma Elish*. It doesn't even mention the divine spirit. It just begins with these two gods associated with the primordial waters. Nor is this statement clearly true of Genesis because in Genesis God has already been said in verse 1 to have created the heavens and the earth: “In the beginning.” Enns is evidently thinking that creation begins with verse 3, but we've argued the creation begins with verse 1. Verse 1 is an independent clause, and moreover it is not simply a title of the entire chapter. Why? Well, for one reason the first verse is connected to verse 2 by the conjunction “and,” or in the Hebrew *vav*. So it's not simply a title; it is an independent clause followed by “and” and the second verse. Moreover, if it were a title of the chapter it would be an inaccurate summary because the ensuing chapter does not, in fact, describe the creation of the Earth. Verse 1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth” but in verse 2 the Earth is already there! The Earth was without form and void, etc., etc. So if this were a title, it's inaccurate because the chapter doesn't describe the creation of the Earth. So creation, I think, in Genesis begins
with verse 1, and therefore it is simply false to say that matter exists independently of God's spirit.

What about number two? That was the darkness precedes creation. Well, here it's exactly the same problem. If creation begins with verse 1 and not with verse 3 then it's false that darkness precedes creation because creation begins when God created the heavens and the Earth in the beginning. As if this weren't bad enough, even worse, in the *Enuma Elish* darkness isn't even mentioned so that the parallel is completely spurious. The *Enuma Elish* says nothing about darkness existing in the beginning.

Number three is that the Hebrew word *tehom* or “the deep” is linguistically related to *Tiamat*. Now this is very misleadingly stated. *Tiamat* and *tehom* are undervived from each other. You cannot show that the word *tehom* is derived from the Akkadian word *Tiamat*. Rather, since Akkadian and Hebrew are both Semitic languages, both of these words independently go back to a Semitic root word. So, yes, they're linguistically related. That's true. But they're not linguistically related in the sense of being derived from one another. They are independent from this earlier Semitic word. Moreover “the deep” is completely different in the Genesis account than the waters in the *Enuma Elish*. We already saw this point in our study of Egyptian myths. What is described in Genesis is an earthly ocean. It's an ocean on the face of the Earth, whereas in the *Enuma Elish* what we have is a sort of primordial divine substance associated with this god and goddess. And this is prior to the Earth's existence, and something that gives birth to the other gods. So it's quite different than what you have in Genesis.

Number four, light exists before the creation of the sun, moon, and stars. This would be such a novel feature, I think, of the narrative that that would be impressive as a parallel if that were true. But, in fact, in the *Enuma Elish* Marduk does not create light before he creates the sun, moon, and stars. What is true is that the primordial events in the *Enuma Elish* don't take place in the dark. That's true. But neither do they take place in the earthly realm. In contrast to Genesis (which describes the earthly realm), the *Enuma Elish* begins with the description of the divine realm – the realm of the gods. And it's true they're not walking around in the dark in the realm of the gods. There you have day and night in their realm. But this is not a description of the earthly realm, and therefore it's simply of no relevance to when light comes to exist on Earth.

What about number five – that Marduk fillets the body of the slain Tiamat to form a barrier to keep the waters above from escaping while Genesis depicts the sky as a solid dome to keep the waters where they belong? This is actually a point of contrast between the two narratives! In the one you have this dissected corpse which is stretched out over the sky whereas in Genesis you have a firmament in which the stars and the sun and the moon are placed. This is completely different. And this is wholly apart from the fact that
Genesis does not portray the firmament as a solid dome. That is reading between the lines. It’s not in Genesis.

What about number six – the sequence of the days of creation is similar? Again, this claim is mistaken because there is no sequence of days of creation in the *Enuma Elish*. There’s no sequence of days of creation at all. As for the order of the events in the *Enuma Elish*, Marduk first creates the heavens by stretching out Tiamat’s skin to keep back the waters. Then he creates the abodes for the various gods. Then he creates the constellations, and then the moon which was so important for Babylonian astronomy and timekeeping. Then he creates the clouds and rain storms. Then he creates the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and then the mountains and the springs. Then he creates what's called the great cosmic bond (whatever that is) and the supports for the heavens. And then he's done. The creation of men as slaves for the gods is a later incident related after the story of Babylon’s creation. So this is scarcely similar to the sequence of events in Genesis 1, I think you'd agree.

Finally, what about the last alleged similarity that all is followed by divine rest? Is that true? No, it's not true. Marduk does not rest after these works are done. Instead, it says he attaches guide ropes and hands these over to the god Ea while he goes to the god Anu. The only time that Marduk rests is immediately after slaying Tiamat before undertaking the creative works just mentioned. So the time he rests is prior to creation, not after it. He kills Tiamat then he rests and surveys her dead body and then he begins the work of creating the heavens and the constellations, the mountains and the rivers, and so forth.

When you look at this, you can't help but wonder how could Peter Enns have so seriously misread the *Enuma Elish*. I've warned in this class about the dangers of parallelomania – how difficult it is to show dependence or borrowing of one piece of literature upon another. But since men rush in where angels fear to tread, let me hazard a guess about where Peter Enns got this idea of these similarities between *Enuma Elish* and Genesis. It seems that Enns has simply followed the book by Alexander Heidel called *The Babylonian Genesis*. The *Babylonian Genesis* has been one of the most influential books traditionally on the *Enuma Elish* and the interpretation of Genesis published in 1961. *The Babylonian Genesis* by Alexander Heidel. If you look on page 129 of that book you will find a chart in which these same similarities are listed by Alexander Heidel.

I thought to myself, well, now, wait a minute. If these really were commonly accepted similarities maybe it's just a coincidence that Enns would notice the same similarities that Alexander Heidel did. But here's the thing. Enns reproduces the errors in Heidel’s list like darkness being prior to creation or divine rest after creation. In the *Enuma Elish* there is  

no primordial darkness, and Heidel admits it on page 101 – that that is not part of the creation myth. So the fact that the very errors in Heidel’s chart are reproduced by Enns makes me think, or suspect, that he has simply borrowed the chart from Heidel and reproduced these alleged similarities. And I noticed just very recently in reading Richard Clifton’s book on Genesis that he makes exactly the same allegation with respect to the well-known commentator on the book of Genesis, E. A. Speiser. This is what Clifton says: Speiser “simply adopted A. Heidel’s chart of the sequence of acts in Enuma Elish and Genesis 1, assuming it proved borrowing.”41 But, in fact, says Clifton, “the sequence of events in the two works are [sic] not truly parallel.”42 So the same critique that I’m exercising of Enns and Sparks has already been enunciated with regard to Speiser by Clifton.

Heidel, in his book, admits,

the divergences are much more far-reaching and significant than are the resemblances, most of which are not any closer than what we should expect to find in any two more or less complete creation versions . . . which might come from entirely different parts of the world and which might be utterly unrelated to each other.43

This is because, as he says, “both would have to account for the same phenomena and since human minds think along much the same lines.”44 So Heidel himself recognizes that the alleged similarities between the Enuma Elish and Genesis 1 are not any more than what you might find between a creation story in South America and one in the islands of the South Pacific.

Enns acknowledges that the Babylonian and biblical stories have many significant differences suggesting that something other than simple borrowing has taken place, but nevertheless he still remains guilty of alleging parallels on the basis of listing isolated elements of the narratives without consideration of context. They’re simply listed without any consideration of the context in which they occur, and therefore these are little more than cherry-picking. When the two accounts are read as wholes they are far from parallel. The Enuma Elish, in fact, is only improperly characterized as a Babylonian creation epic. It really isn't. What it is is a panegyric of the god Marduk. It's the story of the exaltation of Marduk over the other Babylonian gods and how he became the supreme god. It is not

42 Ibid.
43 Heidel, The Babylonian Genesis, p. 130.
44 Ibid.
a Babylonian Genesis at all. Therefore most scholars today no longer considered the
*Enuma Elish* to be relevant in any direct way to Genesis 1.

W. G. Lambert is a very highly respected Assyriologist; that is to say, he studies the
literature of ancient Mesopotamia. Lambert says the *Enuma Elish*

is not a norm of Babylonian or Sumerian cosmology. It is a sectarian and aberrant
combination of mythological threads woven into an unparalleled compositum. In
my opinion it is not earlier than 1100 BC. . . . The various traditions it draws upon
are often perverted to such an extent that conclusions based on this text alone are
suspect. It can only be used safely in the whole context of ancient Mesopotamian
mythology.45

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student*: You said that it's not the Babylonian Genesis but rather is what?

*Dr. Craig*: I said it's a panegyric for Marduk. It is a sort of praise for Marduk about his
supremacy and how he attained the supremacy. That's what it really is.

*Student*: Picking up on what Heidel said, if you accept that *Homo sapiens* came into
being in a relatively small number and geographically close at the very beginning (i.e.
Adam and Eve) and they were aware of, through divine revelation, their origins of their
being (I'm just speculating here now) it seems to me it would be more likely that there
would be similar stories as mankind dispersed around different parts of the world, not
necessarily that the Hebrew borrowed from others. But would not then if it were
knowledge of the actual creation of the world – the story of creation – it seems to me
these other stories are . . . actually it's the other way around. They are remembering
variations of what may be what their forefathers have said verbally. Why is it always that
the Bible or Hebrews is the one borrowing instead of the other way around?

*Dr. Craig*: We ran into the same question when we talked about the Epic of Gilgamesh
and the flood story, if you'll recall, and speculated whether or not the flood story in
Gilgamesh and the flood story in Genesis might not both stem independently from some
earlier event. While that's certainly possible in a case like the creation account, I have to
to say that they're just not that similar. These similarities are spurious. So I don't see any
reason to think that these are dim memories of the same original story or account. They're
just so different.

*Student*: In any of them? In any other accounts?

45 W. G. Lambert, “A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis,”
*Journal of Theological Studies* 16/2 [1965]: 291; see further W. G. Lambert,
“Mesopotamian Creation Stories,” in *Imagining Creation*, ed. Markham J. Geller and
Dr. Craig: I've looked at the ones that are causally most relevant to Genesis that are usually discussed in the literature, and that would be Mesopotamian and Egyptian. I don't think we need to look at, say, Greek mythology or Norse mythology, though you may remember when we broadened our survey to take in other myths around the world we found common motifs in North American and South American Indian myths of creation that involved darkness and primordial water. Exactly as Heidel said, these are elements that might be found in completely unrelated stories. So you're just really into the realm of speculation here, and I would say that, at least with regard to these stories, the alleged parallels are the skewed vision of parallealomania from which some of these scholars are suffering rather than genuine indications of either borrowing or stemming from a common source.

**END DISCUSSION**

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46 Total Running Time: 28:47 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)
Lecture 14: Etiological Motifs in Genesis 2

To step back a moment and review where we’ve been, we're examining the interpretation of the creation stories of Genesis as being Jewish monotheistic myths. You will remember that we were using the folklorist’s definition of myth as given by Alan Dundes—a traditional sacred narrative that seeks to ground present day realities in primordial events.

I’ve argued that we should not attempt to demonstrate that these Genesis narratives are Jewish creation myths on the basis of their similarities to other ancient Near Eastern myths. We saw that the biblical stories are quite different from the Babylonian and Egyptian creation myths, and that the attempt to prove some sort of dependence between the biblical accounts and the Babylonian and Egyptian accounts is fraught with conjecture and uncertainty. Rather, the claim that Genesis 1-11 shares with ancient Near Eastern myths a common literary type or genre is to be grounded in the commonality of themes and etiological motifs that are found in various myths. You’ll remember we defined etiology as concerning the attempt to show that present-day events or realities or phenomena are to be explained by grounding them in prehistoric realities and events. Genesis 1-11 shares with myths in general and with ancient Near Eastern myths in particular the grand etiological themes of the origin of the world, the origin of mankind, the origin of certain natural phenomena, the origin of various cultural practices, and the origin of the prevailing religious practice of the day.

Of these different etiological themes, the great Assyriologist S. N. Kramer has said, “The most significant myths of a given culture are usually the cosmogonic, or creation myths.” Genesis 1 is obviously an etiological account of the origin of the world through God's creative activity. As such, it is spectacularly different from the cosmic etiologies of Israel's neighbors. In contrast to the Babylonian and Egyptian myths, there is neither theogony (that is to say, an account of the origin of the gods) nor is there any trace of theomachy (which is warfare or conflict between the gods that gives birth to the world as we know it). Rather, according to Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” All of physical reality is brought into being by an unoriginate and transcendent Deity. Over the ensuing six days, the world is filled out by God's effortless creation of day and night, of the sky with the waters above and the waters below, of dry land and seas, of vegetation, of the heavenly luminaries, of marine life and birds, of terrestrial animals, and finally of man. Genesis 2:4 sums it up, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” The creation narrative grounds the world with its familiar creatures and phenomena in the primordial creative work of God.

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In Genesis 2 we have an etiological account of the origin of humanity that supplements the brief notice of mankind's creation in chapter 1 verses 26 and 27. In Genesis 1:27 it says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Contrary to earlier scholarly assertions that what we have here in Genesis 2 is a different creation account which differs from the creation story in Genesis 1, the Old Testament commentator Klaus Westermann has rightly differentiated between myths of the origin of the world (which would be cosmogonic myths) and myths of the origin of mankind (what we might call anthropic myths).

The latter type of myth – the origin of humanity – is plentiful in the ancient Near East, and they are distinct from cosmogonic accounts. For example, humans are often treated as later creations of the gods almost as after-thoughts for the purpose of delivering the minor deities from the back-breaking labor of digging ditches and irrigation canals. So, for example, in the Atrahasis Epic we read that the minor deities are said to have labored for thousands of years before finally rebelling against their overseers which necessitated the creation of man to take over their labors. Similarly, in the Enuma Elish which we talked about last time, the god Marduk does not create man until much later in the epic than his creation of the cosmos from the severed corpse of Tiamat. That Genesis 2 is not a cosmogony is evident from the fact that it contains no description of God's creation of cosmic features like the sun, the moon, and the stars. Rather, it seeks to relate God's creation of humanity.

So Genesis 2 is not a different cosmogonic or creation myth distinct from chapter 1. Rather, it is a different sort of story which seeks to explain the origin of humanity. The story in Genesis 2 is therefore best understood, I think, as the Pentateuchal author’s attempt to supplement the brief notice of mankind's creation in Genesis 1:26-27. Whereas in Genesis 1 we are given a panoramic view of creation, in Genesis 2 we have a focused account of the creation of humanity on day 6 as mentioned in Genesis 1.

Although some scholars have suggested reading the account of man's creation in Genesis 2 diachronically; that is to say, sequentially compared with Genesis 1 . . . Diachronic would be over time or sequential. Some have suggested we should read Genesis 2 sequentially or diachronically compared to Genesis 1 rather than synchronically which would mean simultaneous or at the same time – the proposal is that Genesis 2 should be read sequentially rather than simultaneously with the creation of humanity in Genesis 1:26-27. But I think that this diachronic interpretation is less plausible than the synchronic view. The motivation for adopting a sequential interpretation of Genesis 2 is to allow for the existence of a considerable lapse of time between the creation of the original humans in Genesis 1 and the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 and thus the growth of a large human population that existed outside the Garden. So on the sequential interpretation, the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 simply represents a special
creation of Adam and Eve even though there were people unnumbered outside the Garden. This motivation looks to me suspiciously concordist. It seems to arise from concerns about paleoanthropology and population genetics, and so it wants to read into the narrative a considerable lapse of time and a large human population. But there's very little if anything in the text itself which would lead us to think that the events of Genesis 1 and 2 are not identical, much less that they are separated by eons of time.

On the contrary, let me share three reasons for thinking that what is described in Genesis 2 is the original creation of humanity, not some later creation of a special pair. Number one: The purpose of the primeval narratives of Genesis 1-11 is to portray God's universal plan for and dealings with humanity. Scholars have often asked themselves why doesn't the Pentateuch just begin with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12 and the founding of the nation of Israel. Why all this prehistoric stuff prior to the call of Abraham and the constitution of the nation of Israel? Commentators seem pretty widely agreed that the reason for prefixing this prehistoric narrative to the patriarchal narratives is the universalizing interest of the author. The Pentateuchal author wants to show that God's original plan was to bless all of mankind and that this aim has not been abandoned. It still remains ultimately in mind through the election of Israel which is now going to be God's means of fulfilling his original intent. And that's why God says to Abraham, “Through you all the nations of the world shall be blessed,” not just his select people of Israel. Old Testament scholar L. A. Turner rightly says, “Remove these elements, and the coherence of the book as a whole disappears.”48 God wasn't especially preoccupied with just the offspring of one specially created human couple to the neglect of everybody else – a sort of pre-Israelite form of election, if you will. Rather, he was concerned with all of mankind.

The second reason for thinking that Genesis 2 is the original creation of mankind is that a comparison of the story of the creation of man in Genesis 2 with other ancient Near Eastern creation myths show that such stories share an etiological interest in telling about how mankind in general came to exist. For example, in the Atrahasis Epic, in response to the complaints of the lower deities about their burdensome labors, the mother goddess decides to create man to take over the chores for these minor gods. These stories seek to answer the question of human origins in general – why does mankind exist? And the answer is that human beings were created basically as slave labor for the gods. When you read Genesis 2 against this backdrop, you find Genesis 2 has a very similar etiological interest. It wants to explain why does mankind exist, but it gives obviously a very, very different sort of answer.

The third reason for thinking that Genesis 2 is about the creation of mankind is that the account in Genesis 2 when read at face value seems to be about human origins. The author employs the typical ancient Mesopotamian etiological formula that we've seen before: “when ____ was not yet, then ____.” And you fill in the blanks with what you want to describe. Genesis 2:5-7 describes the creation of the earth prior to God's creation of man in these words:

when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground—then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Notice that the author states explicitly that there was no man to do the work of human agriculture until God created man. The word adam is the generic Hebrew word for man. It is not used as a proper name until chapter 4, verse 1. So there was no man—a no adam—to till the Earth before God created the first man. Moreover, notice that woman doesn't appear until her creation in Genesis 2:22 when God puts Adam to sleep and creates a woman out of his side. Among all of the animals that God forms and brings to Adam, Genesis 2:20 says “there was not found a helper fit for him.” God therefore creates a woman and presents her to the man. Here we have in detail, I think, what Genesis 1:27 says in summary: “male and female he created them.” Prior to the creation there simply was no man and no woman. Notice, too, the name that is later given by the man to his wife which is said to mean “the mother of all living” (that's in Genesis 3:20). He calls Eve the mother of all living. That is at face value an affirmation of her and the man's universal progenitorship of all of mankind—she's the mother of all living persons.

So for these reasons the story of man's creation in Genesis 2 is not plausibly intended by the Pentateuchal author to be a sequential account distinct from and later than the creation of man in Genesis 1:26-27. Rather, it is a more focused or detailed rendition of that same event.

In the closing comment of the story, etiology comes explicitly to the fore. Genesis 2:24 says, “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” Notice here the man and the woman have now become man and wife. Marriage is thus God's plan for man and woman and is grounded in the primordial creation of man and woman as his helper. The marriage relationship is then the proper sphere for human sexual activity. This etiological note, I think, confirms that the author takes his story to be
universal in scope. Marriage is not plausibly taken to be merely God's special provision for this specially-created couple. Rather, it is his intention for all of humanity.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student*: When I was a young kid I was brought up sequentially.

*Dr. Craig*: Oh, really?

*Student*: Yes. And it was told that humans were in the Earth – the fall – and they were all darkened, their consciousness were seared. They were not alive spiritually. They were cut off from God. So God created Adam and gave him the law to revive the conscious. That happened when he sinned and was under the curse immediately. And so then because we are made of all one blood – everybody, all one life from God – then they revived. They felt sin. It revived their conscience. It looked like she's the mother of all living because his descendants are now alive to God spiritually until sin. Then if you look at why Cain was cast out and he's afraid of dying – he wasn't afraid of being killed by future generations of their own children. There were other people around.

*Dr. Craig*: I think that the story of Cain's wife is the single thread to which the sequential interpretation proponents might appeal. That Cain is able to get a wife – where did she come from? – and then he's afraid that other people are going to kill him, and so God puts a mark on him. This is a shred, I think, of evidence that you might say there are other people outside the Garden, but it would equally be plausible to say that he married his sister and that he feared blood revenge where the blood relatives of someone that's murdered are obligated to go kill the person who did it so that any brothers that he might have had would be out for him. But that's a quite different story, you'll notice. That's in Genesis 4, this story of Cain and Abel, and that's very different from the creation story in Genesis 2. And, moreover, in the interpretation you suggested, it not only makes the creation story of man in Genesis 2 non-universal but the fall as well because these people outside the Garden you said are also fallen, their conscience is seared, and so forth, which would make sins' entry into the world something that didn't just happen in the Garden. So I think that this sequentialist interpretation is reading enormously between the lines and really doesn't have much to commend it. As I say, I think the main motivation for the sequentialist interpretation is to deal with the data of paleoanthropology and population genetics. They want to get a large human population outside the Garden which has left fossil evidence of ancient hominids and which would explain the genetic imprint on living persons. It tries to avoid the problem of having all of humanity originating recently from a single couple.

**END DISCUSSION**
Etiological motifs concerning natural phenomena (we've looked at motifs concerning creation and concerning humanity), are also evident in Genesis 1-11. Such motifs are especially obvious in the account of Genesis 3 of the primordial couple's disobedience to God as a result of their seduction by the serpent in the Garden. In the punishments pronounced by God upon the serpent, the man, and the woman, etiological motifs abound. Let me read to you from Genesis 3:14-19.

The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” To the woman he said, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

In this account of God's judgment, the serpent's slithering on the ground is clearly said to be the consequence of God's judgment for its seduction of the couple. That's why snakes crawl on their bellies on the ground. Similarly, however we interpret the woman's subjection to her husband, the explanation for the terrible pain that women experience in childbirth is attributed to the first woman's disobedience. Finally, the toil of farming is attributed to the fact that the land is cursed because of the man's disobedience. Thus, these natural phenomena with which later Israelites would have been all too familiar are explained in terms of our primordial parents’ fall into sin.

While the story in Genesis 3 does not offer an etiology for evil as such (the deceitful serpent simply shows up in the Garden opposing God), still it does offer an etiology for human misery as the result of sin. In the ensuing narrative climaxing in the Flood story, we have what Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad has called “an increase in sin to avalanche proportions” as man devolves from bad to worse until, according to Genesis 6:5, God sees that “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”49 Though the story of the Fall does not contemplate the later dogma of original sin (that is to say, the dogma

according to which the sin and guilt of Adam are imputed to every member of his posterity – you don't find that in Genesis 3, that's in Romans 5), still it does portray the disobedience of the first couple as the flood gate through which sin entered into the paradise created for them by God leading to their expulsion from the Garden to eke out a life from the cursed soil cut off from the tree of life and thus doomed to death.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* It's been a long time since we discussed this but just remind me, what is your position on the origin of evil? Supralapsarianism? Is it appropriate to go into that? I'm just trying to tie this back into what we are discussing.

*Dr. Craig:* I see evil as originating in creaturely free will whether human or satanic – a kind of satanic fall before the human Fall. I would see that the cross is decreed in light of the Fall that God foreknew would happen as his remedy for human sin and disobedience. I'm not inclined to think of the Fall as the means that God decreed to get to the cross, but rather knowing that humanity and creation would fall into sin God decreed the cross as his remedy for this.

*Student:* So then Genesis 3:15 is just the announcement of that then basically?

*Dr. Craig:* I didn't take a position on that here because commentators disagree on how to interpret this enigmatic phrase that “you shall bruise his heel, and he shall crush your head.” Is this just talking about the enmity that exists between human beings and snakes – that they bite us on the feet, and we try to kill them and stamp them out? Or is this a prophetic foreshadowing of some sort of Redeemer who would come and crush the forces of evil that are represented by the snake and in so doing be himself in some way injured? People have often taken this as a foreshadowing of Christ who crushes Satan but in so doing is himself killed on the cross. I'm not taking a position on that. The focus here is on these etiological motifs. I think you see how the Pentateuchal author several times in this story grounds realities that Israelites would have been familiar with, like dealing with thorns and thistles in their farming or pain in childbirth and so forth. It's grounded in this primordial Fall.

*Student:* I've always wondered about the detail of woman being created from man's rib. Have you found any kind of parallels or hints that maybe any other ancient literature . . . ?

*Dr. Craig:* I think I'm fairly confident that there are no parallels to this in ancient Near Eastern literature. These are generally myths simply about the creation of humanity in general, and there doesn't seem to be any sort of special focus on the creation of woman as man's companion. That seems to be unique to this biblical account.

*Student:* Any reason why it's the rib and not, say, his pinky?
Dr. Craig: Again, one can speculate. Is this meant to indicate their equality before God? Both recipients of God's love and grace, both in his image. It says in Genesis 1, *In the image of God he created them male and female; he created them.* So they're both in God's image despite the fact that the woman is created derivatively from man. Perhaps it might also symbolize the motif that she was created to be man's helper. It's striking that God doesn't first create a woman and then says, *It's not good for her to be alone; I'm going to create a man to be a helper to her.* That would have been, I think, inconceivable in patriarchal Israel. The woman is created to be the man's helper. So by being created from his side this could indicate that she is his equal in being in the image of God and yet derives from him and is therefore meant to be his helper. But I'm speculating here and not taking a firm position.

Student: Wouldn't that sequence indicate God creates man, that you had the creation first then you had the perpetuator of the creation in woman coming second?

Dr. Craig: If we interpret this as the same event of Genesis 1:26-27 then obviously there's a time gap between the creation of Adam and the creation of Eve, but it would still be the same event described in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 rather than the creation of some special couple eons after the initial creation of humankind.

**END DISCUSSION**

Let me go on to the final point so that we will break at a good point, and that is that among the most important and obvious etiological motifs in Genesis 1-11 are those related to the establishment of religious practice in Israel. The creation story ends with God's resting from his work on the seventh day. Genesis 2:2-3 says,

> And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.

The Pentateuchal author is explicit about Sabbath observance being grounded in the pattern set by God and his hallowing and blessing the seventh day. In Exodus 20:8-11 we read,

> Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, . . . for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

Similarly, Exodus 31:15-17:
Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign for ever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

I think probably no other etiological motif in Genesis 1-11 is so powerfully attested as the grounding of Sabbath observance in God's own observance of the seventh day as a day of rest in the story of the world's creation.

In summary, it's evident that Genesis 1-11 are brimming with etiological motifs concerning the origins of the world, the origins of mankind, the origin of certain natural phenomena, the origin of cultural practices, and the origin of the prevailing religious practice. Even if attempts to show that direct borrowing of Genesis 1-11 from ancient Near Eastern myths are fraught with conjecture and uncertainty, as I think they are, still I don't think it can be plausibly denied that these chapters treat many of the same themes as ancient Near Eastern myths and that they seek to ground present realities in the events of the primordial past. Therefore, they should be classified as the folklorist’s concept of myths.50

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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**

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51 Total Running Time: 38:19 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)
Lecture 16: Genealogies in Genesis 1-11 (continued)

We've been discussing the role of the genealogies of Genesis 1-11 in ordering the primeval narratives into a primeval history by providing a sort of chronological backbone to these chapters. In our last session together we examined the claim of Robert Wilson that these genealogies, even if they were not written primarily for historiographic reasons, Wilson claims that they don't really have any intention to be historical records. We saw reasons to dispute that. The fact that these genealogies merge seamlessly into persons who are indisputably thought to be historical (like Abraham and his successors) suggests that there's no differentiation in principle between Abraham and his successors and the predecessors of Abraham.

Still, I think Wilson's work does serve to remind us that ancient genealogies were not the work of disinterested historians but can serve other ends. Consider, for example, the segmented genealogy that appears in Genesis chapter 10 – the so-called Table of Nations. These are listed as though they were the sons of Noah and their descendants. So, for example, in Genesis 10:1 it states that, “These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; sons were born to them after the flood.” So in verse 2 the sons of Japheth are then listed, and then in verse 6 the sons of Ham are listed, and then down in verse 22 the sons of Shem are listed. Although the Table presents these various persons and nations as descended from Noah's sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth), nevertheless the people groups that are listed on the Table are not necessarily connected by blood. Rather, they represent eclectic groupings of peoples based upon geographical, linguistic, racial, and cultural similarities. The Jewish commentator Nahum Sarna in his commentary on Genesis 1-11 comments as follows. Sarna says,

On the surface, the use of verbs expressing birth and of terms like ‘son,’ ‘father,’ ‘first-born’ suggests straightforward genealogies of the kind already encountered in previous chapters. In actual fact . . . many of the personal names listed here are otherwise known to be those of places or peoples. Ten names have plural endings, nine others take the . . . suffix -i . . . [several others include] the definite article, which is inadmissable with personal names in Hebrew.52

He concludes,

The terminology is not meant to be taken literally.53

Some of the peoples that we would classify as Semitic (that is to say, the sons of Shem) are listed in the Table as sons of Ham instead. Because the descendants of Ham are under

53 Ibid.
God's curse, Israel's greatest enemies are listed as Ham's descendants. Moreover, this character of the Table is not a modern discovery. The ancient author himself would have been aware of how eclectic his groupings are. For example, he collects Mesopotamian, Ethiopian, and Arabian ethnicities together under Cush. He could not have failed to notice that Sheba and Havilah are listed as descendants of both Ham and Shem in verses 7 and 28-29. So Sheba and Havilah are counted as both descendants of Ham and Shem. All of this suggests that he did not understand the genealogy to be a straightforward historical account. So despite the notices “sons of” and “begot,” this genealogy does not list blood descendants, but rather it lists peoples based on political, linguistic, geographical, and other similar factors. And the author of Genesis knew it. It is a showcase example of Wilson's claim that segmented genealogies serve mainly domestic, politico-jural, and religious purposes.

With respect to the linear genealogies, telescoping (that is to say, collapsing generations) and fluidity are common features in ancient genealogies. Gaps in Sumerian, Assyrian, and Babylonian king lists are common. When you put together or conjoin the genealogy of Adam in chapter 5 of Genesis with the genealogy of Shem in chapter 11, you find created an artificial symmetry of ten antediluvian ancestors from Adam through Noah followed by ten postdiluvian ancestors from Shem through Abraham. A similar ten name genealogy appears in Ruth 4:18-22 for King David, as well as in various Sumerian, Assyrian, and Babylonian king lists. Sarna concludes,

The conclusion is unmistakable: we have here a deliberate, symmetrical schematization of history, featuring neatly balanced, significant segments of time as a way of expressing the fundamental biblical teaching that history is meaningful.54

Moreover, in the Sumerian king list, the antediluvian kings have fantastically long reigns – as long as 43,200 years for an individual reign with the lengths of the reign then diminishing after the Flood. The eight antediluvian kings are said to have ruled for a combined total of 241,000 years. Eight kings ruled for 241,000 years. Following the flood, 39 additional kings reign for less than 27,000 years. So a tremendous decline in the lengths of the reigns following the Flood. Similarly, in Genesis the Flood interrupts the genealogies, and fantastically long lifespans (hundreds of years in length) are ascribed to the antediluvians and then diminished lifespans following the Flood. These abnormally long lifespans lead to difficulties if taken literally. For example, if you add up the years, it turns out that Noah is still alive when Abraham is born! And his son Shem actually outlives Abraham by 35 years, which seems crazy. The author of Genesis would himself have been aware of how fantastic these ancestral lifespans are which gives reason to think

54 Ibid., p. 40.
that the genealogies are not intended to be straightforward history. The Old Testament commentator Kenneth Matthews suggests, plausibly I think, that the genealogies serve the theological purpose of showing the interconnectedness of all mankind and the hope of universal blessing. Nevertheless, as John Walton reminds us, there's no evidence that ancient genealogies included individuals who were not believed to have actually lived. Indeed, with respect to many of the kings in the Mesopotamian king lists, we are confident that they actually did exist. Walton concludes,

Consequently there would be no precedent for thinking of the biblical genealogies differently from others in the ancient world. By putting Adam in the ancestor lists, the authors of Scripture are treating him as a historical person.

START DISCUSSION

*Student:* Concerning your point about the fantastic ages, while I agree with that, I am having difficulty seeing how that's not anything more than an argument from personal incredulity. Because I know of plenty of Young Earth Creationists who would bite the bullet on that.

*Dr. Craig:* Some things are incredible, I think. It is unbelievable that I think the ancient author would have thought that people like Methuselah lived for 900 years. Moreover, remember the point that I make that taking them literally causes these really odd consequences like Shem outliving Abraham for 35 years. The fact that ancient Jews felt uncomfortable about this is evident in the fact that in the Samaritan and Septuagint texts of the Pentateuch these numbers are changed so as to make them less awkward – the ages are reduced. Scholars agree that the Masoretic text (the one that we have our translation based on) is probably the right text – it's original. But nevertheless, these other texts (the Samaritan and the Septuagint) show how uncomfortable ancient Jews felt about the length of these lifespans. So it's not just incredulity; it's that they also produce these sort of chronological anomalies that just don't seem right.

*Student:* I actually did a presentation on that very thing not all that long ago – on the Septuagint numbers versus the Masoretic text. I actually think the Septuagint numbers have the better historical support. That's because the difference is all off by a hundred except for one of them which is off by fifty. It looks like the one that's off by fifty could have easily been added a hundred years to it but you couldn't have subtracted a hundred years from it. There's a whole host of reasons for that. If there are gaps in the genealogies though that alleviates the problem of Abraham existing while Noah and Shem. Plus if you add the Septuagint numbers to it that also alleviates that problem. However, I do agree that there are gaps in the genealogies. As for the ages, I think there could be some scientific reasons. Moses lives 120. Abraham lives 175. We don't seem to have as much
of a problem with that. 900? Well? I know. But it's one of those things that we don't know genetically.

Dr. Craig: It's a cumulative argument here that I'm presenting, and I think this would be one factor. But thank you. Good response.

Student: Antediluvian and postdiluvian? What does that mean?

Dr. Craig: Antediluvian – those who lived before the Flood; before the deluge. Antediluvians are those who lived before the Flood; postdiluvians are those who lived after the Flood. As I say, in these Mesopotamian king lists, they have these fantastically long reigns prior to the Flood and then afterwards diminished reigns. You have the similar pattern in Genesis with the ages of the antediluvian patriarchs who lived for centuries and then afterwards the ages are diminishing.

Student: I just read a book Rebooting the Bible, which agrees with what someone earlier said – that at 100 AD there was a conspiracy to get rid of thirteen hundred years to confront Jesus being the Messiah. That's what got inducted into the Masoretic Text. The Septuagint is most accurate. Plus if you use the date of Josephus for the Exodus, it agrees with the Septuagint dates which agrees with all archaeology of the destruction of Jericho and their surrounding cities.

Dr. Craig: Thank you for that. I would just say that when you read Old Testament commentaries on Genesis, I think that I've never seen anyone yet disagree with the priority of the Masoretic text. Everyone seems to think (that I've read, and I've read quite a few) that the Septuagint text (that's the Greek text of the Old Testament; that's not the original language – that's a Greek translation) and then the Samaritan text of the Pentateuch – everybody seems to think that those numbers have been changed because of these difficulties. But, as you indicate, everything is open for discussion.

Student: Given the differences in how the world is supposed to work before the Flood (such as not having rain, things like that), it suggests different realities that may not preclude a longer lifespan due to a variety of factors. We won't want to get into it but I think that given the differences that are described it's premature to make a judgment about the reality of those types of lifespans.

Dr. Craig: I don't think that there's anything in the text that indicates that the laws of nature changed before and after the Flood that would allow people to live longer. And here I might appeal to Jonathan Sarfati, who is himself a Young Earth Creationist who has written a commentary on Genesis 1-11. Sarfati himself argues against Young Earthers who say that somehow the antediluvian conditions were different that enabled people to live for centuries and then after the Flood somehow they changed. There just doesn't seem to be anything in the text to support that, much less in science.
Student: Just a quick methodological question. We talked about the symmetry of tens. At what point do you think such symmetries should be seen as artificially added by the author versus those being signs of God's sovereign ordination over creation, like he planned it that way?

Dr. Craig: It's going to be a cumulative argument, as I said earlier. It's not just here that you seem to have this created symmetry of ten and ten, but you find that for example in the genealogy for King David in Ruth 4. You find these groups of tens in the king lists in ancient Mesopotamia. So it looks like an artificial construction rather than saying that there actually were literally ten generations before and after the Flood.

Student: With the pre-Flood ages and then post-Flood ages, they seem to kind of decrease as the ages go after the Flood, I was curious what function that might serve, as well as tying that in with the Flood? Did the author of Genesis, and then the original people hearing this, would they have taken the Flood then to be strictly literally or did they see it as something different?

Dr. Craig: That's sort of the million-dollar question at this point, and we'll have to talk about that more later on. What I'm suggesting is that there are indications such as I've mentioned already that even though the genealogies order these narratives chronologically they shouldn't be read with strict historical precision. Therefore it would be a mistake to read them in a kind of literal way. They could represent other things. Now, what they represent – that's a difficult question. What is the theological significance of long ages prior to the Flood and shortened ones afterwards? I'm not in a position to answer that question. But that certainly is germane.

Student: The questions you've raised here – is it an example of a general tendency that we have when assessing ancient writings to impose modern standards of accuracy on those writings? For example, we expect when you read a history everything will be chronological, and in the Gospels that doesn't seem to always be the case. Also, direct quotation. Ancient people had no means of recording speeches, and yet we insert quotation marks as if these are verbatim quotes. Do you have any comment on that?

Dr. Craig: You are absolutely correct. The difference between the Gospels and Genesis 1-11 that I believe I mentioned before is that the genre of literature to which the Gospels belong is ancient biography. While you're correct that in ancient biography events could be told in different order, nevertheless these do show a historical interest. They are about a historical person and telling anecdotes to illustrate the character of the principal figure in the biography. By contrast, I've argued at some length now that the genre of Genesis 1-11 is myth. It is an attempt to ground realities in the Pentateuchal author’s time that were important to Israeli society in the primordial past. Therefore you cannot just assume that these are to be read historically in the way that you can with the Gospels which are a
The most historical element in Genesis 1-11 that I think does show (and I've defended this against Wilson) historical interest is the genealogies, but as I've just argued, even the genealogies mustn't be interpreted in a kind of wooden literalistic way. I think the Table of Nations alone in Genesis 10 precludes that. As for quotation, you're also correct about that. In fact, in Genesis 2 when we have the story of the creation of Eve and God brings Eve to Adam and presents her to him, Adam says, “She shall be called woman [Ishah in the Hebrew] for she was taken out of man [Ish in Hebrew].” What's interesting about that is according to Hebraists that I've spoken to, that kind of vocabulary didn't exist in Hebrew until about the monarchy around 1000 BC. Therefore, Adam (or even an earlier author) couldn't have used this kind of vocabulary – this pun on Ish and Ishah. This is an anachronism. It is a retelling of the story using the language and the vocabulary of more modern Hebrew that existed around the time of the monarchy. That's just again one more indication here that we mustn't press these narratives with a kind of wooden literality.

Student: A couple things about the ages. It seems to me that the decline of purity of the gene pool coupled with the introduction of meat into the human diet may have had something to do with the reduction of ages. But I also want to ask you. Genesis 6:3 – what do you think about that verse where it says “God says my spirit will not abide and man forever for he is flesh but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.”

Dr. Craig: That is presented as the reason for the diminished lifespans of the postdiluvians. God has said, I'm not going to put up with these people in the same way and now their lifespans are going to be diminished to no more than 120 years. That would be the rationale. Maybe that would help to answer an earlier question about what's the theological point that's being made here by the diminished lifespans. Maybe it underlines the sinfulness of mankind and how their lives need to be shortened lest they utterly destroy the world and civilization.

Student: Matthew is indisputably historical, but it provides a genealogy where up to the deportation to Babylon there are fourteen generations, after that up to Jesus there are fourteen generations. So you see there's a similar type of symmetry there, but it's hard to say that there would literally be fourteen generations.

Dr. Craig: I didn't appeal to that example because it's New Testament. It's centuries after Genesis. But you're exactly right. You have these three groups, as I recall, of fourteen generations each, clearly, I think, constructed by Matthew to be symmetrical – nice and neat. It's an artificial symmetry. As I say in Ruth 4 you have a genealogy of David like this which is constructed of ten nice generations. This, I think, makes it plausible that that's also what's going on in the genealogies of the antediluvian/postdiluvian ancestors.
**Student:** I want to bring you to awareness of how people keep up with their genealogy tracking. My father actually passed down to my older brother (the first-born) a poem of twenty generations and said that is to pass on to the first-born. You pass on and track the twenty generations. That is how everything is intact. That way you not only have the last name but this poem gives you the given middle name so that later on you can kind of track across the geography someone shared that last name and middle name. You can ask about their ancestry and be able to track.

**Dr. Craig:** This is in Chinese society?

**Student:** Yes.

**Dr. Craig:** That's very interesting. Let me ask you one question. When an additional person is born, do they drop somebody off the beginning of the genealogy to keep it at 20 or do they add so it becomes 21, 22, 23?

**Student:** The firstborn after the 20 generation has to come up with a poem for another 20 generation. So it is passed down like that.

**Dr. Craig:** Very interesting. Thank you. As Wilson's book illustrated, this anthropological data (such as what you shared) is very often studied by Old Testament scholars today as an analogy to how genealogies function in tribal societies. Although this is of uncertain application to ancient Israel, nevertheless it's interesting and suggestive.

**Student:** I have seen headlines but not studied and read that there's no reason why we couldn't live forever. Junk DNA at the back and the copying errors and everything else. I keep hearing from that – our better understanding of how DNA is used for copying and that sort of thing. You mentioned that there's no indication in the Bible that there was a change that caused people to live longer earlier than later. There is an indication. It's called the ages of the patriarchs. That is the evidence that said something happened.

**Dr. Craig:** Well, no, I don't think that's fair. Because we're looking for an explanation of the ages of the patriarchs – some change. There isn't anything in the text that says that somehow because of a flood that the laws of nature changed enabling DNA to operate differently or people to live longer. I want to just be very clear here. The objection or concern that I'm raising is not scientific. I've not said anything about DNA or science. This is purely hermeneutical at this point. We're just studying the text and asking: Are these genealogies meant to be taken literally or do they serve other purposes as Wilson suggests? I want to say they do have a historical side to them. They show a historical interest by the author. But we mustn't press them too hard for literal truth.

**Student:** It does seem that there is a lot. The ages. The patterns of the ages. Enough that I wouldn't just say “ah.” I would go with a default and say it is true.

**Dr. Craig:** Fair enough.
Student: One of the things to consider in these groupings, like the 14s in the New Testament, as memory devices. This would be a way of arranging so you would remember the main people groups.

Dr. Craig: Yeah, absolutely. In an oral society or with oral tradition you probably don't want to have genealogies that are hundreds of names in length, for example, but you would have simple, symmetrical genealogies that could be easily transmitted like the groups of twenty that someone mentioned.

Student: The other consideration is the range of the kings – a number of these can be co-regencies rather than consecutive. That would shorten these spans somewhat.

Dr. Craig: Fair enough. Though when you get to reigns of twenty six thousand, thirty thousand years, something very peculiar is going on there.

Student: I didn't get that. Where do these come from?

Dr. Craig: This is the Sumerian king list – the lists of the kings of ancient Sumer which is the society prior to Assyria and Babylon in Mesopotamia. Then you also have king lists from Assyria and then from Babylon. So we have these ancient king lists that seem to resemble a little bit the biblical genealogies. The biblical genealogies are unique in ancient literature, but in these king lists you do have “____, son of ____, son of ____” and they list their successive reigns, so there's some analogy there to the biblical genealogies.

Student: I'll just add a comment about the feasibility really quickly about the old ages. I was going to say something along the same thing that others said about the degeneration of mankind over time – the genetic mistakes for instance. Obviously when God created mankind, he created them perfect without any genetic mistakes. By the time you get to the law of Moses, a law has been established that you can't marry a sibling because you're going to have some mistakes because of similar genetic mistakes. So I think that gives some feasibility to the longer lifespans early on. Then under the Young Earth perspective, we are at least consistent between animals and humans because reptiles continue to grow as long as they live, and so reptiles that live a long time would be dinosaurs. So humans live hundreds of years, reptiles live hundreds of years, that's where we get dinosaurs from – reptiles that live a long time since they continue to grow until they die. Then I think you kind of look at Methuselah who has a prophet as a dad and Enoch names Methuselah which means in Hebrew “when he dies it will come.” If he actually did live 969 years then he dies the year of the Flood which would make that prophecy true. I guess I just wanted to add a couple of comments about the feasibility of these.

Dr. Craig: Fair enough. I welcome the push back. I know this is controversial.
Student: I'm just thinking and sort of comparing and contrasting the Mesopotamian king lists with the genealogies in Scripture. Obviously the Mesopotamian king lists are ridiculous. We know from anthropology that Homo sapiens has been around for much less of the time that those kings would have ruled, but to me I was just thinking that seems to add to an argument for the historicity of the Genesis list because even though they're large they're far more reasonable in a way that people at that time wouldn't have known that Homo sapiens had only been around for a hundred thousand years. But they still have dates that are considerably shortened. To me, I would think that does make an argument for their historicity. They are not a clear copy of those Mesopotamian lists.

Dr. Craig: This is a point that is made by the Jewish commentator Umberto Cassuto in his commentary on Genesis 1-11. He says compared to these king lists with these fantastic reigns thousands and thousands of years long, the ages of the antediluvians look modest by comparison. Now, that doesn't mean he takes them literally, but he does say that they are much more modest, lest fantastic than the reigns of these Mesopotamian kings, and so that certainly is a fair point. Whether or not though these are to be taken literally, well, I've already said reasons for my doubts about that.

Student: The Mesopotamians and the Egyptians had a tendency to exaggerate, too.

Dr. Craig: Obviously!

Student: If they had real numbers then they were trying to outdo each other in some cases.

Dr. Craig: The question would be then: what about ancient Israelites? Did they have a tendency to exaggerate numbers for some reason? Is there some theological point that's being made here?

Student: If there's a theological point, I haven't been able to find it. I just think it brings up the inerrancy issue. If the numbers are not literal . . . and I think you can take the numbers in Genesis literal and have gaps in the genealogies so that you don't have a wooden strict timeline.

Dr. Craig: But in the genealogies what you've got is that it gives the age of the father at the time that he gave birth to the son: when he was 375 years old he gave birth to a son and then he lived another 600 and some years after that.

Student: In some cases like in Abraham it says that Terah was, I think he was 135 when Abraham was born, but when you do the math in some of the other places we see that he was really not that age when he was born. So the numbers . . . there are actual textual reasons to think that the numbers are not exact.

Dr. Craig: You don't think the text is corrupted?
**Student:** I don't think the text is corrupted. I just think that if there are gaps there (if it's telescoped like you said) the numbers could be literal but we still can't make an exact timeline out of it.

**Dr. Craig:** Alright. That is sort of the point I'm making, isn't it? We mustn't interpret these with a sort of wooden literalness. There's something else going on here.

**Student:** An excellent article if you want to write these names down – Jeremy Sexton and Henry Smith from the Associates of Biblical Research website has got an excellent article on those two.

**Dr. Craig:** The reading that I’ve done on this suggest that there is no sort of consensus view about how to explain these ages of these antediluvians. It is completely mysterious. They tried to find numerology in them, symbols, tried to think of multiple generations or lines of descent, and nothing seems to work. Old Testament scholars remain baffled basically at what these long ages could mean. I think it's at least an open question; maybe they're not meant to be taken literally.

**END DISCUSSION**

We are at the end of our time. Next week we will continue. I appreciate the good discussion today.\(^{55}\)
Lecture 17: The Genre of Mytho-History

Last time we looked at the genealogies in Genesis 1-11 and saw the way in which they serve to provide a chronological framework for the primeval narratives that turn them into a primeval history. But I argued despite the interest in history that these genealogies evince, we shouldn't press them too hard for their literal interpretation. We saw, for example, that in the genealogy in chapter 10 – the so-called Table of Nations – that despite words of “begetting” and “son of” and so forth that these are not actually lines of blood descent but group people on the basis of geography, ethnicity, political considerations, and so forth so that this isn't a literal genealogical table. Moreover, we saw that the artificial symmetry between the antediluvian and the postdiluvian ancestors suggests that this is an artificial construction arranged so as to have ten antediluvian ancestors from Adam to Noah and then ten postdiluvian ancestors from Shem to Abraham. Finally, I argued that the abnormally long lifespans of the antediluvians suggests that these are not to be taken literally but, on the pattern of the fantastic reigns of the ancient Sumerian kings, have some other purpose than to give a literal historical account.

Just this past week I was at a conference at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School on the Creation Project and had a chance to talk with a few Old Testament scholars about some of these issues. I spoke at some length with John Collins, who is a professor of Old Testament at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, and also with Richard Averbeck, who is a professor of Old Testament and ancient languages at Trinity. I asked them what they thought of these long lifespans of the antediluvians. Collins said to me that nobody knows what is going on here. Everybody is convinced there's something going on here, but nobody can figure out exactly what it is. Averbeck suggested that perhaps the point of having these abnormally long lifespans was to show the tremendous antiquity of the figures involved. Whether in the Genesis genealogies or in the Sumerian king lists, the abnormally long reigns or lifespans was meant to indicate how deep in the prehistoric past they were. But, again, this was just a suggestion. Nobody really knows for sure exactly the reason for these long antediluvian lifespans.

I argued that while these genealogies do evince a historical interest on the part of the author of Genesis, we need to be careful not to press them too woodenly for literality.

So I think Genesis 1-11 are plausibly to be understood as Hebrew myths with an interest in history. The eminent Assyriologist Thorkild Jacobsen proposed that we recognize a unique genre of literature which he called “mytho-history.” On the basis of three fragments of different dates, Thorkild Jacobsen was able to assemble an ancient Sumerian story. Sumer was the Mesopotamian civilization prior to Babylon. He was able to assemble an ancient Sumerian story which he called the Eridu Genesis. Eridu was a
Sumerian city. The *Eridu Genesis* is a story which deals with the creation of man, the institution of kingship and the founding of the first cities, and then the Great Flood. Jacobsen thinks that Genesis similarly describes the creation of man and animals, it lists the leading figures after creation, and then narrates the Flood. His reflections on this sort of literature are worth quoting at length. He says, “These three parts . . .” That is to say, the creation account, the account of the lists of antediluvians, and then the Flood itself. “These three parts moreover are in both traditions . . .” That is to say, both in the *Eridu (Sumerian) Genesis* and in the Hebrew Genesis.

These three parts, moreover, are in both traditions combined simply by arranging them along a line in time and not according to the most usual device for connecting separate tales or myths: grouping them around a single hero. . . . In the ‘Eridu Genesis’ moreover the progression is clearly a logical one of cause and effect: the wretched state of natural man touches the motherly heart of Nintur, who has him improve his lot by settling down in cities and building temples; and she gives him a king to lead and organize. As this chain of cause and effect leads from nature to civilization, so a following such chain carries from the early cities and kings over into the story of the flood. The well-organized irrigation works carried out by the cities under the leadership of their kings lead to a greatly increased food supply and that in turn makes man multiply on the earth. The volume of noise these people make keeps Enlil from sleeping and makes him decide to get peace and quiet by sending the flood. Now, this arrangement along a line of time as cause and effect is striking, for it is very much the way a historian arranges his data, and since the data here are mythological we may assign both traditions to a new and separate genre as mytho-historical accounts.\(^56\)

It might be seriously questioned whether the conditions identified by Jacobsen for a narrative’s qualifying as even quasi-historical in nature, namely, they arranged causally connected events in chronological order, is really sufficient to indicate a genuine historical interest. By this standard, the myth *Enuma Elish* (which we've discussed in this class; this is the myth of the ascendancy of the god Marduk to a place of supremacy in the Babylonian pantheon) ought to qualify then as mytho-historical since the story of Marduk’s conquest of the dragon goddess Tiamat most certainly relates chronologically ordered, causally connected events in time. He builds the world – the heavens and the Earth – out of the carcass of the dragon goddess Tiamat whom he has slain – clearly a chronological event of cause and effect. But that would be absurd to think that the *Enuma

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Elish is therefore some sort of quasi-historical account. But I think it's important to realize that Jacobsen is talking about an ordering in real time, not merely the fictional time of a myth or fable. The second part of the Eridu Genesis is modeled on the Sumerian king lists, and Jacobsen credits the inclusion of this section in the tale to “pure historical interest on the part of the composer.” So it is this interest in genuine chronology that sets the stories apart from pure myth:

This interest in numbers is very curious, for it is characteristic of myths and folk tales that they are not concerned with time for all. . . . No!– interest in numbers of years belongs elsewhere, to the style of chronicles and historiography. In Mesopotamia we find it first in date-lists, lists of reigns, and in the Kinglist, later on in the Chronicles, but to find this chronological list-form combined, as it is here, with simple mythological narrative, is truly unique. . . . The assignment of the tale to a mytho-historical genre is thus further confirmed.

I realize that classifying Genesis 1-11 as mytho-history is doubtless disquieting for many evangelical Christians. But evangelical laymen would probably be surprised at how widely accepted Jacobsen’s classification of Genesis 1-11 as mytho-history is among evangelical Old Testament scholars. The case of Gordon Wenham, who is a highly respected Old Testament commentator, is instructive. Wenham is the author of the commentary Genesis 1-15 in The Word biblical commentary series. Of Jacobsen’s classification of Genesis 1-11 as mytho-history, Wenham remarks, “This is a sensitive analysis of both texts.” That is to say, both the Eridu Genesis and the biblical Genesis. “But,” and here comes the caveat, “myth is a loaded term which leads to misunderstanding. That is why I prefer Proto history.” So instead of mytho-history, Genesis 1-11 is proto-history. What is that? Wenham says, “It is Proto in that it describes origins and sets out models of God and his dealings with the human race. It is historical in that it describes past realities and the lessons that should be drawn from them.” This is a distinction without a difference. Wenham’s characterization of proto-history aptly describes mytho-history. Wenham says, “The genealogical framework . . . of chapter 4 as well as the introductory formula” – in chapter 2 and verse 4, there he’s referring to that formula (toledoth in Hebrew) these are the generations of which then will have a genealogical account – “shows that the editor considers his account proto-historical: as describing real individuals from the primeval past whose actions are significant for all mankind.”

The narratives put profound theological truths “in vivid and memorable form in an absorbing yet highly symbolic story.” If we take these stories as straightforward history, Wenham cautions, “we may be forced to conclude that Genesis is trying to relate history but not succeeding, which would be a rather negative conclusion.” That's why Wenham prefers proto-history. It’s evident, I think, that there is no material difference between proto-history and mytho-history. Wenham simply declines to use the word “myth” because of the connotations which the word has in popular parlance.

By contrast, Bill Arnold is an evangelical Old Testament scholar at Asbury Seminary in Wilmington, Kentucky. Arnold has more temerity than Wenham. He opines,

These chapters are no simple history or example of ancient historiography. At most, we may say that mythical themes have been arranged in a forward-moving, linear progression, in what may be considered a historicizing literary form, using genealogies especially, to make history out of myth.

Not that myth has been lost: rather myth is combined with history. Accordingly, Arnold believes, Jacobsen’s nomenclature should be adopted:

The Primeval History (Gen. 1-11) addresses the origins of the universe, the creation of humanity, and the first institutions of human civilization. We retain the term ‘history’ in the title of this first unit of the Bible—the Primeval History—because, on the one hand, it arranges themes along a time continuum using cause and effect and generally uses historical narrative as the literary medium for communication. On the other hand, those themes themselves are the same ones explored elsewhere in the ancient Near East in mythological literature . . . . The Primeval History narrates those themes in a way that transforms their meaning and import, and for these reasons we may think of these chapters as a unique literary category, which some have termed ‘mytho-historical.’

Although Wenham is doubtless correct that the classification of Genesis 1-11 as mytho-history is prone to misunderstanding, I do not think that we who are scholars should revert to vague euphemisms like “proto-history” that tend to conceal rather than to disclose the literary character of Genesis 1-11. I think we simply need to be careful to explain our meaning to laymen in the way that I have tried to do in this class over the last several months.

START DISCUSSION

*Student:* I want to come back to the definition of “myth.” Should we just not believe Genesis 1-15 because it's all made up?

*Dr. Craig:* No. You highlight a good point. “Myth” – we're not using it here in the popular sense like a falsehood. We are using it in the sense in which folklorists use it. Do you remember way back when we started this study, we saw that folklorists distinguish three types of folklore: myth, folktales, and legends. The distinguishing qualities of myths as a literary type is that they seek to ground present realities that are determinative for a society or culture in primordial events in the distant past. So they will treat grand themes like the origin of the world, the origin of humanity, the Flood, and so forth. That's the sense in which we're using this term, and it is neutral with respect to truth.

*Student:* Can we believe the themes, or do we just disbelieve the numbers and ages? What part of Genesis 1-15 do I . . . ?

*Dr. Craig:* That’s the million-dollar question. I will address that next week.

*Student:* It seems like the effort to synthesize this with other legends of the time is where this idea of trying to de-historizing these verses comes from. But I would submit that if this was true history (like Genesis 1-11, which I would believe) then in false renditions of this in the non-believing communities and so forth that people would have developed these other types of stories that have similarities but are exaggerations or folklore. They would introduce other things into the stories. You have the same thing with the New Testament. You have all kinds of literature that wasn't included in the canon that's very spacious. Some of it’s good and like *The Didache* that wasn't included in the canon but then you have things that are very bizarre – tales of Jesus killing people as a young person or being offended or doing strange things. All these types. There's many different pseudepigrapha out there that are not included in the canon. So I don't think you can say I want to categorize the Scripture in a certain way because there's other communities and unbelieving communities that have established different ideas and that we somehow need to synthesize these.

*Dr. Craig:* All right. Let me refer back to the lessons that we spent on the nature of Genesis 1-11 where I pointed out, as I believe appealing to Wenham, that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are very, very different from chapter 12 to the end of the book. The first eleven chapters bear close resemblances to the themes and literature of ancient Mesopotamian mythology, whereas from the call of Abraham on there aren't these sort of resemblances. So the argument is that when you read Genesis 1-11 in its historical context there are, I think, a couple of earmarks that suggest we're not dealing with just straightforward history here. One would be that the common themes that are treated in ancient mythology and in Genesis. The second would be this interest, remember, in etiology. Etiology is the attempt to ground present realities in the primordial past. At
some length I tried to show that that also characterizes Genesis 1-11. On these grounds I think that we're on pretty good basis in saying that it has the folklorist's interest in myth that would cause one to classify these as myths in the folklorist sense, though the genealogies then definitely show an interest in history as well.

When it comes to the Gospels, I think the relevant comparison is not later apocryphal Gospels that know the biblical canonical Gospels and then try to import Gnostic mythology into them or philosophy. It would be whether or not the Gospels can be explained on the basis of prior literature, for example the myths of Greece and Rome which were contemporaneous with the Gospels. Here I am so thankful for the work of New Testament scholars who were able to show that that hypothesis is false. The same sort of hypothesis that does seem to be true of Genesis 1-11 was tried in the late 1800s for the Gospels. You still find this on the Internet – that the accounts of the life of Jesus are predicated upon Greco-Roman or Egyptian mythology and therefore Jesus is a mythological figure or he's influenced by myth. That has been exploded by 20th century, and now 21st century, New Testament scholarship which has established that the supposed parallels between the Gospels and mythology are first of all spurious (they're bogus) and then secondly there's no causal connection between these myths and the Gospels. Rather, scholars like Richard Burridge have changed the course of New Testament scholarship by convincing historical Jesus scholars that the genre of the Gospels is that of ancient biography like The Lives of famous Greeks and Romans by Plutarch. These ancient biographies definitely have a historical interest. So we shouldn't think that because Genesis 1-11 do resemble in their etiology and their grand themes Ancient Near Eastern myths that that's also true of the Gospels. Because it's not true; it is false. When you're dealing with the Gospels, you're dealing with a historical genre.

Student: I'm wondering if you found in any of the commentaries you've read on the subject here whether there is any internal evidence within the rest of Scripture that they might have referred to those early chapters of Genesis as this kind of mytho-history.

Dr. Craig: I have focused all of my attention over the last year on these eleven chapters. My next step will begin to look at what is called inter-textual references. Certainly both Jesus and Paul refer to Adam and Eve, and there are other New Testament references to Noah and the Flood. Those need to be taken up next, but I haven't done that yet.

Student: Just to tag onto that, I feel like we're approaching the early chapters of Genesis as if we read them as myth but somehow we have to prove them as history. I wonder if there's a way of looking at it the other way around where . . . I guess what I'm wondering is, would the authors of the Old Testament have just not even thought twice about how they would have represented those early stories in Scripture? Were they actually thinking,
We're going to do it in this kind of artistic sense of using the genealogies and these even numbers, or would they have just thought, This is the way we do history?

Dr. Craig: Obviously, these classifications of genre are modern categories. Right? These are categories of modern folklore and literature and so forth, not categories that the original authors would have been thinking of. So I think there the relevant question is: did they intend for their narratives to be read in a sort of literal way? I've already argued, when we looked at Genesis 1, that I think there are indications in the text itself that they didn't intend it to be read in a kind of literal fashion. We will talk more about that, as I say, next week.

Student: I just wanted to say you're so brilliant, you answered the question before I asked it! [laughter] I was going to ask about the reference by Christ of Adam and Eve, Noah, and so forth, and how that might be understood – this approach. You said you were going to look into that further. So I felt like you answered it.

Dr. Craig: Well, I didn’t answer it – I begged off answering it. [laughter]

Student: The other is: I'm assuming that what was written in Genesis 1-11 prior to it being written was a compilation of sort of an oral tradition or that was compiled in the writing of the Scripture.

Dr. Craig: Doubtless.

Student: So it could then be more of the way people at that time communicated their understanding or what they feel was revealed to them about their lineage and their origins.

Dr. Craig: Right.

Student: And that might affect how our modern-day view of that type of expression seems foreign or in the sense of it not being necessarily a historical reflection on everything they knew. But it was their dealings with the subject. Is that sort of correct?

Dr. Craig: Yes, I think that's right. We want to try to get inside their horizon, so to speak, and put ourselves in their footsteps. That's the danger that we spoke of earlier – of concordism – where you try to read modern science into the narrative and say, “A-ha! This is the Big Bang!”

Student: As if they knew that and were trying to give us hints.

Dr. Craig: Yeah, right, or that God has hidden it in between the lines. We want to try to avoid that sort of hermeneutic by putting ourselves in their shoes and seeing how they would have understood it.
**Student:** Would an example perhaps of what you're talking about how a society grounds itself in primordial events be maybe here in our society we value honesty and strength, so we take George Washington (who's a historical character) and then we create what from everything I've heard is a myth – he cuts down the cherry tree of his father and then his father says, *Did you do this?*, and he said, *I cannot tell a lie*? Or there's also a myth that he skipped a silver dollar across the Potomac River to illustrate strength. Are those examples of the kind of thing that you're talking?

**Dr. Craig:** Yes. Or perhaps legends. But that is the idea. Right, we would try to ground our present beliefs in honesty and uprightness in this event in the past. But I think that the only thing there is that it's not really primordial. It's not prehistoric. That's within relatively recent past, and so that might be better described by a folklorist as a legend rather than a myth.

**Student:** I'm worried for, let's say, apologetic reasons of using this word “mytho-history.” Is it conceivable to view, let's say, things that would be more I guess based off of naturalism or naturalistic views of let's say the genealogies. I noticed that you mentioned the justification for having the name “history” at the end was the genealogies. But in between some of the genealogies there's certain miracles that may be referenced here.

**Dr. Craig:** Are you talking about the Old Testament?

**Student:** The Old Testament; not necessarily Genesis, but the Old Testament as a whole. Is it conceivable that these miracles that occur can actually be historically 100 percent accurate but the genealogies itself could be mythological? The reason why I ask is not so much for . . . because it seems as though the name “mytho” only applies to the things that are supernatural and historical only applies to the natural aspects of it.

**Dr. Craig:** No, no, I wouldn’t want to say that. I would say the “myth” part applies primarily to the stories – the narratives. And then the genealogies serve to order these historically and I think show that these are taken as being about real people and real things that happened. Though even the genealogies, as we've seen (or as I've argued anyway) can't be pressed for a kind of wooden literalness.

### END DISCUSSION

Let me conclude by summing up.

In sum, the shared themes and interest in etiology of Genesis 1-11 and Ancient Near Eastern myths leads us to think of the primeval history as composed of Hebrew monotheistic myths whose primary purpose is to ground realities present to the Pentateuchal author and important for Israelite society in the primordial past. At the same time, the interstitching of the primeval narratives with genealogies terminating in real people evinces a historical interest on the author's part in persons who once lived and
wrought. So it seems to me that the classification of Genesis 1-11 as mytho-history is a plausible genre analysis.

Now, if Genesis 1-11 belongs to the genre of mytho-history then the question arises: Is the primeval history to be understood as literally true? That's the question that we will take up next week. ⁶²
Lecture 18: Is the Biblical Primeval History To Be Understood as Literally True?

Last week I promised that I would address the million dollar question today! If Genesis 1-11 belongs to the genre of mytho-history (as I’ve argued), then the question arises: is the primeval history to be understood as literally true? Although the genealogies show a historical interest on the author’s part, we’ve already seen reason to think that the genealogies should not be interpreted literalistically. Moreover, insofar as these chapters share the genre of myth, the question arises as to whether societies which embrace a myth understand that myth to be literally true. Certainly they understand it to be true, but do they take it to be literally true? It is so important to understand that figurative discourse can be true even if it is false when interpreted literalistically. So, for example, if I come in from the outside and I am drenched with water and I tell you “It’s raining cats and dogs outside!” that can be true even if there are not animals falling from the sky. The literalistic interpretation of figurative language is often the source of jokes. I saw a television program once where there is a knock at the door and a man tells his robot, “Robot, go answer the door.” And the robot dutifully approaches the door and said, “Yes, door, what was it that you asked?” Obviously something can be figuratively true and yet literally false.

Were the myths of the Ancient Near East intended to be taken as literally true? This question is not easily answered because we do not have direct access to the adherents of ancient myths so as to probe their attitudes toward the myths they embraced. As in the case of the genealogies, we must instead turn to comparative anthropological studies and to comparative Ancient Near Eastern literature in order to try to find an answer.

Let’s first look at comparative anthropological data concerning societies which pass on myth.

In distinguishing between myths and folktales, the folklorist William Bascom points out that quite a number of primitive societies clearly recognize the distinction between what he calls factual and fictional narratives. “Factual and fictional narratives are clearly recognized as separate categories in many [primitive] societies.”63 But it is not in dispute that myths are not taken to be fictitious by members of the society in which they are embraced or that they are different from folktales. In an oft-cited article64 by the anthropologist Raffaele Pettazoni, he draws upon anthropological data similar to those


adduced by Bascom to show that North American Indian tribes “differentiate ‘true stories’ from ‘false stories’. . . . in the ‘true’ stories we have to deal with the holy and the supernatural, while the ‘false’ ones on the other hand are of profane content,” for example, the false ones would include stories about the antics of the trickster and accomplished rogue Coyote—a figure who in Indian tales is very much like Wile E. Coyote in the Road Runner cartoons.\textsuperscript{65} Sometimes these false stories are differentiated from “true tales” as “‘funny stories,’ mere inventions, having no real substance.”\textsuperscript{66} I think it goes without saying that the members of a society which embraces foundational myths would never regard such sacred stories as profane or merely funny. Of course, “myth is not pure fiction;” “it is a ‘true story’ and not a ‘false’ one.”\textsuperscript{67} But it is a \textit{non sequitur} to infer that it is therefore history because truth comprises much more than history and so cannot simply be equated with it.

The deeper question raised by these anthropologists is what conception(s) of truth is held by these various tribal peoples. The predicate “true” has a wide range of meanings, as is evident in such expressions as “true gold,” “a true friend,” “a true yardstick,” “the true path,” or “a true statement.” All of these use the truth predicate differently in their meaning. Why should we think that these tribal societies’ conception of truth is the philosopher’s conception of truth as correspondence with reality?

The anthropologist Theodor Gaster says that Pettazoni makes the mistake of conflating truth with efficacy.\textsuperscript{68} He confuses truth with efficacy. Gaster cautions,

> Before any general deductions can be drawn, it would seem necessary to determine exactly the meaning and frame of reference of the native terms rendered ‘true’ and ‘false.’ Does ‘true’ mean, in this context, accurate, or historical, or real, or valid, or authenticated? Conversely, does ‘false’ mean untrustworthy, or unhistorical or unreal (fictitious), or futile, or spurious? A story might, for example, be valid functionally—that is, fully serve a ritual purpose—yet be invalid historically, or it might be valid historically, yet futile and inefficacious as a cultic recitation. Again, it might be a genuine tradition, yet in itself fictitious, or, conversely, it might relate an actual, historical fact, yet be a modern product and no genuinely traditional composition. . . . Obviously, then, until we know precisely what words the primitive employs, and in what sense he employs them,

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p. 100.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p. 102.
\textsuperscript{68} Theodor H. Gaster, “Myth and Story,” in \textit{Sacred Narrative}, p. 133.
it is precarious to deduce from his distinction between ‘true’ and ‘false’ stories anything concerning the fundamental ‘truth’ of Myth.\textsuperscript{69}

The dichotomy drawn by tribal peoples between true stories and false stories is not sufficient to prove that members of those societies are expected to believe that the myths are literally true.

The fact that myths, while accepted as true and authoritative, are not necessarily to be taken to be literally true is evident from examples of myths which seem to be clearly metaphorical or figurative.

For example, the anthropologist William Doty relates a myth from the Chukchee people of northeastern Siberia. Let me read you a paraphrase of this myth which I think is surely metaphorical. See if you don’t agree as I read it. Here is how it goes:

The self-created Raven and his wife live together where there are no humans, nor any other living creature. The wife says to Raven that he should try to create the earth. When he protests that he cannot create the earth, she says that she will try to create companions for them. She falls to sleep and her black feathers become human and her talons turn into fingers. Her abdomen enlarges, and before she awakes from sleep she has created three human children.

Raven says, “There, you have created humans! Now I shall go and try to create the earth.” He flies away and asks all the benevolent beings such as the Dawn, Mid-day, and Sunset for advice, but no one gives it. At last he comes to the place where the sky meets the horizon and sees a tent full of men. Raven learns that they have been created from the dust resulting from the friction of the sky meeting the ground. They are to multiply and become the first seed of all the peoples of the earth.

They ask Raven to create the earth for them, and he agrees to try. As he flies, he defecates, and every piece of excrement falls on water, grows quickly, and becomes land. Then he begins to urinate, and where a drop falls, it becomes a lake, and where a jet falls, it becomes a river. Then he defecates a very hard substance, which becomes the mountains and hills.

When the men complain that they need food, Raven flies off and finds many kinds of trees. He takes his hatchet and begins to chop, throwing the chips into the water, which carries them into the sea. The various kinds of woodchips become

\textsuperscript{69} Gaster, “Myth and Story,” pp. 133-34. Cf. G. S. Kirk, Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures, Sather Classical Lectures 40 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 32, who expresses his suspicion that the native terms translated as “true” have a variety of meanings, none of which quite corresponds with our word, even if it is extended to mean significant, thereby confusing many modern critics, including Pettazzoni.
walruses, seals, whales, polar bears, reindeer, every kind of sea and land creature. He says, “Now you have food!”

But the men still could not multiply, for there were no women yet. However, a Spider-Woman comes and gives birth to four daughters, who grow fast and become women. One of the men takes one woman as a companion. The next day Raven goes to visit them and finds them sleeping separately in opposite corners of the room. Realizing that they will not multiply, Raven calls a woman to him and treats her to sexual intercourse, which she finds quite pleasant. So she soon teaches the man how to multiply. That is why girls understand earlier than boys how to copulate.70

The avian (or bird-like) and human features and activities ascribed to Raven seems to require that this myth was not taken literally. Gods and goddesses are frequently represented in myths as animals. As we shall see, Ancient Near Eastern myths also exhibit this kind of metaphoricalness.

What we’ve discussed so far is the metaphoricalness, if you will. I wish there were a better word than that. I looked to see if there is a word called “metaphoricity” but apparently there isn't, so “metaphoricalness” was in the dictionary. That's what we're talking about is this metaphorical nature of some myths.

START DISCUSSION

Student: You made the comment earlier that we don't have the ancient sources to ask how they took . . .

Dr. Craig: The ancient people.

Student: Right. The ancient people to ask how they took this literally. But given that there have been sources between the time the ancient people lived and today, is there no sources much closer to that point in time that we can rely on to gauge their level of belief?

Dr. Craig: Yes, I think that's quite correct. That would be the literary evidence which will be what we'll look at next. First we will look at anthropological evidence from current contemporary peoples that are tribal societies that pass on myths. Then we'll look at the literary evidence. If one wanted to, you could look at how other ancient peoples interpreted these stories. That's right.

Student: [off-mic]

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Dr. Craig: The dating of these is difficult, of course. Knowing when to date the oral traditions that lie behind Genesis 1-11 compared to extra-canonical Jewish pseudepigrapha and apocryphal writings that arose during the intertestamental period. Certainly in those writings you do have reflections on these Old Testament personages. But those are hundreds of years later, and that needs to be taken into account as well, I think.

Student: I think everybody would agree that the Bible contains clearly metaphorical or symbolic language in certain places, but I just don't see it in Genesis 1 through 11. Can you give an example where you think . . .

Dr. Craig: Well, let’s wait. We will look at that later on. Right now I'm looking at the backgrounds to see how are myths understood by societies which embrace them as true. We’ll make application later on. I don't want to get ahead of ourselves.

END DISCUSSION

Let me share two additional anthropological data that suggest that something other than literal truth may be attributed to a society’s myths, and these would be the plasticity and the flexibility of myths. Plasticity has to do with the degree of variability of a myth at one time. Flexibility has to do with the degree of variability over time. So plasticity would be a kind of synchronic variability whereas flexibility will be a diachronic variability. The plasticity of a myth is demonstrated by the variability of contemporaneous oral tellings of it, since that shows that the very tellers of the stories did not take them to have a rigidly fixed form. By contrast, a myth’s flexibility is demonstrated by its evolution over time, its mutability and adaptability to new situations and challenges. So plasticity has to do with the different versions of the story that can be told at the same time; flexibility is the adaptability of the myth over time to changing circumstances.

The social anthropologist Raymond Firth gives a wonderful example of both the plasticity and flexibility of myth from the Tikopian people, which is an island in the Solomon Islands. The example concerns two versions of a remarkably flexible myth about the building of their sacred temple. The actual temple was built around 1700 and it was supposed to be modeled on the heavenly temple which is built by God. In the contemporary version of the myth God calls upon men to pass up to him the nails to build the heavenly temple, but they refuse to do so and pass up only coconut husks and fibers and cord. In one version of the story, God, disgusted with them, departs with the nails to the land of the white men, leaving the Tikopians to make do with their inferior construction materials. In another version of the same myth, the model temple is actually being built by God in England and he calls down to the Tikopians in English for the nails.

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Failing to understand English, the Tikopians keep handing up these coconut materials to him, until God in disgust banishes them to the island of Tikopia, keeping the iron nails in the land of the white men. Firth reflects that this is clearly an etiological myth designed to explain why the Tikopians have the poor construction materials that they do whereas the white man has iron nails. Here is the interesting part. The knowledge of these iron implements did not come to Tikopia before the arrival of the white man around 1800. Remember the myth goes back to the 1700s. So this feature of the story of God’s requesting the nails be handed up and the people refusing to do so must have been a later adaptation of the myth of the construction of the heavenly temple. We see herein not only the flexibility of the original myth which was able to adapt to the arrive of the white man with his superior construction implements, but we also see its plasticity in the permitted variability in the telling of the story. In either version, despite the different locations and different explanations, it is essentially the same story and both are acceptable in Tikopian society.

Theodor van Baaren cautions that if we asks the members of the society whether their myths have changed, they will typically deny it. “If asked, the answer of the informants as a rule will be that things are as they used to be since immemorial times. This is self-evident, because within their cultural frame this is the only fitting answer.”\(^\text{72}\) As a result, Westerners sometimes form a misleading view of primitive cultures as static and stagnant. I think for exactly the same reason we have to be cautious about native claims that their myths are absolutely or completely true—what else could they say?

The plasticity and flexibility of myths lend support to the notion that what is at stake in believing a myth is not belief in its literal truth. The different versions of the myth that are believed by contemporaneous members of the society may be logically incompatible with one another; nevertheless, a fundamental religious truth is communicated by the various versions of the myth, so it does not matter which version one relates. One does not bother to correct someone telling a different version of the myth, for it, too, expresses that same fundamental truth. If these myths were understood to be literally true then they could not be changed in response to new challenges in ways that are incompatible with the earlier versions. But if both versions continue to express the same fundamental truth, then they can both be regarded as absolutely true, despite their differences.

Let’s now turn to look at the Ancient Near Eastern literary evidence. As I already mentioned in our discussion of the function of genealogies, contemporary anthropological data will always be of uncertain applicability to the stories told by ancient Israel; rather literary evidence from Ancient Near Eastern mythology will be much more relevant. When we examine the myths of Mesopotamia and Egypt, we find

\(^{72}\) Ibid., p. 221.
the same use of figurative language, plasticity, and flexibility that is disclosed by the anthropological data that we’ve just surveyed.

First, it is evident that Ancient Near Eastern myths are often highly metaphorical rather than literal. Consider, for example, the story of Marduk’s creation of the world in the epic poem, *Enuma Elish*, which we’ve examined already in this class. The classicist F. M. Cornford has written with respect to the creation story in the *Enuma Elish*, “No one but a lunatic under the influence of hashish could ever arrive at the theory that they [sc. earth and sky] were originally formed by splitting the body of a dragon in half.”

No ancient Babylonian looking up to the sky expected to see the desiccated body of Tiamat overhead nor did he expect to find the Tigris and Euphrates rivers originating in Tiamat’s eyeballs as the *Enuma Elish* states. These are figurative images, “acts of imagination and fantasy,” as the classicist George Kirk puts it. They are not to be taken literally. Similarly, in the story in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* of Gilgamesh and Enkidu’s killing the Bull of Heaven (which is the constellation Taurus) – that story could not possibly be literal. In the story, the Bull of Heaven comes down to the city of Uruk and rampages through the city, but Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill the Bull by grabbing it by its tail and stabbing it and then butchering it and distributing the meat to the poor people. This is impossible to interpret literally. Not only can a stellar constellation not come down and rampage through the town and be slaughtered and eaten, but if it were (if it did literally happen) then Taurus should no longer be observable shining in the night sky. So the story is clearly, I think, to be interpreted metaphorically.

Similarly, in Egyptian mythology the sky could be depicted variously. For example, as the goddess Nut. The goddess Nut is depicted as arched over the Earth with her hands and feet touching the ground. But, again, no Egyptian looking to the sky expected to see the body of a naked woman arched over him, nor, I think, we can hazard to say, did any caravan ever think that it might come upon Nut’s great legs or arms stretching up to the heavens. Again, although Egyptian myths often portray the sun god Re sailing in a boat across the heavens, this boat chockful of other gods and animate tools, nobody looking at the sun thought that he would see such an entourage sailing across the sky. When the sun journeys into the underworld at night and reverts to its pre-creation state, this cannot be intended literally. Did no soldiers on nightwatch or farmers rising before dawn ever notice that the world failed to return to a primordial sea? Sometimes the sun is depicted as undergoing rebirth at night. As sunset it enters into Nut’s mouth, and then at sunrise it is birthed through her vagina and rises in the sky. This is clearly metaphorical. Equally and obviously metaphorical is the depiction of the sun as a scarab or as a falcon, since a rolling dung beetle or a falcon were thought to be appropriate images of the sun. The

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depictions of Egyptian gods and goddesses as having human bodies with animal heads should not be taken as literal pictures of them. Erik Hornung, who is an Egyptologist and has written a fine book on the gods of Egypt, affirms that Egyptian religion lived on the fact that the gods really do exist. But in order to describe this reality it had to speak in “metaphorical and representational images” of the gods. “These images . . . serve to express a content that can perhaps be appropriately expressed only in this way.”

Not only does the metaphorical and figurative language of Ancient Near Eastern myths support a non-literal reading of these myths, but also their plasticity and flexibility also indicate that they are not best interpreted literally.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I'm just curious because Islam came to mind when I was thinking about this. It talks about the sun setting in a mud puddle and things like. Have you done any thought about how stories like this should be understood in terms of Islam?

Dr. Craig: I haven’t with respect to Islam. I know that Muhammad was deeply offended at the polytheism of pagan Arabia that he was raised in and so wanted to have a conception of God that was much, much higher and more exalted than that of these pagan polytheistic religions. But I'm not familiar with images of God that are used in Islam, so, sorry, I can't speak to that.

Student: I recall you mentioned about this a long time ago but, isn't the way we interpret any text by looking into the situation of the scientific knowledge at that time is a form of concordism or eisegesis? You mentioned nobody looked up in the sky and expecting a boat for example. But that's because there is no boat in the sky. Isn't it a form of because . . .

Dr. Craig: Oh, no. I don't think that's why. I'm not saying that because there is no Tiamat in the sky that that's why Babylonians didn't think this. Babylonians looking up at the sky saw the same thing that you and I do – the stars. Babylonian astronomy charts in meticulous detail the movement of the stars. They did not see the skeleton and desiccated flesh of a dragon overhead. Similarly, with regard to Nut, these images of the sky goddess or other pictures of gods weren't interpreted literally and, as we'll see, the plasticity of these is just one more indication of this because the sky can be pictured or imaged in many, many different ways which are incompatible with each other. So in no sense is this a concordist critique of trying to impose modern science on these texts.

Student: [off-mic] Because it is not modern. It was back then. They already knew that there is no boat in the sky.

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74 Ibid., p. 258; cf. p. 253.
Dr. Craig: Right. What I'm trying to do is to look at these texts and put myself within the horizon of the original audience – put myself in their shoes, so to speak – and say: Did they really think that the way the sky and Earth were created was by splitting the body of a dragon in half? I think the answer is pretty clearly no. Or similarly, did Egyptians really believe that there is this naked woman hanging over us with her palms and the soles of her feet resting on the ground? Again, I think the answer is clearly no. They didn't understand these images in that literalistic fashion.

Student: I like this. The idea that other societies had myths that are clearly metaphorical; I don't think you're suggesting we can impute that to Genesis. I really like this new standard that says “Is it clearly metaphorical?” Is it something we know that is metaphorical, or are we reading into the text because we don't like it that it is indeed metaphorical? I like this new standard.

Dr. Craig: All right. I'll just reserve comment on that. Just don't put too much emphasis on the word “clearly” as though we have to have certainty about these things. What we're asking is what's the most plausible way of understanding these stories?

Student: Oh, no. I heard you say it. I wrote it down. It's got to be clearly metaphorical because it is presented to us as God's Word, and God had a role in writing it. So if we're going to determine that it's mythological or historical-myth or whatever it is then it better darn sure be very clear that that is true.

Dr. Craig: It's important to understand that Scripture employs a variety of genres of literature, and it's instructive in this regard to compare the first book of the Bible with the last book of the Bible. The book of Revelation is also God's Word, and yet no one interprets that literalistically. Everybody recognizes that this is Jewish apocalyptic literature where multi-headed monsters crawling out of the sea and trying to take over the Earth are not similar to Japanese grade-C horror movies. Rather, these are symbols for nations and alliances of nation-states that will be combating each other. So God's Word can use metaphor, figurative language, and so forth. So we mustn't take as our default position literal interpretation. That could really be misleading. We have to ask ourselves what is the genre of the Bible book that we're reading, and that will help us then to discern how to interpret it.

Student: That sounds good.

Student: Today living in this age of fake news and where fiction dominates nonfiction, my question (and this is a broad question, I don't want to take it off track from our focus today): is there really any time in history where we can't find a genre where people are making up myths to convey their truths?
Dr. Craig: This is one of the most interesting things that these modern folklorists and mythographers emphasize. Contrary to the sort of arrogant attitude of 19th century scientistic thinkers – that we, as moderns, have graduated from beyond the level of myth which was characteristic of primitive man – you'll often hear these people referred to as primitives and savages. Now mythographers say every culture, every age, has its myths including us. But so often we just don't recognize them.

Student: Right. So where is this literalistic genre out there?

Dr. Craig: Well, I think, for example, when someone writes a historical work he is intending to give an actual account of what happened.

Student: There’s still debates on that. The assassination of JFK. People still have ideas on the way they think that modern story rolled out. Again, I don't want to detract from our focus on Genesis. I'm just skeptical that there is really any genre by this standard where we can say, “Oh, this is a literalistic genre.”

Dr. Craig: I think that that's just unrealistic. Clearly we can use figures of speech all the time. But history, scientific reports, the Mueller Report, these things are intended to be taken literally. They're not like these stories we've read.

Student: Again, I don't want to take off the track but you know science and biology is dominated by an evolutionary framework. So, again, I am very skeptical. I'm not saying I wouldn't believe it, but this goes to the heart of epistemology.

Dr. Craig: You haven't been in the class here for a while. I think you're interpreting the word “myth” incorrectly here. We're talking about the folklorist’s understanding of myth where this is a traditional, sacred narrative that attempts to establish realities that are present for the author and his audience in the primordial past. So things like stories about JFK and the other shooter on the grassy knoll – those aren't myths in the sense that we're talking about.

END DISCUSSION

OK, let me wrap it up then. We will next time then look at two of these further factors of Ancient Near Eastern myths, their plasticity and flexibility as well as their metaphoricalness.75
Lecture 19: The Plasticity and Flexibility of ANE Myths

We've been thinking about the question: Are myths to be understood literally to be true? In our examination of anthropological data we saw that there are three factors or properties of myth that contribute to the view that they are not to be interpreted literalistically. One was their metaphoricalness. Another was their plasticity. And the third factor was their flexibility. Their metaphoricalness refers to the figurative nature of the language of myth. The plasticity of myth refers to the different versions of a myth that might be told simultaneously in a culture that differ from one another though they teach the same central truth. And the flexibility of myth is its ability to adapt and change over time in response to new pressures and situations.

When we began to look at the literary evidence of Ancient Near Eastern myths of Israel's neighbors Mesopotamia (that is to say, Babylon and Sumer) and Egypt, we found that they are characterized by this same metaphorical language that the anthropological data suggest.

Not only does the metaphorical and figurative language of Ancient Near Eastern myths support a non-literal reading of such myths, but these myths also exhibit the same sort of plasticity and flexibility that we found in the anthropological data.

In Mesopotamia, we have alternative accounts of Marduk’s creation of the world which are significantly different. I’ve already mentioned the creation narrative in the Enuma Elish in which Marduk fashions the world out of the corpse of the dragoness Tiamat. But in a different work – the bilingual Sumero-Babylonian creation story – there is no such contest. Rather, in this account we read that when all was once sea,

> Marduk constructed a raft on the surface of the waters, he made earth and heaped it up on the raft. That the gods should be settled in a dwelling of their pleasure he created mankind (17-20).

Although this version of the myth also features primordial water and Marduk as the principal creator of the world, this serene creation story is vastly different from the warlike account that is found in the Enuma Elish.

We also have varying accounts in Mesopotamia of the creation of humanity out of the blood of slain gods in order to provide workers for the gods. For example, in the Enuma Elish the god Qingu is executed for inciting Tiamat’s rebellion, and “From his blood he [Ea] created mankind, / on whom he imposed the service of the gods, and set the gods free” (VI.33-34). In the story of creation in another cuneiform text abbreviated KAR 4, two gods Alla and Illa are slaughtered “to grow humanity [with] their blood. Let the labor of the gods become its [humanity’s] work assignment” (25-27). In the Atrahasis Epic we read that another god Wê-ila was killed, and “From his flesh and blood Nintu mixed
clay” (225-26) to fashion man to relieve the gods of their labor. “I have removed your heavy work, / I have imposed your toil on man” (240-41). In these different versions of the myth of humanity’s creation, we find the central truths affirmed that there is a divine constitutive element in man, and the reason for mankind’s creation was basically to make slave labor for the gods. So we have different versions that illustrate the same central truths.

It is in Egypt, however, that one finds the greatest plasticity and flexibility of its myths. Egypt has become famous for the variation and flexibility of its myths. John Wilson who is an Egyptologist nicely epitomizes Egyptian mythology with this sentence: “The Egyptian accepted various myths and discarded none of them.”76 Over the course of 2,300 years there emerged four major versions of the fundamental myth of origins. Each of these was associated with a cult center in an Egyptian city: Hermopolis, Heliopolis, Thebes, and Memphis. These Egyptian cities were the cult centers for the worship of various deities featured in these versions of the creation myth. Yet, over these 2,300 years, in Egyptologist John Allen’s words, this same story remained “remarkably consistent” throughout its history.77

According to that myth, as we’ve seen, reality is the unfolding of an undifferentiated, primordial, monistic state which was represented by water. Out of these waters emerged a little hill which was identified or associated with the god Atum. Atum is regarded as self-created – he brought himself into existence. Atum in turn creates the other gods by acts of, alternatively, sneezing or spitting or masturbating. The peak of this creation sequence is the sun god Re or Amun-Re (variously called). His manifestation is the sun. Every day this creation cycle is repeated as the sun sets in the evening and then is reborn at dawn.

Wide variations of this fundamental story developed. The Egyptologist Eric Hornung, in his book on the gods of Egypt, comments, “The Egyptians place the tensions and contradictions of the world beside one another and then live with them.”78 Egyptian iconography (iconography refers to the pictures, for example, that you find in Egyptian tombs on the walls and ceilings portraying various gods and natural phenomena)

76 Wilson, “Egypt,” p. 50.
77 Allen, Genesis in Egypt, pp. 12,56.
78 Ibid., p. 97. The best sense I can make of this syncretism that Egyptians postulated in their myths what modern metaphysicians would call mereological fusions of gods. A mereological fusion combines two non-identical objects into a new, third object without blending them together, so that each retains its distinct character as well as identity. So, for example, one’s body might be regarded as the mereological fusion of all the cells of the body. A mereological fusion of distinct gods would involve a very permisive principle of comprehension governing what sort of fusions are possible. I suspect that so construing Egyptian religion would, however, be anachronistic and that it is more plausible to interpret the myths non-literally.
permitted “an astonishingly rich variety of possibilities” in the representation of a deity.\(^{79}\)

For example, the goddess Hathor is variously represented as a woman, as a cow, as a woman with a cow’s head, and as a cow’s head with a human face. In addition she is also represented as a lioness, a snake, a hippopotamus, and a tree nymph. Moreover, “we are not observing a historical development in which one form replaced another; at all periods different ways of depicting the goddess simply existed side-by-side.”\(^{80}\) We should not infer that Egyptians thought that Hathor actually had, for example, a human body and a cow’s head. Rather, as Hornung explains, the varying images were meant to express different facets of her character, for example, the maternal tenderness of a cow, or the wildness of a lion, the unpredictability of a snake, and so forth. Such images are not to be taken literally. They are visual metaphors.

I’ve already alluded to a similar variability in Egyptian representations of the sun and the sky. The sun might be depicted as a boat or as a beetle or as an old man declining in the west or as a falcon. Hornung says, “These concepts were felt to be complementary not conflicting.”\(^{81}\) Similarly, the sky was variously depicted. John Wilson comments,

> We should want to know in our picture whether the sky was supported on posts or was held up by a god; the Egyptian would answer, ‘Yes, it is supported by posts or held up by a god--or it rests on walls, or it is a cow, or it is a goddess whose arms and feet touch the earth.’ Any one of these pictures would be satisfactory to him, . . . and in a single picture he might show two different supports for the sky: the goddess whose arms and feet reach the earth, and the god who holds up the sky goddess.\(^{82}\)

The plasticity which allowed contradictory depictions of the sun and sky is a sure indication, I think, of the non-literality of such representations.

Interpreted literalistically, Egyptian mythology is a mare’s nest of logical contradictions and metaphysical absurdities. But the problems that belong to a literal interpretation of Egyptian mythology should not lead us to think that the Egyptians were in general irrational. Hornung says, “The fact that in Egyptian thought myth is not considered to be contradictory is not sufficient cause for us to term the thought as a whole ‘mythical’ or ‘mythopoeic’; myth is one mode of discourse among many . . .”\(^{83}\) I think that is exactly right, and given its metaphorical and representational imagery, myth is a special case. Hornung concludes,

\(^{79}\) Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*, p. 110.
\(^{80}\) Ibid., p. 113.
\(^{81}\) Ibid., p. 49.
\(^{82}\) Ibid., p. 45.
\(^{83}\) Ibid, p. 240.
I maintain, in opposition to the widespread prejudice against metaphorical and representational images in modern scientific research, that images are among the legitimate systems of signs with which we are provided in order to describe the world.

. . . For the Egyptians the gods are powers that explain the world but do not themselves need any elucidation because they convey information in a language which can be understood directly—that of myth.84

The language of myth is figurative and therefore need not be taken literalistically.

Unfortunately, many Old Testament scholars today, even those emphasizing the importance of Ancient Near Eastern studies as an interpretive backdrop to the book of Genesis, have been seriously misled by a wooden literalism with respect to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian myths. Perhaps one of the most egregious examples, I think, is the claim that the so-called “cosmic geography” of the Ancient Near East included the idea of the sky (or the heavens) as a solid dome over the Earth, touching its horizon, in which the stars are engraved. This is demonstrably wrong, as Babylonian astronomical texts reveal. The ancient Babylonian astrologers charted meticulously the motions of the stars across the heavens, and the motion of the planets with respect to the fixed stars, and therefore could not possibly have thought of these as engraved in a solid dome that is touching the Earth. Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer in their book on Ancient Near Eastern thought conclude that contemporary scholars who construe the ancients’ cosmic geography literalistically have just failed to understand them. This is what they write:

People in the ancient Near East did not conceive of the earth as a disk floating on water with the firmament inverted over it like a bell jar, with the stars hanging from it. They knew from observation and experience with handicrafts that the lifting capacity of water is limited and the gigantic vaults generate gigantic problems in terms of their ability to carry dead weight. The textbook images that keep being reprinted of "the ancient Near Eastern world picture" are based on typical modern misunderstandings that fail to take into account the religious components of ancient Near Eastern conceptions and representations.

Keel and Schroer sum it up:

The thought, pictorial representations, and language of people of that time were generally symbolic—that is, neither entirely concrete nor purely abstract. A cow that bears a calf or the sky-woman who bears the sphere of the sun are not expressions of naïve, childlike fantasies regarding the origin of the world but philosophical developments of thought that were able to form and formulate more
abstract notions (the coming into being of the world) from concrete experiences (cattle, birth, etc.). This kind of representation is not simple realism but reflects an interest in the powers that operate and appear in the concrete world.

It is sobering to reflect that so many Old Testament scholars claiming to inform us about what the ancients believed about cosmic geography should have so seriously misunderstood the relevant texts.

So when it comes to the Genesis account of creation, I think little needs to be said. With the modern misinterpretation of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cosmo-geography exposed, the main prop for interpreting the so-called firmament in Genesis 1 (in Hebrew, this is called rakia translated from the Latin as “firmament”) as a literal solid dome falls away. Genesis 1 tells us virtually nothing about the nature of the rakia nor whether the word is being used figuratively or literally. The key to the meaning of rakia as used in Genesis 1 comes in verse 8 where it says, “God called the rakia heaven (shamayim).” Shamayim is the Hebrew word for the heavens or for the skies. Thus rakia denotes the sky, or expressing the notion of breadth, the skies. That's what rakia denotes. The ancient Hebrews could not possibly have thought that the sky is a solid dome in which the sun, moon, and stars are embedded for these heavenly luminaries were observed to be in motion – to move through the sky – and that's why Genesis 1 says they are useful to mark seasons and days and years. Birds fly, Genesis 1 says in verse 20, across the face of the rakia, and in the skies, Deuteronomy 4:17.

Benjamin Smith, who sits among us this morning (there he is!), has probably given I think the best characterization of the denotation of rakia as, “the whole sky.” All that can be seen above the Earth from the surface. That’s what the rakia denotes – the whole sky; all that can be seen above the Earth from the surface. What that suggests is that the rakia is simply a phenomenal reality – something that you see. As John Walton very nicely puts it, there is a rakia and it is blue. It's just the sky! I think that not only does the metaphorical and the figurative language of Ancient Near Eastern myths support a non-literal reading of such myths, but their plasticity and flexibility also indicate that they are not best interpreted literalistically.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I wonder if you could comment on the fact that you're talking about Mesopotamian and the Egyptian gods and how they have bodies of animals and stuff like that, as opposed to the Greeks who really have a human appearance and how that reflected what their sense of life was. How that contrasted with both because the

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Israelites came from Egypt, but most of the Old Testament is in Greek, and that's how we understand it. Can you comment on how that meshed?

*Dr. Craig:* Are you asking about the influence of Ancient Near Eastern myths on the Greeks?

*Student:* Yes. Right. Or how their sense of life and art . . .

*Dr. Craig:* I think that although there may well have been an influence of Ancient Near Eastern myths upon Greek mythology, this is still very poorly understood. The earliest attested myths in Greek are from Homer (*The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* around 700 BC) and from Hesiod, his *Theogony* which describes the origin of the myths. These Greek gods and goddesses, as you indicate, are very humanoid in their description. They're like people. And they often are associated with different forces or powers of nature, like the sea and the wind and things of that sort. They are not relevant to our study in terms of their having an influence, I think, on biblical stories because they're later and they're further afield. So while they may be interesting in terms of comparative models, I think that Mesopotamia and Egypt are far more relevant to the biblical backgrounds.

*Student:* A quick question about this method of interpreting ancient writings. It's clear, or at least I'm under the impression that, some of the phenomena that were witnessed by the ancients were, in fact, described by a literal reading of their mythology, like earthquakes for instance. Turtles shifting or whoever is holding it on their shoulders has to move. Things like that. Number one: is earthquakes and things that they may have believed more of a literal genesis for it? Is that addressed in the literature?

*Dr. Craig:* If I understand your question correctly, you are raising an issue that is a huge interpretive question that has pitted some of the greatest Assyriologists against each other, and I'm thinking here of Thorkild Jacobsen, for example, and Stanley Kramer. Jacobsen holds to the view that these Ancient Near Eastern myths are basically allegorical; that they are really personifications of the powers and the entities of nature. So, for example, when the *Enuma Elish* says that Apsu and Tiamat mingled their waters to give birth to these other two gods, he takes that as the mingling of salt water and fresh water such as the Mesopotamians observed in the Persian Gulf when the freshwater of the Tigris and Euphrates flowed into the salt water of the Gulf. The two gods that are produced by Apsu and Tiamat he thinks are symbols of the silt that is deposited in the Persian Gulf at the mouth of these two rivers. So on Jacobsen's view, in a sense gods don't really exist. They're just sort of literary personifications of forces and powers and things of nature. If you were to do an ontological inventory of everything that exists, you would not need to include in addition to the physical things of nature these gods as well because they're mere personifications of those forces. Kramer, by contrast, really took Jacobsen to the woodshed on this and said this is a complete misrepresentation of the Ancient Near
Eastern thinking. He said that they believed that the gods were literal, humanoid entities invisible, mysterious, who were behind the forces of nature and manifested in nature. So when you see the water, you're not looking at Tiamat, but Tiamat is the goddess who was behind the sea. This view would explain why the Babylonians were so obsessed with divination. Divination was a huge and lucrative industry in ancient Babylon. Over half of the cuneiform texts that were discovered at Ashurbanipal’s palace in the late 1800s are divinatory texts, and of them most of those are astrological texts, though some of them also concerned what is called extispicy which is examining the liver and entrails of birds and animals to divine portents from the gods. So the practice of divination seems to support the view that there really are gods behind these forces, and by reading these portents of nature we can discern the will of the gods and perhaps what's going to happen in terms of good or bad fortune. I, as a layperson, wouldn't presume to try to adjudicate this debate. When I've asked other Old Testament scholars about it, the reaction I get is a sort of blank stare. So I don't know which of these is correct, but what I would say is that on either view the myths aren't meant to be taken literalistically. Clearly on Jacobsen’s view they're not literal because they're about natural phenomena. Gods are just personifications of the forces of nature. But even on Kramer's view, even though the gods really exist we don't have a clue what they're like because they're invisible. So these various images and descriptions and so forth again are just figurative language for describing these beings that control our destinies. So on either interpretation, I think, it's very plausible to think that these stories were not necessarily taken to be literal. Having said that, as I mentioned in conversation last week, of course some people probably did take them literally. No doubt many people believed them in a very literal sort of sense. But what I'm suggesting is that they don't need to be taken that way. It could very well be the case that these are metaphorical and figurative speech, and the metaphoricalness, the plasticity, and flexibility, I think, supports such a reading.

*Student:* I need a little GPS here of where we are. I am prepared to agree that the Ancient Near East Mesopotamian and Egyptian myths are not literal. I'm a little confused by the application to Hebrews. And the idea of the firmament – that it wasn’t true.

*Dr. Craig:* Let me ask you. What about that point? I kind of already gotten ahead of myself on the *rakia* in saying here's an application to Genesis. It's clear that the Mesopotamians and Egyptians didn't take the sky to be a solid dome, so why should we think the Hebrews took the *rakia* to be solid? That would be an example of seeing in Genesis metaphorical or figurative speech. What's your reaction to that?

*Student:* My reaction to that is – there was nobody around at that time. So it was God that provided some imagery of that. If Hebrew scholars happened to take it as, well it was a solid dome and they were wrong, then okay they were wrong.
Dr. Craig: And by “Hebrew scholar” do you mean the author of Genesis?

Student: The author of Genesis is God.

Dr. Craig: I meant the human one who wrote it down. Is he the Hebrew scholar you are talking about, or are you talking about later people?

Student: I'm talking about later people.

Dr. Craig: OK, that's good to understand. Because I wouldn't want to go so far as to what you said at first if we think that Hebrew scholars include the author of Genesis.

Student: Oh, no, no. Remember, that chapter could not be written by anyone because they weren’t around. It had to be revelation from God that said “This is what it was.”

Dr. Craig: So the question is: did God use imagery that didn't need to be taken literally in providing this revelation to the Hebrews?

Student: I don't know. I think the imagery is fine if it's, as you said last week which I really like, if it is clearly not true. If it is clearly . . .

Dr. Craig: OK, wait. Let's be careful. I've tried to be very careful about this – to distinguish between literal truth and figurative truth. You mean not literally true.

Student: If it is clearly metaphorical, then we take it as metaphorical, and I really love that test. Let's look at it and say, “Is it clearly metaphorical, or could this be true?”

Dr. Craig: Again, literally!

Student: Literally true. I'm sorry. Could this be something that is literal? I get mixed up with calling things myths and applying it to Hebrews.

Dr. Craig: OK, well, at least you're open so far to the possibility of thinking that the so-called firmament, or the rakia, is not a solid dome in which the stars are engraved.

Student: Absolutely. I think that our interpretation with the firmament being a solid dome could be a misinterpretation of that word. Yes.

Dr. Craig: OK. Good. Thanks.

Student: Concerning the question: Did God have to use metaphorical language to talk to us to give us understanding and truth? I would say definitely yes because right now could God give the ultimate reality of our future being in his very presence? The unapproachable light? To do so literally may put us there, and we're not ready. So he must deal metaphorically to set the truth that we see.

Dr. Craig: OK, now I have not taken so strong a position as you did. Notice your position was: it must be that way. Because, after all, Genesis is not intended to be just for modern
people but for shepherds and herdsmen and illiterate peoples and so forth who wouldn't understand it if God were to give a manual on general theory of relativity and the expansion of the universe. So of course this is revealed in figurative and pictorial ways. I find that persuasive. I think that we want this to be a narrative that ministers to people of all times and ages and cultures and education. I remember in my debate with Lawrence Krauss in Australia, one of the objections he proposed to Christianity was why didn't God reveal calculus to Moses? I thought, “What is the matter with this man? It's so stupid to even think that that's a good objection.” God was revealing to Moses what they needed to know to do his will and to find salvation. Giving them the calculus would have been next to worthless.

Student: Just a comment. We need to make a distinction between something that's symbolic and something that's general in nature. Because Genesis was intended to be accurate for all ages and times. Scientifics and sophistications. The nature of it is general, and so I think that's more the issue than it being symbolic.

Dr. Craig: I'll let you have the last word on that. Let me just say I'm not necessarily saying these narratives are symbolic or allegorical where you have a kind of one-to-one correspondence between a symbol and what it represents. But I'm saying it's figurative; it's metaphorical. And that's not necessarily symbolic in the sense of allegory.

END DISCUSSION

All right. What we'll do next time is to make this all-important transition of trying to apply this generic analysis to Genesis.  

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Lecture 20: Why Think Genesis 1-11 is Mytho-History?

On the basis of the metaphoricalness, the plasticity, and the flexibility of myths, we've seen from both anthropological studies as well as Ancient Near Eastern literature that myths are not always best interpreted literalistically. Now we want to make application of these insights to Genesis 1-11.

When we consider the biblical narratives that are at the heart of our study, namely the creation of the world in chapter 1 and the origin and Fall of Adam and Eve in chapters 2 and 3, then it seems to me that a non-literal interpretation of these narratives is very plausible. First and foremost is the creation of the world in six consecutive 24-hour days—a description that doesn't require a knowledge of modern science to recognize as metaphorical. We've already seen reasons in our previous lessons to interpret the six days non-literally. Next is the humanoid deity which appears in chapters 2 and 3 in contrast to the transcendent Creator of the heavens and the Earth in chapter 1.

The anthropomorphic nature of God, which is merely hinted at in chapter 2, becomes inescapable in chapter 3 where God is described as walking in the Garden in the cool of the day calling audibly to Adam who is hiding from him. Genesis 3:8-9 state,

> And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”

Read in light of Genesis 3, God's creation of Adam in Genesis 2 takes on an anthropomorphic character as well. Here God is portrayed (like the Mesopotamian goddess Nintur shaping bits of clay into a human being, or the Egyptian God Khnum sitting at his potter's wheel forming man) as fashioning man out of the dust of the ground and then breathing into his nostrils the breath of life so that the earthen figure comes to life. We're not told whether God similarly formed the animals when, “out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and bird of the air” (Genesis 2:19) but we can't help but wonder if they weren't formed in the same way as man. When God takes one of the sleeping Adam's ribs, closes up the flesh, and builds a woman out of it, the story sounds like a physical surgery which God performs on Adam, followed by his building a woman out of the extracted body part. Similarly, given God's bodily presence in the Garden, the conversations between God and the protagonists in the story of the Fall (namely Adam, Eve, and the serpent) read like a dialogue between persons who are physically present to one another. God's making garments for Adam and Eve out of animal skins and driving them out of the Garden sound again like physical acts by the humanoid God. Given the exalted transcendent nature of God described in the creation
story, the Pentateuchal author could not possibly have intended these anthropomorphic
descriptions to be taken literally. They are in the figurative language of myth.

Moreover, many features of these stories are fantastic. That is to say, they are palpably
false if taken literally. So I'm using the word “fantastic” here with a technical precision.
To say that something is fantastic means that it is palpably false if taken literally. Here
I'm talking about features of the narrative that the author himself would have plausibly
thought fantastic.

For example, chapter 2 begins by saying that when God created man it had never rained
upon the Earth. Now this seems fantastic. Ancient Israelites understood the water cycle as
is abundantly attested throughout the Old Testament. In light of chapter 1’s affirmation
that God had separated the waters above from the waters below, it's hard to believe that
the author thought that there was ever a time in the Earth's history when the Earth was
utterly devoid of rain. Just as the waters below took the form of seas and rivers and
springs, so the waters above took the form of rain. So an Earth which is replete with seas
and rivers and springs (such as Genesis 2 describes) but without rain seems fantastic even
for an ancient Israelite given his knowledge of the water cycle.

Then there is the description of the Garden of Eden with its Tree of Life and Tree of the
Knowledge of Good and Evil. These are plausibly symbolic. The idea of an arboretum
containing trees bearing fruit which if eaten would confer immortality or yield sudden
moral knowledge of good and evil must have seemed fantastic to the Pentateuchal author.
Keep in mind here that we are not dealing with miraculous fruit, as if God would on the
occasion of eating impose immortality or supernatural knowledge of good and evil on the
eater for these were against his will. The fruit is said to have their effect even contrary to
God's will. The Garden of Eden may have described an actual existing geographical
location (plausibly the Persian Gulf oasis), but like Mount Olympus in Greek mythology
that site may have been employed to tell a mythological story about what happened at
that site.

Then there is the notorious walking and talking snake in the Garden. Now, he makes for a
great character in the story – conniving, sinister, opposed to God, perhaps a symbol of
evil, but not plausibly a literal reptile such as you might encounter in your own garden.
For the Pentateuchal author knew that snakes neither talked nor are intelligent agents.
Again, the snake's personality and speech cannot (like Balaam's ass) be attributed to
miraculous activity on the part of God lest God become the author of the Fall. The snake
is not identified as an incarnation of Satan. Rather, he is described as simply the craftiest
of the beasts of the field which the Lord God had made – a description which is
incompatible with his being Satan.
When God finally drives the man and his wife out of the Garden of Eden he stations at its entrance, “the cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the way to the Tree of Life” (Genesis 2:24). What makes this detail fantastic is that the cherubim were not thought to be real beings, but fantasies composed of a lion’s body, a bird’s wings, and a man’s head. The Jewish commentator Nahum Sarna in his commentary on the book of Genesis observes that the motif of composite human-animal-bird figures was widespread in various forms throughout the Ancient Near East, and he thinks that it is prominent in both art and religious symbolism, and that the biblical cherubim seem to be connected with this artistic tradition. Cherubim filled multiple roles in the biblical tradition such as symbolizing God's presence or God's sovereignty. Artistic representations of such creatures were to be found in the tabernacle and the temple including in the Holy of Holies. Sarna points out that they are the only pictorial representation permitted in Judaism, an otherwise anti-iconic religion. They don't violate the prohibition against images because they are, “purely products of the human imagination” and so “do not represent any existing reality in heaven and earth.”

Thus images of them could be made in ancient Israel without breaking the second commandment prohibiting images of things in heaven, for the cherubim were not real. And yet, here in Genesis 3, they are posted as guards at a time and place in history (along with a rotating, flashing sword) to guard for an indeterminate time the Garden of Eden against man's re-entry into the Garden. Since cherubim were regarded as creatures of fantasy and symbol, it's not as though the author thought what realism would require that the cherubim remained at the entrance to the Garden for years on end until it was either overgrown with weeds or swept away by the Flood.

So there are a number of features in these narratives which I think, if interpreted literally, would be palpably false which gives good grounds for thinking that they are in fact to be taken as figurative or metaphorical discourse.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I'm a bit confused as to why God taking anthropomorphic form in the Garden would be unthinkable considering how he does the same thing with Abraham just before the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Dr. Craig: Yeah, right. There it talks about the Angel of the Lord appearing to Abraham. Right? But there isn't any such identification here. You'd have to think that that's what happened – that there was some sort of an incarnation. And I guess I don't see that as contemplated in the text. It seems to me more plausibly to be interpreted metaphorically.

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Student: Along the same lines regarding the angels and perhaps Satan as the snake, this might seem strange but one of my original interests in the area of apologetics was in matters of the paranormal, was in hearing stories of ghosts and demons and poltergeists, and this came from watching too many movies. But the thing that I found though and the more stories that I heard it seems to me that one of the capacities that demons especially enjoy and perhaps what's referenced later in Genesis when they overstep their boundaries is the capacity to possess living things. We know that, or at least from stories that people have told from around the world, that they don't just possess people but they also possess animals. Just as they can speak through people (as Legion did speak directly to Jesus) the demons can also speak through animals as well if they so choose. I'd also like to point out there is no detail and there's a original chapter that says that the snake ever had legs, that he used to walk around. God just curses him to go on his belly.

Dr. Craig: Yes, right.

Student: But I'm just wondering that, in my experience, it doesn't seem implausible to me that the snake would be able to speak to Adam and Eve. They might have thought that that was strange – we're not given that detail or not – but it doesn't seem implausible with the other things that we're told about angels. And as far as the cherubim go . . .

Dr. Craig: Well, wait. Let's keep to one thing at a time. The question is: Is this plausibly interpreted as being some kind of paranormal phenomenon. There I think you're reading into it modern notions from your own experience with paranormal phenomena and so forth rather than how this would have been understood at that time. The way the snake is described is not as some kind of demonic being much less Satan or some sort of a god or anything. It's just *the wiliest of the wild animals that the Lord God has made*. And so while I do think that the snake could be a symbol for evil, nevertheless the symbol is a symbol of just an ordinary animal. It's just one of the wild animals or beasts of the field that God has made. I think that's a more plausible way to understand it than to read into it these paranormal phenomena.

Student: Is it absolutely necessary that the author of Genesis lay out from the very beginning and label the snake as Satan? Or, if we understand that Genesis was written in the same time period with the same cultural understanding as, say, let's say the book of Job where Satan is clearly identified as a being that does very specific things, then why would the snake need to be identified specifically as Satan whereas we could infer that pretty well.

Dr. Craig: Again, it is the way in which the snake is positively described, I think, that gives one pause. It's not just the absence of describing the snake as satanic or a demon, but it is the way in which it is described in purely natural terms as one of the wild animals that God has made and indeed the craftiest among them which wouldn't be compatible
with its being some sort of demon or Satan. Now, you wanted to say something about the cherubim. Why don't you say what you wanted to say about that.

**Student:** If somebody saw a talking snake they would say that's probably not a regular snake, but anyway. As far as the cherubim go, my understanding of those descriptions that you cited of the cherubim that come from mostly the major prophets (things with lions heads and wings and body of a man and all that sort of stuff), to me those prophetic visions – those are the figurative things that have symbolic meaning whereas in more historical and narrative accounts of angels they seem to appear as people.

**Dr. Craig:** Let me give you some references – I skipped over these because I didn't want to encumber the lesson with a bunch of Bible references. Remember I said that the cherubim are represented in the tabernacle and in the temple, even in the Holy of Holies itself. So this isn't late prophetic literature. This is Exodus 25:18-22 and Exodus 26:31, and then also 1 Kings 6:23-29. Given the prohibition in Israel of images of anything in heaven and on Earth that would be used in worship, it's very peculiar that you would have these statuettes of these beings represented in Israelite worship unless, as Sarna says, the reason is they don't represent anything real and therefore wouldn't violate the second commandment against images.

**Student:** Regarding the point about the snake, I was just thinking if you're going to interpret this literalistically, aren't you also going to have to be committed to the fact that ancient Israelites also believed that snakes were the craftiest of all creatures and surely that they probably had a better understanding of animals than that. I'm just thinking about Jesus talking about the mustard seed being the smallest of all mustard seeds. Clearly by making that point he's not trying to make a literal point about the mustard seed being the smallest of all seeds but he's making an overriding or an overall point regarding the kingdom of God. I'm just thinking maybe regarding the snake, maybe that's a hint that it's not . . .

**Dr. Craig:** Yes. I think that the point is a good one. I hadn't though of it before. But I understand the point you're making, and that would be worth looking at. When you look at snakes in the Ancient Near East, they are used as symbols for a wide range of things, of both good and evil things. Snakes could be worshiped in Egypt, but then they could also represent evil and sinister powers and so forth. So snakes could be regarded as crafty and wicked and so forth, but you're making a good point as to whether or not even that statement shouldn't be taken literally but simply as part of the story.

**Student:** Where will I start? I'll start with snakes because we're on snakes, but you'd have to wipe out a lot of New Testament that identifies Satan as operating with the snake. Now the snake itself could be – it says it was the craftiest of all creatures. God could be attributing the style of its movements and the way it hides as something that as a tool
Satan would use to approach Eve because of the subtlety of movement and so forth, not necessarily anything related to the snake itself, but this is something Satan used. But then if you talk about other things like the rivers and so forth.

*Dr. Craig:* With respect to the snake, the word there that is translated “wily” or “crafty” is definitely a mental property. This is not attributing to the snake merely slithering movements in a physical way. This is attributing to the snake this mental property of being wily or crafty or smart. So the snake is definitely personified as an agent and it talks. So I don’t think we can attribute that adjective to merely its bodily movements. Now you wanted to say something about whether it rained on the Earth prior to the creation of man.

*Student:* Just concluding the snake, then you would say Satan used the subtleties of the physical to accomplish spiritual things. But you’d have to negate a lot of New Testament that talks about the serpent deceiving Eve in the Garden.

*Dr. Craig:* Well, that’s interesting. There is a passage I believe in [2] Corinthians where Paul says that, *I fear that just as the serpent deceived Eve so you might be deceived.* He doesn't say, “just as Satan deceived Eve.” He says the serpent. So he's simply citing the story about the snake or the serpent in the Garden, and doesn't explicitly say Satan. I almost wish that he had because then it would make it clear but he’s just citing this story about the serpent.

*Student:* There’s other things in Revelation. I’d have to look at the concordance exhaustively to see what serpent references there are. But with respect to water, if you go up to Mount Hermon where Jesus told Peter that the gates of hell won't prevail against the church, there's water that gushes out that they call the gates of hell – the pagans – and it becomes a river. You have the same thing, for example Bennett Springs in Missouri, that this underground river comes out and becomes a huge river and body of water. So this doesn't seem unreasonable. And with respect to cherubim . . .

*Dr. Craig:* Well, now wait. Come on. Just because there are underground springs and aquifers, which Genesis affirms (Genesis 2 says a spring or something welled up out of the ground to water the land), that doesn't mean that it makes it plausible that therefore there was no rain. I mean, they understood the cycle of evaporation, clouds forming, and then rain falling. That's plausibly what the waters above referred to – was rain. So just the fact that there are certainly underground rivers and springs and so forth I don't think does anything to make it plausible that the Earth was utterly devoid of rain and clouds.

*Student:* Well, I don't think Genesis said there was no rain either specifically, but that there were occasions of this water coming from the ground and becoming . . .

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88 2 Corinthians 11:3
Dr. Craig: Yes, and that's exactly what I'm questioning. I'm saying that that detail of the narrative is fantastic, and the ancient author would have found it so, I think, given his understanding of the water cycle.

Student: One more thing. Pain. I was listening to a sermon about was there pain before the Fall. This relates to taking the rib out. Because there are two references after the Fall. God says, *I'm going to multiply your pain in childbirth (not that you didn't have any, but I would multiply it)*. And the other thing would be if he put Adam to sleep to take some part of his DNA (and we'll call it a rib or whatever) what you could do with cloning in the modern sense but he closed up the side and he put Adam in a deep sleep. So if there wasn't an actual opportunity or there wasn't actually pain experienced by Adam he wouldn't have had to put him to sleep to take something out of the side . . . into a deep sleep to take something out of his side in order to make Eve.

Dr. Craig: Yes, I think that's quite right. And that wasn't a point that I was attempting to make. My point about the building of Eve out of Adam was that when you read it in context of this humanoid deity walking in the cool of the Garden looking for Adam and Eve hiding in the trees and so forth, that the surgery performed on Adam sounds very much like a physical operation which this God did – put him under general anesthetic (so to speak) so he wouldn't feel anything, cuts him open, takes out the rib or some body part, closes the incision up again, and then builds a woman out of this rib. That sounds like a physical operation that is going on. To say it's not, you would have to imagine that God is not physically present there, Adam falls asleep, an incision opens up on his side, a rib floats out into the air, and then the rib changes into a woman. Because, remember, God is immaterial – he's transcendent. So that would be, I think, not a plausible interpretation of the passage. When you read it in the context of the Garden, walking in the Garden, physically discoursing with people, it sounds like the formation of Eve is also a physical act which is going to require either, what someone mentioned earlier, that God becomes incarnate in chapter 2 or else this is just figurative language.

Student: I just have a quick comment and then two clarification questions. I haven't heard many people have a problem with that being a theophany in Genesis. I mean, people say that Jesus showed up as a theophany multiple times throughout the Old Testament – inside the furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when he went and told Isaac not to be sacrificed. It seems like the way that it would make the most sense for him to interact with Adam and Eve would be as a theophany just like in other parts of the Old Testament. I just didn't see an issue there. As far as the serpent being Satan, it just seems like the curse upon the serpent, I mean any interpretation I've heard of the curse is a curse against Satan when it says *I will put enmity between you and the woman; between your seed and her seed*. This being a reference to the ongoing struggle between Satan throughout all the generations in between Jesus and the line going to Jesus. It just seems
like the curse that's put against the serpent would have to be Satan based on what the
curse is.

*Dr. Craig:* Well, read the whole curse though upon the serpent beginning in verse 14.
*Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle and above all wild animals.*
That’s what he was said to be. Right? The craftiest of the wild animals. *Upon your belly
you shall go and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.* This sounds like an
etiological explanation of why snakes slither on the ground – because God cursed them.
And then, you're right, *I put enmity between you and the woman and your seed and her
seed; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.* Old Testament
commentators divide on what this means. Taken literally, it describes enmity between
snakes and humans and stomping on one with your heal to crush its head to kill it. If you
take it literally this is very much talking about a sort of snake. Now, it's actually, in this
case, it's the person who wants to take it as Satan who is interpreting it more figuratively
and metaphorically to say that it refers to Satan. I'm open to that – that this is what that
could be, especially if the snake is a symbol of something like that.

*Student:* I guess if Satan went into the serpent, you know took over the serpent, possessed
the serpent or something, I guess I don't see it being a problem as the curse being against
the serpent that he went into as well as Satan himself.

*Dr. Craig:* So both of them?

*Student:* Yeah. But, anyway, my clarification question is: I know the last few weeks
you've drawn the parallel between other ancient cultures’ origin stories and the Genesis
origin story. So my point of clarification is: do you believe that the Hebrew origin story
did come from God himself, or do you believe that the Hebrews needed an origin story so
they made it up as well? Because if you believe that they just made it up then it doesn't
seem like this is any better than anybody else's ancient culture story. But if you believe
they didn't make it up and it came from God then it seems like the parallel only goes so
far because you have to look at the source. One is people have to make it up out of
scratch . . .

*Dr. Craig:* This relates to a question that was raised earlier. The author of Genesis on an
orthodox Christian understanding of inspiration, which I have obviously affirmed in our
class, is that God is the ultimate author of Genesis. The question then is: Can God use
literary forms, literary genres, that are not literal? And there the answer is demonstrably
yes! All you have to do is read the Psalms and see poetry, or read the book of Revelation.
There's a kind of a nice comparison between the first book and the last book of the Bible.
The last book of the Bible is Jewish apocalyptic literature filled with imagery. When it
talks about the beast that is going to rebel against God, it doesn't mean something like in
Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* – some sort of animal-like thing. This is a symbol for
some political leader. Right? And these multi-headed monsters that come out of the sea and try to take over the Earth are representative of nation-states and alliances and so forth. So clearly God uses different literary genres to communicate his truth. What I'm pleading for here is to consider the possibility that the first eleven chapters of Genesis belong to this literary genre which has been called mytho-history which doesn't require that it be interpreted literally any more than, say, the book of Revelation. But, obviously, I am affirming that God is the author of this history.

*Student:* I know you've made the parallel with Revelation, but apocalyptic literature and apocalyptic language is just so much of a genre of its own; in fact, it even says specifically that the dragon coming out of the sea is Satan or the devil. I mean, you don't have to draw that conclusion yourself. The verse actually says this represents Satan or the devil. It just reads completely differently. But, OK, my last clarification. Do you personally believe that there is a literal Adam and Eve who is the progenitor of the entire human race? Do you believe there was a literal Adam and Eve?

*Dr. Craig:* Yes. As I said, this isn't pure mythology. It’s mytho-history. So the genealogies are intended to show that these are narratives or stories about people who actually lived and wrought. But I'm suggesting that these stories may have been told with metaphorical and figurative language that shouldn't be interpreted literalistically, and I've given several examples this morning of these.

*Student:* Concerning about the serpent. I was trying to say that if God tried to communicate with us about a spiritual phenomena as, say, Jesus was baptized by the Holy Spirit and it looks like a dove but obviously the Holy Spirit is not a dove but it looks like that. In this case it's a communication where I think the main message of eating that fruit is that human conscience has departed from agreement with God and that's why it's the knowledge of good and evil instead of defined good and evil by God's definition. We start that definition by our own selfish perspective. So this story is conveying that when human conscience has departed from God then there is no salvation because we are guided by our conscience except when a new conscience comes in Jesus Christ and replaces ours. I don't know how else Genesis can depict this idea other than what it has said in that Genesis – the fruit of knowledge of good and evil. Another interesting thing is that the Chinese character retained a lot of these stories in its radicals in their language. The pronoun “it” is derived by “snake.” So in the beginning if they describe you or I or it, that “it” is a snake. So I thought that was interesting.

*Dr. Craig:* OK, thank you.

*Student:* Aren't we hermeneutically bound to look into the apostolic authority of the New Testament and go back and get Old Testament meanings? Because I'm very sympathetic with what you're saying about the literary genre and all these Ancient Near Eastern
cultures with these theories, but if you take, say, Isaiah and you look at what Jesus or the New Testament authors are saying about that, they didn't think that's what Isaiah meant. “Out of Egypt I called my son.” Matthew. When he said that, they didn't think that's what the Old Testament was referring to. So when in Revelation, not that I want to beat the snake to death, but in Revelation when the author says “Satan, that ancient serpent” I can see where we go back and nobody would have thought that – that the serpent was literally Satan. But because we have that progressive revelation, we as Christians, we have a *deux ex machina* in our pocket that no other culture has in this apostolic revelation – “oh, it's progressively revealed.” So can't we – this Sarna fellow, I don't suppose he was a Christian. When did he write?

*Dr. Craig*: No, he's Jewish. Which is why I found his comments on the cherubim so interesting.

*Student*: I thought that was interesting because what you said about that – Jews broke the law all the time. The whole Old Testament is about how unfaithful they were so of course they might have had things like that. But he doesn't have the “Christian magic power” to go back and say, “Oh, but our apostles say this.” So aren't we as Christians bound to go back through New Testament light to reinterpret these?

*Dr. Craig*: Yes, I think that's true. I think that's right. Although the examples that you gave lead me to think that in some ways the New Testament authors could read things into these texts that weren't originally there like “out of Egypt I have called my son.” The hermeneutic there would be that they are discerning a different level of meaning or a different interpretation that wasn't intended by the original author. That raises all kinds of difficult questions pertinent to these things. I don't think that the New Testament references to Adam and Eve are going to overturn what I've said in this class because it primarily is a theological interpretation that Paul gives in Romans 5 about how sin entered into the world through Adam and Eve – through their choice, their Fall – and that therefore there was such a couple and that they did disobey God and fall away. But the degree to which the story is to be taken literalistically I think is left open by the New Testament. But you're certainly right in principle by saying that that needs to be taken into consideration.

*Student*: There's so much to be said but I'm going to pick back on the rain issue. Genesis 2 – the three major interpretations seem to be that, one would be it's a separate story than Genesis 1. One would be that it's a story of primarily what happened on day six. And one would be that it's consecutive in order, or follows in order from Genesis 1. I know you did a presentation on that not long ago disagreeing with that idea. I'm more inclined to think that it's a separate story, and that it begins similar to Genesis 1 in that it's telling what's wrong. There's no plant of the field; there's no plant of the Earth there. It's no good
plants and no wild plants. Then it gives a two-fold reason why that's the case – because God did not send rain and because there was nobody to irrigate the land. And then there's a two-fold solution – God causes it to begin to rain essentially and he creates man. So I think it's a separate story, just in a different order. So the “no rain” refers back to a time when God was creating the rain cycle in a similar fashion that he did on day 2. So I don't see them as seeing that as fantastic as much as it's just another telling of a creation story that may have been later in time than Genesis 1.

Dr. Craig: Well, that sounds very much like what I have just said! It's a separate story. I'm going to talk next week about the conflicts between Genesis 1 and 2 with respect to the order of creation – of vegetation, animals, and man. I'm sympathetic to what I think I understood you to say – that it's part of the plasticity of myths that they enable them to be told in different ways and that we shouldn't press this narrative to mean that before human beings were created it had never ever rained on the Earth. That, I think, would be fantastic even for these ancient Israelites who understood, as you say, the water cycle since the creation of the waters above and the waters below.

END DISCUSSION

All right. Good discussion today. Next week we will take up further evidence for the non-literal nature of these narratives.89
Lecture 21: Why Read Genesis 1-3 Figuratively?

In our last session together we saw that there are many elements in Genesis 1-3 which, if taken literally, seemed to be palpably false thereby recommending to us a figurative interpretation. Chief among these certainly are the anthropomorphic descriptions of God which are incompatible with the transcendent God described in chapter 1.

I want to say a word more about a question last week: whether we couldn't take Genesis 2 and 3 to be a theophany akin to the appearance of God to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre in Genesis 18. There are examples in the Old Testament like Genesis 18 where God appears to a person in human form. You have that in the appearance of the Lord to Abraham in Genesis 18. Let me suggest two reasons, however, why I think that Genesis 2 and 3 are not as plausibly interpreted as a theophany than as figurative language.

First of all, the Lord’s anthropomorphic qualities in Genesis 2 and 3 are not presented as a theophany is. Look at how the language of theophany reads in Genesis 18:1-2. The author says,

> And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him.

By contrast, in Genesis 2 and 3 you don't have anything of language of theophany like this – of God's appearing to Adam and Eve, looking up and seeing him in the Garden.

Secondly, I think decisively, in Genesis 2 and 3 God is described anthropomorphically even when he is not appearing to Adam. This is the preeminent case in God's creation of Adam. In creating Adam he forms him out of the dust of the ground and then he blows into his nose the breath of life and Adam comes to life. This is clearly not an appearance of the Lord to Adam because Adam isn't even alive at that point, and yet God is described anthropomorphically. A second example would be God's creation of Eve. Adam is unconscious when this occurs. God puts Adam to sleep and then he performs this physical surgery on him to create Eve. So, again, this can't be an appearance to Adam because Adam is unconscious. It seems to me that neither of these are appearances of the Lord to Adam and that therefore this anthropomorphic language is more plausibly interpreted to be figurative in nature and not to be taken literally.

In addition to these elements in the narrative that if taken literally are palpably false, we also have certain *prima facie* inconsistencies (that is to say, face value inconsistencies) between the chapters 1 and 2 which were apparently of no concern whatsoever to the author of Genesis, such as the order of the creation of plants, animals, and man. According to Genesis 2:5 there was no rain and hence no vegetation on Earth prior to the creation of man. Genesis 2:5-7 says,
when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground—then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground . . .

According to this passage there was no rain and hence no vegetation prior to man's creation. But according to Genesis 1 God created vegetation on day 3 before he created man on day 6.

Some commentators have argued that there's really no inconsistency here concerning the vegetation prior to man because Genesis 2:5 is not referring to all types of vegetation, rather it's referring specifically to only two types of vegetation: thorns and grain. These are said to have come forth from the Earth only after the Fall as a consequence of God's cursing the ground. On this interpretation there was vegetation aplenty all over the Earth prior to man's creation, but there weren't any thorns and there weren't any grain. Those arise only after the Fall. But I think that this harmonization is too clever by half. On this reading, the reason given in Genesis 2:5 for why the Earth had not brought forth thorns and grain should have been “for man had not yet sinned.” Since the world was supposedly filled with vegetation at that time, the absence of rain and the absence of any man to till the ground had nothing to do with it. Moreover, man was commanded to till the Garden prior to the Fall – Genesis 2:15 gives him the command to till the Garden – which would imply that the growth of grain was not delayed until after the Fall. So I think it's far more plausible to think that Genesis 2:5 envisions an exhaustive distinction between uncultivated plants on the one hand and cultivated plants on the other hand, and therefore no vegetation at that time.

Similarly, in Genesis 1 God creates the animals prior to his creation of man, but in Genesis 2:18-19 God creates man before creating the animals. Genesis 2:18-19 state,

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

It would have been very easy for the author of Genesis to bring the account of the creation of man in chapter 2 into accord with the account in Genesis 1 rather than to leave these apparent inconsistencies concerning the order of the creation of man and the animals. The Jewish commentator Umberto Cassuto says that the author of Genesis could not have failed to notice what he calls “so glaring a contradiction” in the order of creation of the animals if such a contradiction exists. So Cassuto rejects the harmonizing
translation of chapter 2 verse 19 as animals which “He had already created” as being unworthy of serious consideration. Cassuto assumes that cattle or domestic animals must have already been with man in the Garden whereas the beasts of the field and the birds of the air being wild animals were not in the Garden. So what chapter 2 verse 19 envisions is the Lord's creating what Cassuto calls “particular specimens” of these wild animals in order to present them to man in the Garden. So, for example, although there were crocodiles outside the Garden, there weren't any in the Garden and so God creates a specimen of a crocodile and lets Adam give it a name. There were hippopotami outside the Garden, but God creates a specimen hippopotamus in the Garden so that Adam can give it a name. There were lions outside the Garden, but God creates a specimen lion in the Garden so that Adam can give it a name. I'll leave it up to you to decide whether you think this is a plausible interpretation of the passage. The overriding point remains that if the author were concerned with consistency he would surely have avoided such a glaring contradiction by making such a scenario as Cassuto envisions evident to the reader and making it a whole lot clearer.

Why was the author so blasé about these apparent inconsistencies? Well, plausibly because he didn't intend his story to be read literalistically. Given the plasticity of myths (and you will remember that refers to their variability and the way they could be told), different ways of telling the stories were possible so long as the same fundamental truth was expressed.

START DISCUSSION

*Student:* I haven't, of course, studied this literature in Hebrew but just reading the passage where he talks about the naming of the cattle, it seems to me contrived to interpret that as strictly as conflicting with the creation of animals. That seems to me like a leap justified maybe by an ulterior motive when interpreting the language and maybe to justify other interpretations of Scripture.

*Dr. Craig:* I'm surprised you would say that, quite honestly, because it seems to me the prima facie reading is that he creates man first and then he creates the animals and brings them to him. Cassuto, as I said, says this is a glaring contradiction if there is a contradiction here, and it has been noticed by every commentator on Genesis.

*Student:* It doesn't say created or that he first created them or anything like that in that verse about the naming. So I'm not sure where there would be a contradiction between the creation of the animals and a second creation later when the second instance doesn't reference creation.

*Dr. Craig:* OK, well, that is the solution that Cassuto is preferring – that there weren't any of these animals in the garden and so, in effect, there occurs a kind of second creation of these specimens for Adam to name. While I wouldn't know how to refute that, I think you
need to simply ask yourself: is that the most plausible interpretation of it? You've got a
different order, it looks like with the vegetation, the animals, and man, and so there needs
to be some account given of why the order is apparently contradictory.

*Student:* It seems to me like Genesis 1 is more sequential ordering of God's creation and
that chapter 2 is expanding on certain aspects of the creation, not necessarily trying to tie
them to an order or chronology. That's where the problem seems to be.

*Dr. Craig:* Right, and that's exactly the point that I'm making.

*Student:* I would see this is not conflicting with Genesis 1 in the sequence of creation but
that he's pulling details out in chapter 2 of the creation. He's dealing with some subsets of
this; some expansion of the responsibilities of man.

*Dr. Craig:* I think that is right. Yes. But the odd thing is that when he does this expansion
there's a different order of creation than you have in Genesis 1 where you have first the
vegetation on day 3, then you have the terrestrial animals on day 6, and then finally man
is the crown of creation, whereas in Genesis 2 you have first man is created in the
Garden, and then the vegetation is created, and then the animals are created and brought
to man. So there's at least an apparent conflict here that needs to be resolved. I tend to
agree with what you just said at the beginning that he's not concerned with chronology
here so much that it doesn't matter if they're ordered chronologically or told in the exact
sequence.

*Student:* We agree with that. I think in the second chapter he's not trying to . . . he's
presupposing these things are made and then he's picking out aspects of it to expand upon
rather than say, *I'm ordering this again in a different way than Genesis 1.*

*Dr. Craig:* OK.

*Student:* Can I go back to the theophany? I just had a couple of questions on that. Number
one: in chapter 2 I've never read the text or understood chapter 2 to imply that there was a
theophany there. It just seems like God is doing things in a smaller location and not just
on a worldwide scale like he is in chapter 1 at the transcendent scale. It’s only in that little
brief mention in chapter 3 where it says he's walking around. So I don't know if maybe
there are commentaries that suggest that chapter 2 is meant to be understood as God
actually being in the Garden down on his knees making a man-castle out of the sand. But
the other thing I wanted to suggest, too, was that even in the context of Genesis I don't
think . . . because you mentioned that later the theophanies are singled out as “the Lord
appeared to them” in this way, but there is a verse in Genesis 4:26 that says that that was
the point that men began to call upon the name of the Lord. It seems to suggest that the
implication seems to be that at some point God was actually visible to people. They knew
he was there. He was around. But sometime after Cain murdered Abel and the
consequences resulting from that, God began to be hidden from them and they had to start calling on him to find him.

Dr. Craig: Let me address these in reverse order. I don't think that last point is at all a plausible interpretation. I think what it's talking there is about the names of God. In Chapter 1, the word for God is Elohim and then in chapter 2 you have the LORD introduced – Yahweh Elohim. I think when he's saying that men began to call upon the name of the LORD it means upon the name of Yahweh. This is actually another one of these apparent inconsistencies because later when he appears to Moses it seems that the divine name has been hidden until that time when Moses is given the revelation of the divine name. Commentators have really struggled to try to understand this. With respect to the first point, I certainly agree with you that the anthropomorphism in chapter 2 is more implicit and subtle, and it only really emerges inescapably in chapter 3 when you've got God walking in the cool of the Garden and calling out to Adam and looking for him hiding in the trees. But when you read chapter 2 in light of chapter 3 I think then it's very plausible that chapter 2 is also anthropomorphic. He forms the man out of the dust of the Earth and then he blows into his nose the breath of life and the earthen man becomes alive. That, I think, is a very physical description especially when read in light of chapter 3 which is inescapably physical.

Student: I guess I just don't understand why that would . . . even if chapter 2 was suggesting a theophany, I don't see why it would be somehow less significant than God appearing later to other people.

Dr. Craig: Maybe you didn’t understand my point. I'm saying that chapter 2 is not a theophany because there was no one being appeared to there. We have simply an anthropomorphic description of God creating Adam and animating the earthen (I'm tempted to say “statue” – I don't know what word to use) figure, and it comes alive. There isn't any appearing in that act because Adam isn't alive yet. It's for that reason I think chapter 2 is not a theophany, but I do think it's anthropomorphic, that is to say, described in human terms.

Student: It sounds like you're OK with us making comment regards to last week, so I just wanted to say – the thing that stuck with me that bothered me a little bit from last week is I think that in some aspects you're misrepresenting the views of the literal interpretation, like in aspects to sound especially silly or foolish. Like, for instance, people who believe in the historical accuracy of the Genesis account don't believe the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was some kind of magical fruit the granted supernatural powers. I mean, that was just about disobedience. All we know about the Tree is that if they ate from it – because they were given free will they had the option of disobeying
God – and when they disobeyed God they would naturally be granted the knowledge of good and evil because there was no evil in the world before sin came into them.

*Dr. Craig:* What about immortality? It seems to me that there you definitely have the idea that eating the fruit is going to confer on your body immortality, and that's not from God because it's against God's will. He says, *We've got to keep them out of the Garden lest they go in and eat the fruit and become immortal.* So it sounds like it's magic fruit to me.

*Student:* Well, there's the Tree of Life and then there's the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Those are two separate trees. I'm referring to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It doesn't have to be interpreted in such a literal manner, just like we don't believe that when the curse put upon the serpent or Satan when it says about *you'll strike his heel you'll smash his head,* I mean nobody who believes the literal interpretation believes that that's telling us today how humans should kill snakes when we see them. There can be some obvious symbolism and foreshadowing there in the curse without saying that the entire event was metaphorical and never happened. It's just one big symbol. I just don't want the literal interpretation to be misrepresented, and by going so literal it just makes it sound silly and stupid.

*Dr. Craig:* All right, well it sounds as though what you would call literal interpretation is taking a step in the direction that I'm pleading for – namely, some sort of figurative or metaphorical interpretation. The question would be the extent I suppose to which one would go, but that’s fair enough.

*Student:* I'd like to at least end with two quick questions that are kind of combined. I understand that you believe in a literal Adam and Eve but you don't believe that the events or the facts surrounding them or the characters leading up to Abraham are necessarily literally true. So I guess my question is what is your litmus test in deciding which parts are literally true and which parts are going to be symbolic metaphors?

*Dr. Craig:* I'm going to address that in a minute.

*Student:* OK, then let me just tack on this question that maybe you'll be able to address, too. For the parts that you do believe are symbols or metaphors, do we know what they are symbols or metaphors for?

*Dr. Craig:* I’m going to address that in a minute.

*Student:* If the Fall didn’t happen because Adam and Eve ate from the Tree, then how did the Fall actually happen? I don’t understand why God would give us all these symbols and metaphors while leaving us totally clueless as to what actually happened in the actual events.

*Dr. Craig:* All right, well, hang on and see if you're satisfied with what I'm going to share.
Student: How could saying Seth is 912 years old be a metaphor or symbol for something else that we are clueless about? I’m still struggling with that.

Dr. Craig: OK.

Student: I hope this is not too far afield but having just come back from the West and Colorado and studying the Indians, I'm curious. Their myths stories of creation about the Great Spirit and stories about how the animals came to be and that God provided the buffalo and so forth for provisioning for man and their respect for nature as a result they saw God very much involved (or the Great Spirit) in nature. I guess my question is: they have their own myths, if you will, of creation and origin. Is there any in some way correlation whereby early man (prehistoric man) through oral tradition were told these myths as in Genesis from the Jewish tradition. Are there some parallels or symbolisms? I know we talked about Egypt, but it is curious to me there are some common elements throughout all of these myths and there's a way that the people groups understood it, particularly I think in the Indian culture. I don't think they took these so literally as we tend to try to in the West, but they saw them as important, true stories of their people. Do you feel there's some sort of connection, if you will, with this kind of view of early creation?

Dr. Craig: We have no way of knowing the answer to that because these are pre-literary traditions and so they're not written down until you get to the ancient Babylonian and Sumerian myths which are around 3,000 BC, 2,000 BC, and then you've got these Hebrew stories as well. These are among the earliest. But before that, you mentioned I think prehistoric man – precisely because it’s prehistoric we don’t know.

Student: I'm just thinking of the migration into North America and South America 2,000 years ago when the Indian tribes were settled, and their stories are very similar amongst the tribes of creation and the Great Spirit. It just seems to be a common theme.

Dr. Craig: Let me say this. It is very difficult, as I said earlier, to draw causal connection between these. You’ll remember I describe this affliction called parallelomani where scholars too often see similarities and draw then causal connections. I'm very skeptical about that ability. But, having said that, I think the point that you're making is a good one – all of these myths have certain common characteristics in the grand themes that they teach. There's an account of creation – where did everything come from? There's an account often of the origin of mankind – why do human beings exist and what is the purpose for human beings? The Flood narrative is very widespread around the world in different peoples including you have in Indian culture. So there are certain grand themes that I think are relevant in classifying the genre or the type of literature that Genesis 1-11 is.
Student: I think interestingly a lot of them have a monotheistic kind of umbrella, and it seems to me that when you get later in history is when you get more into the pantheistic.

Dr. Craig: I'm not an anthropologist. I know that that's been a much controverted and disputed question: is monotheism or polytheism more primitive? I'm not in a position to have an opinion on that.

Student: Just for clarification because I just don't know what this means—when you say the text is anthropomorphic, what are you saying?

Dr. Craig: Let's unpack that word. The word “anthropomorphic” comes from two Greek words. One is anthropos which means “man” or “human,” and then morphē is the word for “form.” So an anthropomorphic description is a description of something in human form. That's what we've got in Genesis 2 and 3—anthropomorphic descriptions of God, whom we know doesn't have a human form from chapter 1 so they can't be literal unless it's a theophany of God appearing in a human form.

Student: I was always confused because I always thought theophany was actually that—coming in human form.

Dr. Craig: No, I think you can see the difference here. Theophany comes from other Greek words that are instructive, too. Theos means God, and then I think it's phainó which means “to appear.” So this will be an appearance of God to a person, and he could appear in different guises though often in Scripture God appears in some sort of human form like Genesis 18. So the one is, as it were, a linguistic category, and the other is a phenomenal category.

Student: Getting on the subject of metaphor, as I understand it there are actually competing accounts for the necessary and sufficient conditions for a metaphor. For example, there are what's called a brute force account. A brute force account would say they are something more akin to truth making. There's this metaphor and there's something in the actual world that must correspond with it in some way. Then there are other accounts, for example, that say that if I have a metaphor maybe there are artifacts in the metaphor. There's nothing in the metaphor itself that corresponds to the actual world. I just want to know where you're going to get on that.

Dr. Craig: I don't have a view on that. My inclination would be toward the one that says that it doesn't need to have a corresponding thing in reality. I'd like to be able to just immediately think of one off the top of my head of a metaphor that we use.

Student: I'm thinking about a mist. The mist that you said rising from the ground. I probably don't think that that corresponds to anything.
Dr. Craig: No, I was trying to think of someone who might use metaphors that don't correspond to something like sometimes people will say that something is a blooming, buzzing confusion. I don't think that there's any such thing in reality as a blooming, buzzing confusion. That's just a kind of metaphorical way of describing something that's unclear. Surely there must be examples if we were to put our heads together of metaphors we could think of that don't have concrete reference like, for example, she has a bee in her bonnet. That seems very literal, doesn't it at first? It refers to an insect in a hat. She's got a bee in her bonnet. But it doesn't mean that. It means she's angry or irritable or something.

Student: But in that case it corresponds to something.

Dr. Craig: Yes, exactly. So my inclination would be to say that we could think of metaphors that don't have those kind of concrete reference in them.

Student: Speaking about metaphors, how long do you think that this extends into the book of Genesis? All the way up to the point of let's say Noah's Ark?

Dr. Craig: I do think that the first eleven chapters are the kind of clear breaking point. All commentators on Genesis notice that Genesis has a structure that is tripartite, that is to say three parts. 1 to 11 is the primeval history, then after that you have the patriarchal narratives, and then finally you have the story of Joseph which is the end. The primeval history (the first eleven chapters) stand markedly apart from the patriarchal narratives in their similarity to ancient myths and the employment of etiological motifs like founding present realities in the deep past. After chapter 11 these kinds of similarities and motifs just don't exist. So everybody seems to recognize that the first eleven chapters are set apart in that sense.

Student: This is just a simple question. In the language of 19, it says “out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast.” You're saying that that puts it out of sequence. In the Hebrew, if you said in English “out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast and then brought them to me” it is not much of a change but I was just wondering if you could detect that in the Hebrew.

Dr. Craig: It's permitted but not detectable, I think. Remember I quoted Cassuto (himself a Jewish commentator) who said that this alternative isn't to be taken seriously. It's just a harmonizing attempt to mistranslate the passage so that it looks like that God has already formed the animals by putting it in past-perfect tense. Now, linguistically, yes that verb could be given that kind of past-perfect tense. But when you read the whole story, when you read the context, is that the best way to translate it or just simply translate it as a simple past – that now this is the point at which God is creating the beasts? Most translators and commentators would, I think, agree with Cassuto in rejecting the
harmonizing translation on the basis of the context. It's just an isolated linguistic point apart from contrast that the verb would permit multiple ways of rendering it.

Student: But it does permit it. And chapter 1 is clear in day 1, day 2, day 3. This is not day 1, day 2, day 3, and it could use the past-perfect tense or whatever it is. So it would make sense that since he had created them he brought them.

Dr. Craig: I don't think that it makes as much sense as reading it as just not a past-perfect, but the isolated linguistic point is right. It permits it. That’s true.

Student: One question about rain, because it does say it didn't rain. I think last week or the week before you said the people that read this would have known about the water cycle and all of that kind of stuff so it wouldn't make sense to write that. I think if someone were writing it to make it seem like it fits in with what everybody knows then yes indeed that's correct. But if they were writing it as, This is what happened and this is how it worked, then having something like the mist was used to water everything and there wasn't rain, it seems like if you were writing it to say, Hey, this worked the way it was before, you would say there was rain. If you were trying to make it up, you would say it was rain. But since it says, no, there wasn't rain and there was mist, I think we could take that as literally true.

Dr. Craig: I do think that it should be understood in a sense literally. He is saying there was no rain. But I question whether or not the author really meant us and his readers to think that there was a period within Earth history in which it had never rained on the face of the Earth because he understood that if you have rivers and seas and evaporation that there were formed clouds and it's going to rain. When he refers to the waters above, in the Old Testament that is referring, I think, to rain and rain clouds, and they understood that that's where the waters above are and where rain comes from.

Student: I tend to reject uniformitarianism. I tend to say that something that happened back here that were being revealed could be very different than the way it happens today. So that doesn't bother me as much, I guess.

END DISCUSSION

All right. We’re out of time.⁹⁰
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 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."
Lecture 23: Adam in the New Testament

The last several months we have been studying the primeval history of Genesis 1-11. But of course there’s all the rest of the Scriptures to consider as well. Remarkably, however, for all his importance in Christian theology, Adam is scarcely mentioned in the remainder of the Old Testament outside the primeval history of Genesis 1-11. His name appears again in the Old Testament only in 1 Chronicles 1:1-24 at the head of a genealogy of Abraham which the author has simply constructed via scissors and paste from the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11. In extra-canonical Jewish literature, by contrast, the narratives of Adam and Eve are often put to work for varying theological purposes. I’m speaking here of the Jewish pseudepigrapha and apocrypha. To give you an idea of the amount of literature that we’re talking about here, I brought Charlesworth’s two-volume edition of the Jewish pseudepigrapha and apocrypha including things like 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, Maccabees, The Wisdom of Solomon, things of that sort. This is intertestamental Jewish literature that is not included in the Old Testament canon. In this pseudepigraphal and apocryphal literature you find Adam occurring as a theological figure. For example, we have Adam the paradigmatic moral man of the book of Sirach and from Josephus. We have Adam the model of faithful Torah observance of the law in the book of Jubilees. We have Adam the archetypal sinner in the book of 4 Ezra, Adam the image of the divine Logos of Philo of Alexandria, and so on. It’s noteworthy that despite the various theological uses to which Adam is put and the various theological interpretations of him, all of these Jewish texts concur in presenting Adam as a historical person, the first human being to be created.

When we come to the New Testament, we find the figure of Adam widely deployed most importantly by the apostle Paul. Let me read to you the principal texts from Paul concerning Adam.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22:

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:45-49 Paul writes:

Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.
2 Corinthians 11:3:

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.

And then the most important passage, Romans 5:12-21:

Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned—sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous. Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Finally, 1 Timothy 2:12-14:

I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

This is doubtless a very impressive array of texts concerning the figure of Adam, but they should not be treated indiscriminately, lest we be misled.

Many scholars have attempted to distinguish between what is called the literary Adam and the historical Adam. Unfortunately, this distinction is not always clearly drawn or consistently applied. The literary Adam is a character in a story, specifically the stories of Genesis 2-3. The historical Adam is the person who actually existed, the actual individual that the stories are allegedly about. This distinction between the literary Adam and the historical Adam implies a further distinction between truth and truth-in-a-story. A statement S is true if and only if S states what is the case. A statement S is true-in-a-story
if and only if it is found in or implied by that story. So if I say, for example, that Gilgamesh slew the Bull of Heaven, my statement, though true-in-the-*Epic of Gilgamesh*, is false. Truth-in-a-story does not, however, preclude truth. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh* there are, or are implied, statements such as “Gilgamesh was an ancient Sumerian king,” which are both true-in-the-epic and true. So the relevant question then is whether the above New Testament passages that I’ve read are intended to assert truths or merely truths-in-a-story. Just to recap then. The literary Adam is a character in a story. The historical Adam is the real flesh-and-blood person that actually lived. Truth-in-a-story is a statement’s being in the story or being implied by a statement in the story whereas truth simply states what is the case.

With those distinctions in mind, we must further distinguish between a New Testament author’s using a text *illustratively* versus what I'll call *assertorically*. I know that's an ugly word, but I couldn't think of anything better to express what I'm getting at here. The illustrative use of a text and the assertoric use of a text. Using a text illustratively is using the text merely to provide an illustration, real or imagined, of the point that the author is trying to make. So the illustrative use of a text is using the text to provide an illustration which may be either real or imagined of the point the author's trying to make. Such an illustrative use of a text does not commit the user to the truth of the text itself but merely to truth-in-a-text. So, for example, Greek mythology which is so familiar to us in Western culture is frequently the source of illustrations for us. We speak, for example, of something’s being a Trojan horse, or of someone's having an Achilles’ heel, or of somebody's opening a Pandora's box, without thinking that we are thereby committing ourselves to the historical reality of these relevant mythical entities.

This illustrative use of a text occasions a further distinction between what a person citing a text *believes* and what that person *asserts*. Perhaps someone using the illustration of the Trojan horse believes that such an instrument actually existed and helped to turn the tide of the Trojan War; but right or wrong, his personal belief is irrelevant to the point that he's trying to assert or teach. Thus, a text is used assertorically, as I'm using the word, just in case the user means to teach the truth of what the text says and not merely truth-in-a-text. So an assertoric use of a statement is teaching the truth of the text not simply truth-in-the-text, and that is the case whether he believes the text to be true or whether he doesn't believe it to be true. That's quite distinct from what he is asserting.

The illustrative use of a story is using a story merely to illustrate a point, and as we all know from hearing preachers’ sermons, often illustrations are made up. They're not about real things, but that's fine. They still serve to illustrate the point the preacher is making. By contrast, if you're using the text assertorically then you are asserting the truth of what you're saying, and it doesn't matter whether you believe in the illustration you're using or
not. If you're only using it illustratively then you're not asserting what the illustration says – it's simply serving to illustrate the point you want to make.

I draw these distinctions not to try to weasel out of commitments on the part of New Testament authors to the historical Adam or the historicity of Genesis stories. Rather these distinctions are important in our treatment of many New Testament passages which, if interpreted assertorically, would involve unwanted commitments to pseudepigraphal and mythological entities. This is a lot more important than just dealing with the historical Adam or the primeval history. As we'll see, these distinctions are vital lest we be committed to mythological and pseudepigraphal entities.

Let's turn to some fascinating New Testament texts to give examples of this point.

In the books of Jude and 2 Peter we find examples of the use of extra-biblical literary texts. Jude and 2 Peter appeal to these non-canonical literary texts, and in these books we find the wholesale importation of extra-biblical material. For example, in condemning the false teachers of his day, Jude contrasts them to the archangel Michael in his dispute with the devil over Moses' body. Jude writes in verses 9 and 10:

But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, “The Lord rebuke you.” But these men [the false teachers of Jude's day] revile whatever they do not understand, and by those things that they know by instinct as irrational animals do, they are destroyed.

The problem here is that no such incident as this is to be found in the Old Testament Scriptures. There's nothing about a dispute between Michael and the devil over the corpse of Moses. But according to the early church father Origen, such a story is to be found in the Jewish apocryphal book *The Assumption of Moses*. Origen writes,

in the book of Genesis, the serpent is described as having seduced Eve; regarding whom, in the work entitled *The Ascension of Moses* (a little treatise, of which the Apostle Jude makes mention in his Epistle), the archangel Michael, when disputing with the devil regarding the body of Moses, says that the serpent, being inspired by the devil, was the cause of Adam and Eve's transgression.

That's from Origen's work *On First Principles* (3.2.1). Unfortunately for us, the extant version of this treatise *The Assumption of Moses* is known only from a single, very late, incomplete manuscript which does not include the story that is mentioned by Jude and Origen. But it seems to have been a part of Jewish folklore which was also known to the author of 2 Peter. In 2 Peter 2:10-11 he says,
Bold and wilful, they are not afraid to revile the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a reviling judgment upon them before the Lord.

So we have here in Jude and 2 Peter apparent references to the literary Moses of the book The Assumption of Moses, but not to the literary Moses of Genesis. This is from this apocryphal Jewish work.

Again, another example, after providing various examples to illustrate the danger of false teachers, Jude then goes on to actually quote from 1 Enoch as though it were authentic. In Jude verses 14 and 15, speaking of the false teachers, Jude declares,

It was of these also that Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

This is a citation from the Greek text of 1 Enoch 1:9 which reads,

Behold, he will arrive with ten million of the holy ones in order to execute judgment upon all. He will destroy the wicked ones and censure all flesh on account of everything that they have done, that which the sinners and wicked ones committed against him.

Jude cites the author of 1 Enoch, which is a pseudepigraphal book dated between around 400 to 200 BC, as though he were identical to the Enoch of the antediluvian primeval history, the seventh generation after Adam.

It seems to me that this text is the reductio ad absurdum of overly easy arguments for Old Testament historicity on the basis of New Testament authority. By failing to distinguish between the illustrative use of a text and the assertoric use of a text, those who offer such arguments are driven into a hopeless position. This is well illustrated by the writer Guy Waters. Waters writes as follows,

Jude here identifies ‘Enoch’ as descended from Adam, in the seventh generation from Adam. He treats Enoch as a historical personage, who utters the prophecies documented in verses 14-15. The fact that Enoch is identified as ‘the seventh from Adam’ not only confirms Enoch’s historicity but also assumes Adam’s historicity.

. . . Some have argued that Jude quotes from a book that his opponents regarded as authoritative, but that Jude did not. Others more plausibly have suggested that Jude regarded these words as a historically accurate, authentic utterance of the
prophet Enoch, an utterance that, in the providence of God, was preserved in 1 Enoch.  

There are two claims that are being made here in Waters’ supposedly “more plausible” suggestion. First is that Jude personally believed that the words cited from 1 Enoch were a historically accurate, authentic utterance of the antediluvian Enoch, and second, that in fact Enoch’s words were, in God's providence, preserved in 1 Enoch. The first of those claims is irrelevant and the second is desperate. As we’ve seen, an author using a text illustratively may or may not believe in the factuality of the illustration, and the usefulness of the illustration is independent of the author's personal belief. So if Jude is using 1 Enoch illustratively, as seems plausible, then his personal beliefs about Enoch’s historicity are just irrelevant. Water’s further suggestion that an oral tradition emanating from the antediluvian Enoch has been preserved over thousands of years to reach the ears of the author of the pseudepigraphal 1 Enoch can hardly be said to be plausible. If Jude is using the examples illustratively rather than assertorically, then overly easy historicity proofs of Old Testament narratives must fail. That an assertoric interpretation of Jude 14 forces us to conclude that in 1 Enoch 1:9 we hear the authentic voice of the antediluvian Enoch I think should give any New Testament theologian serious pause.  

Another fascinating example comes from 2 Timothy 3:8. Warning against religious hypocrites, Paul says “As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith.” Again, these personages Jannes and Jambres do not appear in the Old Testament; but they are widely known in Jewish folklore as the unnamed magicians in Pharaoh’s court who opposed Moses in Exodus 7:11, 22 doing counterfeit miracles. The New Testament reference here in [2 Timothy] most closely resembles the account given in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, a later Jewish work. The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan says, “Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and Yanis and Yambris, the sorcerers who were in Egypt, also did the same with the spells of their divinations.” That’s from the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. Origen, the same church father mentioned before, refers to an apocryphal Greek text called The Book of Jannes and Jambres, and Ethiopic and Greek fragments of this work do exist.  

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93 Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew 27.8

94 See The Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres the Magicians, ed. and trans. with an Introduction and Commentary by Albert Pietersma (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994); for discussion of this and other traditions concerning Jannes and Jambres see Koji Osawa,
The traditions behind this work may have been known in the Essene community at Qumran because they are mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the so-called Damascus Document among the Dead Sea Scrolls we find the following, “Moses and Aaron still continued in their charge . . . even though Belial [that is, Satan] in his cunning had set up Jannes and his brother in opposition to them” (5.17-19). A bewildering variety of contradictory traditions concerning Jannes and Jambres grew up within Judaism. In the traditions that employ the pair’s Hebrew names, which are presumably more primitive, there is no magician’s contest with Moses. Rather, they simply quarrel with Moses and then they accompany Pharaoh's army in pursuit of the Israelites. They then fly about magically at the Red Sea and are finally killed by either God or Moses. By contrast, in the traditions featuring their Greek names, which are re-transcribed into Hebrew, we find that the pair serve at Pharaoh's court, they lose to Moses in a magician's contest, as a result they convert to Judaism, and then they go into the wilderness with the Israelites!  

95 The New Testament scholar Koji Osawa says with regard to these figures,  

They came to be seen as the exemplars of evil persons in Judaism, so that their names came to be used in a variety of scenes without restriction by time or place. That is to say, those who recorded the Judaic traditions included Jannes and Jambres in stories from whatever time to portray someone as an evil person in Judaism by comparing that someone with Jannes and Jambres and thus to emphasize the sinfulness of those who oppose God.  

96 We should therefore be very rash, I think, to assume that in appealing to these well-known figures to illustrate corrupt religion Paul means to assert the historicity of these two literary figures (whatever his personal belief might have been).  

Finally, one last example is that we have Paul's allusion in 1 Corinthians 10:4 to the Rock which accompanied the ancient Israelites through their wilderness wanderings. Paul writes, “All drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” Commentators commonly see here a reference to a Jewish legend based upon Numbers 21:16-18 concerning a miraculous well which was shaped like a rock which continually accompanied Israel and supplied her with fresh water in the desert. This legend, which then flourished in later rabbinic Judaism, is documented as early as the treatise in the first century called Biblical Antiquities by pseudo-Philo. Biblical Antiquities state,  

96 Ibid., pp. 72-73.
But as for his own people, he led them forth into the wilderness: forty years did he rain bread from heaven for them, and he brought them quails from the sea, and a well of water following them brought he forth for them. . . . the water of Mara was made sweet and followed them in the desert forty years (10.7; 11.15).

So the tradition in some form doubtless goes back to the pre-Christian era, and Paul picks up this extra-canonical tradition in order to identify the Rock as Christ, who sustained Israel throughout its sojourn in the wilderness.

On the basis of these examples, I think we can see how naive it is to argue that just because some New Testament author refers to a literary figure, whether found in the Old Testament or outside of it, that therefore that figure is asserted to be a historical person, much less really is a historical person. We need to pay close attention to the context in order to determine whether the New Testament author not merely believes in the historicity of the person referred to but is asserting his historicity, rather than just using the figure illustratively. Again, the use of a figure illustratively does not imply that the figure is unhistorical; it just short-circuits overly easy proofs of historicity.

START DISCUSSION

**Student:** Would you say then that it would be wise in cases of the mention of Enoch in Jude and Jannes and Jambres to remain, for lack of a better word, agnostic about those details in trying to just decide whether they're just illustrative or historical, in the absence of other data. I think this would be more difficult with Adam in the Adam passages, but with these smaller mentions specifically.

**Dr. Craig:** I would say that you need to be agnostic about it simply from looking at it in Jude. But when you consider the source of Jude's quotation (namely, *1 Enoch*), the idea that that is an authentic historical utterance of the Enoch before the Flood that somehow got handed down and preserved is preposterous. So, on that basis, I would say not just agnosticism but we should say that this is not a reference to the historical person.

**Student:** What I also meant is considering the source as well, but if we understand the Bible to be divinely inspired then perhaps – perhaps – just that one detail hints at something that was historically true. And even though we can't confirm that per se, those details don't seem to contradict any other details we have about Enoch. The same with the detail about the archangels.

**Dr. Craig:** I don't think the New Testament author would cite something that would be in contradiction to the Old Testament. But just as I can cite fiction or other sorts of stories to illustrate a point, I think the New Testament authors, under divine inspiration, can do the same thing. They can cite these illustrations from Jewish folklore and myth without thereby committing themselves to the historicity of these things.
END DISCUSSION

97 ?Total Running Time: 35:14 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)
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.\(^98\)
Lecture 25: Paul’s Use of Adam in 1 Corinthians 15

Today we want to turn to Paul’s use of Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45-46 and then in Romans 5:12-21.

John Collins, the Old Testament scholar, has remarked that while it is not easy to insist that Paul’s argument in the texts that we looked at last week depends upon the assumption of Adam’s historicity for its validity, the case is different when it comes to 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5, not to mention Acts 17:26. In these crucial passages Paul lays out his Adam Christology. We will not try, in our brief time, to unpack all of the theological riches in these passages, but we will restrict our attention to their implications for the issue of the historical Adam.

In dealing with Paul’s two passages about Adam in 1 Corinthians 15 the question we face is whether his use of Adam is a merely literary figure – whether that suffices to capture Paul’s meaning with respect to Adam. Let’s review what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45-49. Paul writes,

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. . . . Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

In verses 45-46, Paul’s expression “Thus it is written” followed by his paraphrase of Genesis 2:7 directs our attention immediately to the Genesis narrative of Adam’s creation. There is little in the ensuing paragraph that takes us beyond the literary character in Genesis 2. There Adam is said to be the first man, physical (or, as it is sometimes translated, “natural” – the word in the Greek is psychikos which means “natural” or “physical”), from the earth, and to be made of dust. All of that is true of the figure that we meet in the Genesis account. He was, according to the story, the first human being that God had made, formed by God out of the dust of the earth, and therefore having a natural (psychikos) body. In saying that we all bear the image of the one made of dust, Paul may not be saying more than that we are all like the man described in the story. Each of us has a natural body (sōma psychikon – sōma is the Greek

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word for “body” and psychikon is the adjective describing that body – a natural body), made of dust, and therefore mortal.

There may, however, be a hint of the historical Adam in Paul’s expression “it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual.” Paul might mean simply that in the story the natural or physical body is created first. But it is not the case that in the story after the physical “then the spiritual” is created. True, God breathes into the earthly man the divine breath (though the word pneuma or “spirit” is not mentioned) so that the man becomes a living being; but that still belongs to the natural realm (psychikon) not to the spiritual realm. We have to wait until Christ’s resurrection for the spiritual to appear. So Paul might be attributing a genuine chronological or historical priority of Adam to Christ, in which case we have moved outside of the story to postulate a historical Adam.

Ultimately, whether Paul is using Adam more than just illustratively in 1 Corinthians 15:45-46 is apt to depend upon what he meant by his earlier statement in verses 21-22, “As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” An illustrative reference to the literary Adam would suffice, I think, for Paul’s statement “As by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead,” for the antecedent of that sentence (“As by a man came death”) does not clearly move outside of the Genesis narrative, even though the consequent of that sentence (“so by a man has come the resurrection of the dead”) is external to the narrative. Paul’s statement “in Adam all die” may look like a truth asserted external to the narrative because it is not part of the literary Adam of Genesis that all die in Adam. But it is important to note that while Romans 5 contrasts the spiritual death and condemnation in Adam versus justification and righteousness in Christ, here in 1 Corinthians 15 the contrast is not forensic (or judicial), rather it is physical: in Adam all persons die physically but in Christ we shall someday be made alive and enjoy resurrection life. Notice that the concern here in 1 Corinthians 15, in contrast with Romans 5, is with physical immortality, not with righteousness and salvation. The contrast is between Adam’s mortality and the immortality that we will have in Christ through his physical resurrection from the dead.

In contrast to Romans 5, Paul’s employment of the Adam/Christ typology in 1 Corinthians 15 is thus focused on physical death and resurrection. Although we might think that physical death is the result of Adam’s sin, notice that Paul does not affirm this. Gordon Fee, who is a prominent evangelical commentator on 1 Corinthians, has commented as follows on 1 Corinthians 15:45,

The first Adam, who became a living psychē [being] was thereby given a psychikos [natural] body at creation, a body subject to decay and death. . . . The last Adam, on the other hand, whose ‘spiritual (glorified) body’ was given at his
resurrection, . . . is himself the source of the pneumatikos [spiritual] life as well as the pneumatikos [spiritual] body.\(^{100}\)

On this view Adam was created with a mortal natural body. Think about it. If Adam and Eve had been naturally immortal, then why have a Tree of Life in the Garden at all? It would serve no physical purpose in paradise if they were naturally immortal. Notice that the Tree of Life serves to rejuvenate its eater physically, not spiritually, hence the concern about fallen man’s eating from the Tree and living forever. Notice that God’s concern was not that Adam and Eve would eat from the Tree of Life and be spiritually regenerated or born anew, but rather in their condition of alienation and condemnation from God they would be physically rejuvenated and immortal. So why have a Tree of Life in the Garden at all if they were naturally immortal? Moreover, think about this, Jesus Christ, though sinless, also had a body which was psychikos (natural) and therefore mortal so that he could die. It is only with his resurrection that his sōma psychikon (his natural body) was transformed into a sōma pneumatikon (a spiritual body). That happens at the resurrection. It cannot therefore be said that physical death is solely a consequence of personal sin, or Christ would not be able to die. The only sense in which physical death might be seen as a consequence of sin is, I think, indirect: it is a consequence of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden, cutting them off from any hope of immortality, symbolized by the Tree of Life.

So Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 associates human mortality with the creation of Adam, not with his Fall. Adam is created with a sōma psychikon; he does not get one by sinning. Paul implies that physical mortality is the natural human condition. In saying that in Adam all die, Paul may be saying that it is in virtue of sharing a common human nature with Adam that we share in his natural mortality. Perhaps Paul draws that inference based upon the literary Adam, but it may just go beyond the boundaries of the literary Adam to touch the historical Adam.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* The assumption that Adam is created mortal – I disagree with that because the Tree of Life is in Proverbs described as Wisdom. And the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil actually changed the conscience of man from in agreement with God into an agreement with the tempter. So when our conscience is sealed there’s no way that we will go about living God’s design and his ways. In that, when our conscience is sealed, all decisions are reversed from obeying God to rebelling against God. So it is that decision that they ate of this Tree, changed human conscience which brought mortality.

Dr. Craig: OK, now wait. That's the inference that I'm questioning. Everything you said so far I think is a perfect description of spiritual death – that that is brought about through the Fall resulting in human alienation from God and condemnation. But neither in Genesis 3 nor especially in 1 Corinthians 15 is our having a mortal, natural body associated with Adam sinning. Rather, Paul says very explicitly that the first man Adam became a living being, and that is the image then that we bear as human beings like Adam.

Student: There is a direct association between spiritual and physical in my concept.

Dr. Craig: Now, wait. But the question is: is your concept correct? Is it biblical?

Student: It's developed by God through all this Bible study. OK, so I won't claim it’s correct, but listen to my justification.

Dr. Craig: Yes, I want to hear it.

Student: Everything in the Bible talks about spiritual truth which has a physical manifestation. Everything. All spiritual truth has physical manifestation. That is why when our spirit died, our physical body has no chance of living on.

Dr. Craig: We are spiritually dead apart from Christ, but yet physically very well. Right?

Student: Eternal life is promised for the spiritual being. Right? When we become born again as a spiritual person because Christ is a life-giving spirit. And then we receive that life from Christ and we become a born-again spiritual being which is reconciled to the triune God. So there is that physical ramification of this truth that is the eternal life.

Dr. Craig: What you've just been describing sounds to me like spiritual renovation and renewal. But what we're talking about here is having a sōma pneumatikon as opposed to a sōma psychikon (having a spiritual or supernatural body compared to a natural body). When does that take place? It doesn't take place when you're born again or saved. It takes place at the resurrection. When Christ returns then you will be transformed and you will receive your spiritual body. So the question is: when did you get this sōma psychikon or how did Adam get a sōma psychikon? Was he born with it, or did he get it as a result of the Fall?

Student: When our spiritual alignment agrees with Christ, the exchanged life takes place where he died for our sin, we live for his righteousness. That reality has a physical ramification of eternal life. That's right. And that's a physical ramification.

Dr. Craig: Well, in the sense that it will lead to our resurrection some day from the dead, which is still future. That's something we await for and hope for. Yes, there will be a physical manifestation.
Student: Just like Christ, the Sheol cannot hold his body because he's totally righteous. I mean that he cannot remain dead. He actually physically died, but he cannot remain dead. He has resurrected. So will we. We will physically die but we will not remain dead because of our spiritual alignment with the Christ, and that gives us that physical reality.

Dr. Craig: I don't think we're disagreeing at all about that. As I said, my focus here is not on the part of the contrast between Christ and Adam where we look at what we will have in Christ and what we will become in Christ. I'm interested in the part of the sentence where he says, “as in Adam all die.” What does that mean? Does that mean that when Adam fell his body lost its natural immortality and became mortal, and somehow that's been passed down to us? Or is it the case that Adam was created mortal, but given the Tree of Life as an opportunity for renewal and rejuvenation but lost it when he fell and was expelled from the Garden?

Student: I believe Adam was created to choose between the Tree of Life or the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil – one directed to immortality and the other directed to mortality. And they chose or been tempted into taking the mortality, but I don't believe they were created without immortality.

Dr. Craig: You think they were created immortal.

Student: Yes. If they choose the Wisdom route, they would have the Spirit of God and then they will continue that life with God’s design and purpose. That's how I believe.

Dr. Craig: All right.

Student: You know when Moses talks about nephesh and ruach, how does this tie into that context with Paul’s understanding of the natural and the physical?

Dr. Craig: OK, he’s using a couple of Hebrew terms here – nephesh and ruach – which can be translated as “soul” and “spirit” though they have a very wide range of meanings. In Genesis it doesn't say, interestingly enough, that . . . what it says is, as I recall, that God breathed into him the breath of life and that Adam became a living being (nephesh hayah – a living being). And that's the same that is true of an animal, for example. An animal is a living being. But the divine ruach (or spirit) is not mentioned in Genesis, nor is pneuma mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15. So the idea there is simply that God animates this physical body that he has formed from the dust, and Adam becomes alive. Paul associates that act in 1 Corinthians 15 with Adam’s having this natural body. You see the word psyche here in the word “natural.” Psychikon comes from psyche which is the word for “soul.” It is similar to nephesh in Hebrew, but psyche is “soul.” So literally a “soulish body” – that is to say, a body that is animated by the human soul and therefore alive. 

Student: This poses an interesting question because a lot of times doctrinally we are predisposed to think of physical death as a result of the eating of the fruit.
Dr. Craig: You are right. And this has been a reversal of thinking, frankly, on my own part as a result of this study. I used to think that the sōma psychikon was the result of sin, and I'm amazed I could have missed what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 where he says so plainly that God created the first man Adam and he became a living being – psyche – and that's the sōma psychikon. So I've had to change my own thinking on this. Go ahead.

Student: It's certainly something to think about because I'm in the same boat here. But also, in support of it, they didn't die right away. If they ate the fruit and that was going to be spiritual death as well as physical death at the same time, then certainly Eve would have died first, or you would think.

Dr. Craig: This is a very point that John Collins, whom I quoted earlier, makes. He says the threat in Genesis 2:7 – “in the day you eat of it you will surely die” – must be referring to spiritual death (not physical death) because when they ate of it they didn't drop over dead physically. But they were alienated from God in the way that someone earlier so eloquently described. So I think you're right. I think that the threat of death and then what actually happens to them when they sin supports this view, as well as the fact that having a Tree of Life in the Garden for sinless people would be utterly pointless if they already had natural immortality. So I think you're making a good point which other Old Testament scholars have made.

Student: You just said something that's very related to my question. The whole thing about the Tree of Life. What you're saying sounds reasonable that, OK, then why would you need the Tree of Life if he was immortal and was that to keep him alive? But Revelation 2:7 where it says in eternity in paradise there will be a Tree of Life. So what is the purpose of that one when we have immortal bodies then, if that is any evidence? Revelation 2:7 – he is talking to the church in Ephesus. After the message he says, “He who has an ear, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” That’s talking about eternity, is it not? And we have an immortal body. So why . . . if that's evidence that it's mortal then that would kind of blow that theory.

Dr. Craig: Well, it cannot be for the purpose of bestowing immortality upon otherwise mortal, corruptible bodies because in the resurrection state . . . I mean Paul couldn't be more clear. We will have immortal, honorable, glorious, supernatural bodies which will be incapable of corruption and mortality. Nothing could be clearer from 1 Corinthians 15 than that. Therefore as Christ is raised from the dead never to die again, you're not going to need a Tree of Life in the eschaton to keep you alive otherwise you're going to corrupt and die. That's out of the question. So at best this would serve some sort of symbolic value. It can't be bestowing immortality upon corruptible bodies.
Student: I agree with you, but because of that I can't agree with the other theory that the Tree of Life in the Garden has any bearing on proving that the bodies were mortal and needed it to live. Because it's there in eternity and it's not needed.

Dr. Craig: What I'm thinking of here is why God expels them from the Garden. Why does he kick them out of the Garden? He says, Lest they eat the Tree of Life and live forever. So he seems to think there that if they go and eat this they'll rejuvenate physically and will live forever. But there wouldn't be any point in having that kind of a tree in the Garden if they were sinless. I think it's important, too: don't impose one part of Scripture on another. You can't just sort of take things out of the book of Revelation and use that as an interpretive grid for Genesis or Paul, I think.

Student: It only posed a question because if that is kind of a proof or if that is the reason you were using, I'm thinking it kind of falls apart because it's not always used in that way. I hear what you're saying. There's other things that don't answer the mortality-immortality as far as him keeping them out. That sounds like it was maintaining their life mortally. I just would not use the Tree of Life as the point to prove it. Because to me it kind of falls apart on the other end.

Dr. Craig: OK.

Student: I was thinking along the exact same lines. If the idea is that Adam and Eve would have lived immortally in Eden by continued renewal, continued eating from the Tree of Life to continue forever, having immortality. If that's the case in Genesis, then if you look in Revelation 22 it says that the Tree of Life was on each side of the river bearing twelve kinds of fruit and the leaves were for the healing of the nations. So if that is the case are we then to understand that in heaven we would continually be immortal by virtue of continually eating from the Tree of Life? And then if you skip down to verse 15 of Revelation 22 it says outside are the dogs – the people who are not believers don't have access to the Tree of Life. That would actually infer that they would ultimately die again – annihilationism.

Dr. Craig: I would say again what I said a moment ago. I think it's just illegitimate to take passages written by a different author at a totally different time that are highly symbolic and used those as an interpretive grid for these narratives in Genesis. I think that probably what the author of Revelation is imagining here or portraying heaven as a kind of restoration of an Edenic state. It's like a return to paradise, and so you've got things like the Tree of Life and so forth. But I don't see that as being necessarily literal or in any way non-symbolic, and it shouldn't be a guide to how to understand Genesis and what Paul has to say.

Student: I just had something of a comment, and it kind of goes back to a previous point in the class where you're talking about in the day you shall eat of it you shall surely die.
The day being interpreted there isn't a literal day given that they didn't drop down and die. I was just suggesting maybe this is evidence that the days aren't literal.

Dr. Craig: So what are you saying?

Student: *In the day you shall eat of it you shall surely die* – you pointed out they don't drop dead on that day specifically. That suggests that the day that he's speaking of isn't the literal day.

Dr. Craig: The idea is that if eating from this Tree brings physical death then you would expect that to happen. And it doesn't. Instead there is a kind of spiritual death.

Student: I was just kind of suggesting that this might be like special pleading – to take days literally in a certain part but when you get to this part it’s . . .

Dr. Craig: That gets into the wider debate. In Genesis 2 and 3, in contrast to Genesis 1, it is talking about literal days it seems to me. Right? We're not dealing there with the six days of creation in Genesis 1. We're here in Genesis 2 and 3, and I think that what it's meant to convey is the certainty of their death when they disobey God in this way. But it seems to me naturally to take this as a spiritual death rather than saying that physical death results.

Student: The human saying that really has thrown me a curve all my life is “justice delayed is justice denied.” That's a human concept. That doesn't apply to God. He doesn't necessarily have to do on exactly the same day what he said. As long as he issues the order and that's clear. In the Book of Daniel where Daniel prayed to God to have something removed from him and he didn't get an answer, I believe the Bible says for like twenty days, and he said to the angel when he finally got there, *What took you so long?* And the angel says, *The order was given the day you prayed and God sent me. I was intercepted by the Prince of Persia and I had to go get a higher angel to come help me get through.* And they broke through and came and brought Daniel the answer. I've wrestled with this pretty much all my life. You look at things that are happening and you say, *Why doesn't God do something about this?* You look at the Second World War and the Nazis and their roll across Europe and I can only say that when Nuremberg came along in 1945 and all of those top Nazis ended up facing the court, justice was no longer delayed. And it was swift and they hung big time. I don't know that – and you got into this with the study of Genesis – evening and morning were one day. My concept is, the order may have been given that day and it became as certain as “let there be light” and there was light. When? That's the problem I have with all of this trying to lay human ideas on God and say, *Why aren't you doing something that I understand?* I just sit back and say, *Guess who doesn't understand God?* It's not God. It's me. I have never lived in the spiritual realm. I have only lived in the human realm. I don't know what it's going to be like, but I wrestle with the idea of eternity because I just say how can there be no
beginning and no end? I can't understand that. Everything we deal with has a beginning and it has an end because we're locked in a time frame.

*Dr. Craig:* OK, well, let's not get into issues of time and eternity. Let's deal with this – the Fall and its consequences. My argument here is based primarily upon the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul grounds Adam being a *sōma psychikon* – having a *sōma psychikon* – not in his Fall, but in his creation. Paul says, *This is the way Adam was created.* That's what really leapt out at me in looking at these verses. He doesn't point to the Fall; he points to the creation. Now, in light of that, go back to Genesis and what do you find? You don't find them dying physically, but you do find them dying spiritually. If they were naturally immortal (again, as I say) then the Tree of Life would serve no physical purpose in the Garden. Now, maybe it has some symbolic purpose someone suggested. But it sure doesn't look like that's what it's for. It seems like it's supposed to be a tree that will rejuvenate your youth when you eat its fruit. And that would suggest naturally mortal people who, if they don't sin, will live forever in paradise because they will eat of the Tree. I grant you – you can read it a different way if you want. I think that's perfectly possible. But if your train of thought goes through the steps that I followed, beginning with 1 Corinthians 15 and then going back, it seems to me that this makes the best sense of the biblical data.

*Student:* When you look at Revelation 2, the context is the endurance of the church in Ephesus. So when he tells them to the one who conquers (he's talking about the church enduring) I will grant to eat of the Tree of Life. To me that seems like it's just a metaphorical way of saying that those who conquer will enter into eternal life. I don't think that it is an interpretive stretch to say that that's metaphor because the chapter begins with a metaphor. The chapter says, “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.” So to then go on to describe the endurance of the church of Ephesus and describe the reward as the Tree of Life, to me that just seems to be further metaphor – it is just saying you will enter into eternal life.

*Dr. Craig:* You are making a very good point about Revelation 2:7, because he is talking to people in Ephesus and says if you don’t lose your faith and if you conquer and succeed then you will be able to eat of the Tree of Life, which is probably just a symbol for resurrection life – that you will be raised from the dead and live with Christ in heaven. Then you have the passages later that someone earlier highlighted in 22. The book of Revelation is just full of these sorts of symbols. Once we are raised from the dead and have a resurrection body patterned on Christ, you are not going to need to eat fruit from a tree to keep from dying again. You are going to have a *sōma pneumatikon* that is glorious, immortal, incorruptible, and imperishable.
END DISCUSSION

As I said, I thought this would be thought-provoking. It has caused my own thinking to change on this issue, and I hope that you will consider it as well.

Next time we will turn to Romans 5 and see what Paul has to say about condemnation and death being in Adam.\(^{101}\)
Lecture 26: Paul’s Use of Adam in Romans 5

Last time I argued that in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul may be moving beyond the parameters of the merely literary Adam to touch the historical Adam. He seems to say that in Adam we all die in the sense that we share a common mortal human nature with the man in the story. But insofar as he thinks of that man as chronologically prior to Christ he's placing him within real history. I think that we'll see that implication is confirmed as we turn now to the second crucial New Testament passage on Adam – Romans 5:12-21. Let's read this passage aloud together.

Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned—sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous. Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In this key passage, Paul extends his typology of Christ as the eschatological or endtime Adam from 1 Corinthians 15. Now, our interest in interpreting this theologically rich passage, perversely perhaps, is not in the benefits won for mankind by Jesus Christ through his obedience and death, but rather in what Paul asserts concerning Adam. In the series of contrasts drawn between Adam and Christ, our focus is in each case on the initial clause of the relevant sentence.

There has, of course, been enormous theological controversy about how to understand such expressions as “many died through one man’s trespass” (verse 15), “the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation” (verse 16), “because of one man’s
trespass, death reigned through that one man” (verse 17), “one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men” (verse 18), and “by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (verse 19).

Paul does not explain just how Adam’s sin is transmitted to his progeny. On the one hand Paul may mean that in virtue of Adam’s representative status or our corporate solidarity with Adam or some such notion, Adam’s sin in the Garden is imputed to each of us his progeny. That is to say, we are guilty before God in virtue of Adam’s wrongdoing and so under the condemnation of death. Whether the notion of imputation of sin is palatable to modern sensibilities is irrelevant to the interpretive question concerning this passage.

Now it is evident that if this interpretation of Paul’s teaching is correct, then the historicity of Adam and his fall immediately follow. For the sin of a non-existent person cannot be imputed to me such that I am held objectively guilty before God and liable to damnation. The sin of a purely literary Adam can have no effect on the world outside the fiction. The prominent commentator on the book of Romans, Douglas Moo, has rightly argued as follows:

The effects of Adam’s act in history (universal sinfulness and death) would seem to demand an Adam who sinned in history. I might, for instance, compare or contrast Aslan (from Chronicles of Narnia) with Christ to make a general theological point (as Aslan died for Edmund on the stone table, Christ died for us on the cross), but my listeners would be quite confused if I claimed that the White Witch introduced into our world a condition that Christ has saved us from. And the confusion would be quite natural: I would be positing events in our history caused by, respectively, a fictional character and a real character. Adam, as Paul makes clear, functions on the same historical plane as Moses, the law, and Christ (of whom he is the ‘type’). 102

The imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity requires, then, I think, a historical Adam. If Paul’s doctrine involves such imputation, then it follows that he is teaching the historicity of Adam and his fall into sin.

But is that in fact Paul’s doctrine? Perhaps; but there is plenty of room for doubt that it is. The question is how to relate verse 12cd “as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned” to verse 18a “one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men.” Moo rightly insists that some explanation is needed for why “people so consistently turn from good to evil of all kinds.” 103 Nobody thinks that everybody sins simply by sheer coincidence. Moo says,

103 Ibid., p. 356.
“Paul affirms in this passage that human solidarity in the sin of Adam is the explanation – and whether we explain this solidarity in terms of sinning in and with Adam or because of a corrupt nature inherited from him does not matter at this point.”

I disagree with Moo on this. It seems to me that it is crucial that we understand that the first alternative (the imputation of Adam’s sin to us) in fact does nothing to explain why people consistently turn from good to evil and consistently sin, for imputation is purely a legal or forensic notion which has no effect whatever upon a person’s moral character. Moo himself later explains, “Paul is insisting that people were really ‘made’ sinners through Adam’s act of disobedience just as they are really ‘made righteous’ through Christ’s obedience. But this ‘making righteous’. . . means not to become ‘morally righteous’ people but to become ‘judicially righteous’ – to be judged acquitted, cleared of all charges.” Similarly, he says, “People can be ‘made’ sinners in the sense that God considers them to be such by regarding Adam’s act as, at the same time, their act. . . . It seems fair, then, . . . to speak of imputation here.”

So he says, “We are dealing with a real, though forensic, situation: people actually become sinners in solidarity with Adam–by God’s decision; people actually become ‘righteous’ in solidarity with Christ–again, by God’s decision.” Such forensic (or judicial) transactions cannot explain why people consistently turn from good to evil. Just as the pardon of a condemned criminal does nothing to make him suddenly into a morally virtuous person but simply renders him no longer legally guilty, so also the imputation of legal guilt from Adam to us does not transform the moral character of an otherwise blameless person. So I don’t think that the doctrine of imputation suffices to answer Moo’s question as to why people consistently sin.

START DISCUSSION

Student: The way I understand this is because of Adam’s sin, we are born without a relationship with God – we are born separated. So we have a predisposition to sin. Then when we become a responsible moral agent (when and if) we commit acts of sin and then the sin is imputed to us. When we receive Christ that imputation is removed.

Dr. Craig: I think that the alternative you are expressing is fairly close to the second one that we’ll talk about in a moment. The idea that we have inherited from Adam a corrupted human nature. We’ll look at that in a moment and you can see whether or not that expresses what you are saying. But you are offering a different perspective than imputation. You are not saying that it is in virtue of Adam’s sin being imputed to us

104 Ibid. Since Moo argues against the postulation of a corrupted human nature, I take it that “by this point” he must mean v12, for later in the passage that option will be disfavored.

105 Ibid., p. 372. The proper legal notion here is not acquittal, but rather pardon. God’s guilty verdict is not overturned, as though there had been a miscarriage of justice; rather we are graciously given a divine pardon for our crimes.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.
(including infants) that that is why everybody then consistently sins. You are offering a different suggestion.

END DISCUSSION

Because of this problem, the traditional doctrine of Original Sin postulates minimally a corrupted character inherited from Adam, not just imputed guilt. Now the postulation of a corrupted human nature inherited from Adam would explain why people consistently sin – they have a corrupt and fallen nature that they have inherited from Adam. In such an interpretation of Romans 5 requires a historical Adam just as certainly as does the doctrine of imputation. Because if we have a corrupted human nature inherited from Adam then Adam has had real world effects and therefore cannot be simply a fictional or literary character. So if this interpretation is correct – if this is Paul’s doctrine – then his teaching implies the existence of a historical Adam.

I hope you're grasping the alternatives. The one is that Adam's sin is legally imputed to me so that I am reckoned to be guilty and liable to punishment because of what Adam did. The other alternative says, no, no, it's not necessarily imputation; rather, when Adam sinned he bestowed upon all of his descendants a corrupt nature so that they have a propensity to sin and that explains why sinning is universal throughout the human race. The traditional doctrine of Original Sin weds both of these alternatives together – that there is both the imputation of sin and guilt coupled with the inheritance of a corrupted nature.

START DISCUSSION

Student: One verse comes to mind. I wonder if you would view it as being related. It is Hebrews 7:9 when it’s talking about Abraham tithing to Melchizedek. The writer of Hebrews says, And in a sense Levi himself who receives the tenth has paid a tenth through Abraham for he was still within his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. So it's almost as if the good deed of giving the tithe to Melchizedek was imputed to Levi, Abraham's ancestor, and in a similar way is Adam's sin imputed to us because we are still within our ancestor.

Dr. Craig: You'll remember, I think, Moo said that we can think of this either in terms of Adam's being our representative (he acts on our behalf before God and therefore his acts are our acts) or the alternative was what you just mentioned – a peculiarly Hebrew idea of a kind of corporate solidarity with Adam. As it says there, he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. Is there some kind of corporate solidarity of all Adam’s descendants with Adam himself in virtue of which they can be reckoned to be

\[\text{108 Catholic doctrine affirms both elements; Orthodoxy only the corrupted character.}\]
sinners? That would be two ways of trying to understand how we are in Adam in such a way that his sin could be imputed to us.

**Student:** I know in other scriptural passages there are references to our sin nature. It seems to me that is the very core of our being, not imputed as such but that is our nature – a sinful nature. It seems that would support the second alternative.

**Dr. Craig:** I think that those would be passages that you would use to try to support the second alternative. I would just resist saying things like that it is (I forget how you put it) something like the very core of our being or the core of our nature. Because when we're redeemed in Christ and the sin nature is eliminated it's not as though we are going to cease to be human or cease to exist. Sin is an intruder. It's a perversion and a distortion of our true natures which are reflections of the image of God and therefore good.

**Student:** But that would be our fallen nature.

**Dr. Craig:** Yes. That is this alternative – that there is a kind of fallenness in our nature inherited from Adam. Yes.

**Student:** It seems like, from what you just said, that it fits real well with this verse 1 Corinthians 15:49 where it says, *And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.* It seems like that would be more like the second alternative – that this isn't our true selves but we've had this image of sin that we are born with from Adam but we're going to have the image of sinlessness with Jesus.

**Dr. Craig:** You weren't here last week, were you?

**Student:** I was not.

**Dr. Craig:** OK. That’s what I thought. That passage we discussed last week. I think that verse, which we discussed, taken out of context or read in light of Romans 5 would bear very much the interpretation you gave it. But what I argued last week is that when you read the passage and the verse in context, what Paul is talking about there is not condemnation versus justification as he is in Romans 5. Rather it's talking about physical mortality versus resurrection life – that we will exchange this corruptible, mortal, dishonorable body for a glorious, immortal, spiritual body. So the contrast in 1 Corinthians 15 is not the same contrast that is laid out in Romans 5 that we're just looking at.

**Student:** So it's really more the body that that's talking about it?

**Dr. Craig:** Yes. Exactly. 1 Corinthians 15 is about your physical body. It's not about your true self or spiritual identity that you have in Romans 5, I think. Look at the transcript from last week and see if you're persuaded or not of this view.
**Student:** I would think the first explanation of imputation of actual sin goes against Jeremiah where they were saying the son’s teeth are on edge because the fathers have eaten sour grapes. God said, *I'll banish this saying from you because everybody bears their own sin* – you don't inherit this from . . .

**Dr. Craig:** Yes, there are similar verses in Ezekiel isn't there? The soul that sins shall die, and don't utter this proverb anymore. As I say, these passages have been enormously controversial theologically pitting, for example, Reformed and Catholic theologians who believe in imputation of sin and our being held guilty for Adam’s sin, versus, say, Methodist or Wesleyan or other Armenian theologians who would tend to interpret it more in line with the corrupted nature rather than with the imputation of sin. They've often appealed to the sort of verses you just mentioned. I'm not going to try to settle that controversy now. When we get to the doctrine of sin we can talk about that more. What I simply want to do is to show that, whether you adopt the view of the imputation of sin or you adopt the view of corrupted nature, both of them imply that Paul taught the historicity of Adam. He was teaching that there was an actual historical individual.

**END DISCUSSION**

The question is: does Paul, though, teach that we have inherited a corrupted human nature from Adam? As Professor Moo observes, the doctrine is, perhaps surprisingly, nowhere to be found in Romans 5:12-21. We tend to read it there, but in fact when you look at the passage it is nowhere to be found in that passage. That occasions the question: is there no other third alternative to imputation or corrupted nature for explaining why sin is so universal among humanity?

Of course there is another alternative! Our inherent self-seeking animal nature in combination with the web of corruption in which we are born and raised suffices to explain why sin is universal among humanity. That explains why all have sinned. It is worth noting in passing that when in Romans 1-3 Paul develops his doctrine of the universality of sin and condemnation of all men before God, he makes no appeal at all to the doctrine of Original Sin in any form. In Romans 5:12-21, then, Paul is, on this view, describing how the sin of Adam unleashes the power that results in all persons’ sinning, with the result that they are condemned to a spiritual death.

A moment’s reflection reveals that this interpretation of Paul’s Adam Christology also requires that Adam be a historical person. For sin and spiritual death are said to enter the world through him and to affect in turn all his descendants, including us. Paul’s expressions “before the law was given” and “from Adam to Moses” show that he is denaturing real epochs of human history as affected by Adam’s act. An action that is wholly internal to a fiction cannot have effects outside the fiction; only an action that is external to the fiction can have real world effects. It follows that Adam and his sin are,
not just believed by Paul to be historical, but are actually asserted by Paul to be historical. He is saying that Adam opened the floodgate through which sin came into the world and then spread to all men.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Do we have any sense of what the original hearers, or maybe the audience, would have . . . did they wrestle with these kinds of questions?

Dr. Craig: Surely they must have! I mean, the book of Romans is so rich. Surely as Paul's Roman readers (who included both Gentiles and Jews) heard this letter read aloud to them in their worship gathering, they must have scratched their heads and said, *What does he mean?*

Student: In contemporary Jewish culture, the distinction you made between belief and asserting that it’s a historical act, did a lot of Jewish believers you think (or early Christian believers) not think that that was . . .

Dr. Craig: No, no. On the contrary, when you read the intertestamental Jewish literature between the close of the Old Testament canon and the advent of Jesus, during those centuries there is widespread Jewish literature that's called pseudepigrapha (that is to say, they were written under pseudonyms – things like 4 Ezra and 1 Enoch and Wisdom of Solomon – and then there are apocryphal Jewish books as well (like 1 and 2 Maccabees and things of that sort). When you read this Jewish pseudepigraphal and apocryphal literature, none of those treatments of Adam (and they talk about Adam a lot), none of them denies that he was a historical person. They put him to different theological uses. These intertestamental Jewish books will use the literary Adam as a sort of example or mouthpiece for many different sorts of things, but they all take it for granted that he actually existed and was the original person from whom the human race descended.

Student: So his assertion that it was historical wasn't some big challenge to a competing . . .

Dr. Craig: No, no. Not at all. It would have been right in line with what was thought among Jews at that time.

END DISCUSSION

It should be evident, I think, that my argument for taking Paul to assert that Adam was a real person of history is not defeated by simply distinguishing between the literary Adam of Genesis 2 and 3 and the historical Adam. For the argument is not based on Paul’s contrasting Adam with Christ, a literary figure with a person of history, but rather on the real world causal effects of Adam’s sin. It is impossible, for example, for Hamlet, though an individual in Shakespeare’s play, to have real world effects because Hamlet does not exist in the real world but exists only in the play, that is to say, in the play (unlike, for
example, Macbeth’s vision of a dagger) Hamlet exists. Paul thus teaches that Adam was a real person of history. This view accords with the genealogies that structure the primeval history in the book of Genesis, as we have seen, for the genealogies treat Adam and his descendants as real people. In that case we cannot rule out *a priori* the possibility of Paul’s having some knowledge of the Adam of history on the basis of his knowledge of Genesis.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* Just to clarify on that particular view – then are we saying that children are born basically blameless until they, being exposed to rampant sin, respond to it by sinning? Am I correct in that?

*Dr. Craig:* That would be true both on the corrupted nature interpretation and on the view that there is no corrupted nature but that we are born into a corrupted world so that as we grow older sinning comes very naturally. So either of those alternatives would see infants as guiltless or blameless.

*Student:* But as they age, let's say they become selfish or those kinds of things, then we're saying that's not coming so much from within as it is from observing and sensing how the world is.

*Dr. Craig:* I haven't endorsed any one of these three views. I just laid them out and said that each one of them implies the historical Adam. Now, on that third view, what you would say, I think, is that we have in virtue of having animal bodies (we have bodies that are very similar to the primates; indeed, that's a way biologists would class us) that we have within us the same innate propensity for selfish behavior because it's conducive to survival. You need to look out for your own self-interests if you're not going to be run over and destroyed. So little children will have inherently this kind of predisposition to selfishness because it's conducive to survival in the struggle to survive. When they become of age where they become morally accountable then they become morally responsible for these desires and behavior. I'm not suggesting they're determined to do evil. These propensities can be resisted. We have free will. But when you reach a certain age of accountability then these actions would become sin.

*Student:* The first thing that came to mind when you were explaining that was psychological egoism – the idea that any action that you perform is somehow done out of ego and out of self-interest. How do you think your view would accord with that? Because I know people, for example, that think even breathing is somehow... . . .

*Dr. Craig:* I wouldn't buy that. What he is talking about is a sweeping generalization that there is no truly altruistic behavior that's just done out of the goodness of your heart. It's all self-seeking and self-interest. So even if you give your life for somebody else,
somehow this gives you a feeling of feeling good about yourself, and so you're really acting in self-interest. I don't see any reason to think that something like that is true. I think that especially for someone who is a Christian filled with the Spirit of God, he's not imprisoned by those sorts of selfish desires. But God can help him to act in truly generous and loving ways that are not merely self-seeking. That's not to say, of course, that our motives are often mixed and tainted. I think probably we've all felt that, where we give to some cause and, gee, we feel good about that! *I'm so generous.* So, certainly, as fallen people our motives are often mixed, but to say they're entirely selfish I think would be far too sweeping a generalization.

**END DISCUSSION**

Well, let's wrap up now.

The several references by New Testament authors to mythological or pseudepigraphal figures caution us to avoid overly easy proofs of Old Testament historicity on the basis of New Testament authority. Such figures can be merely literary and illustratively employed. Similarly, some New Testament references to Adam and other figures and events of the primeval history may describe merely the story world of Genesis, requiring at most truth-in-the-story. But in 1 Corinthians 15 and especially I think in Romans 5 we do have clear assertions of the historicity of Adam. What is asserted of the historical Adam in these key passages does not, however, really go beyond what we have already affirmed on the basis of our genre analysis of the primeval history in Genesis 1-11, namely, that there was a progenitor of the entire human race at some time in the past through whose disobedience moral evil entered the world. I think the New Testament simply underlines or ratifies what we already leaned from our study of Genesis.

Whether we understand Paul to teach that Adam’s sin was imputed to every one of his descendants or that Adam’s sin corrupted human nature and thus affected all of his progeny or that Adam’s sin opened the floodgates to sin which then infected all who came after him, Adam is regarded by Paul as a historical person whose actions affect the course of history. We might prefer not to settle the question of just how Adam’s sin affects all mankind. Since Paul did not himself seek to explain this relationship, maybe we should just refrain as well. Still, it remains the case that Adam’s sin is, in Paul’s thinking, in some sense the fount of the sin and spiritual death that beset our world, and that suffices for the affirmation of a historical Adam.¹⁰⁹
Lecture 27: Scientific Evidence Pertinent to the Origin and Evolution of Biological Complexity

Today we come to our summary and conclusion of our hermeneutical section on the exploration of creation and evolutionary theory. I think you can see from the various biblical interpretations of Genesis 1 that we've surveyed that there's quite a range of alternatives available to Bible-believing Christians which have been advanced by evangelical scholars. It's not the case that we are forced or boxed into just one interpretation that is valid and binding for anyone who is a Bible-believing Christian. There's quite a number of possible interpretations of Genesis.

Now, you might say to me, then which of these interpretations is the best, if any of them? Well, it seems to me that the two most plausible interpretive options are the literal Young Earth Creationist interpretation and the mytho-historical interpretation. Of these two, I find the mytho-historical interpretation to provide a better genre analysis of Genesis 1-11 for the reasons that I've shared and therefore to be the better of the two options. But I want to emphasize that I present this view merely as a plausible alternative for your consideration. We can, and we should be, open to various options.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Do you have any comment about C. S. Lewis's view of myth? He talked about that in several of his writings. As I understand it, he said that when he was an atheist (in the atheist phase of his life), he regarded all religions as myth. And then later came to see Christianity as a true myth. He, I think, described the resurrection where a god dies to redeem people as having features of a myth, but true for him (not just myth). I wondered if you drew any parallels between his views and your views.

Dr. Craig: Just recently a friend (who is something of a Lewis aficionado) sent me a fairly long paper he had written precisely on Lewis's attitude toward myth and the Bible. I was surprised to discover that Lewis adopts very much the sort of view that I've argued for under the mytho-historical interpretation. He thinks that these events happened (that they were real people) but he thinks that they have been portrayed in the language of myth and symbol. Lewis, I think, has helped to soften the evangelical community to this point of view. He did not take the narratives of Genesis 1-11 in a literalistic fashion but regarded them as divinely inspired myths. What I would want to add is that it's not just myth; it's mytho-history. There is an interest in history here, and so they cannot be equated simply with myth. If you're interested in pursuing that, look at Lewis' Reflections on the Psalms. A lot of the quotations that my friend shared with me were from his Reflections on the Psalms.
END DISCUSSION

Now we want to turn to a consideration of the scientific evidence pertinent to the origin and evolution of biological complexity. As we do so, it's important to remember that our concern here is not – is not! – to present some sort of design argument for the existence of God or indeed any kind of intelligent designer. We're not doing natural theology. Here we are doing systematic theology; that is to say, we're asking: Given the truth of the divine revelation in the Bible, how is the scientific evidence concerning the origin and evolution of biological complexity to be integrated with our theology? So ours is an integrative project beginning with the truths of theology and then asking how the data of modern science can best be integrated with it.

From what I've already said, I think it's evident that unless one adopts the literal Young Earth Creationist interpretation, Genesis 1 doesn't really say anything about how God created life on Earth. The Genesis account doesn't really explain anything about the mechanisms by which God created. In fact, in two places, as we've seen, the account says that God declared let the Earth bring forth (in one case vegetation and in the other case terrestrial animals) suggesting that there may indeed be natural causes in bringing these things forth. So it seems to me that unless we adopt the Young Earth Creationist’s literal interpretation, there is no incompatibility between Genesis 1 and scientific theories about the origin and evolution of life.

If we do adopt the Young Earth Creationist interpretation then it seems we have no choice but to radically revise the doctrine of inspiration so that the text either (1) is consistent with teaching error – that though inspired, the Scriptures teach error, or (2) we could say that the antiquated science and history in Scripture is not part of the teachings of Scripture so that Scripture is not in error in what it teaches but it doesn't teach the antiquated science and history that is found in Genesis 1-11. For Young Earth Creationism is not merely incompatible with evolutionary biology; rather, as creation scientists themselves recognize, Young Earth Creationism is in massive conflict with modern science, history, and linguistics. They therefore have to propose an utterly different alternative science and history that is frequently bizarre. I don't want to dwell on the negatives in this class but those of you who are tempted by creation science should understand just how wild it is. You need to look at it with open eyes. The idea that the universe is only six to ten thousand years old would not only force us to abandon modern geology, paleontology, archaeology, and dating techniques, but it would make it impossible for us even to see the stars at night since light has not had sufficient time to travel from the stars to Earth. In order to explain a fact so simple as that we can see the stars at night Young Earth Creationists have had to propose implausible alternative cosmologies. For example, some have said that the universe is an expanding rotating ball of matter in empty space with our solar system located at its center. Now, never mind that
such a model fails to deliver on its promises of how we can see starlight coming from galaxies that are billions of light years away, the more fundamental point that I'm making is that Young Earth Creationists, in order to explain a phenomenon so simple as that you can see the stars at night, are forced to revamp the entire universe. It doesn't just stop there. Take for example the attempt to explain away the Earth's sedimentation on the basis of so-called flood geology – Noah's Flood. The idea that there was ever a worldwide flood that destroyed all terrestrial life on Earth and laid down the Earth’s sediments is a fantasy. For a devastating critique of flood geology I would just commend to you Hugh Ross’ *Navigating Genesis* in which he has one chapter devoted to a scientific critique of flood geology.

Just how bizarre Young Earth Creationism is becomes evident from reading Jonathan Sarfati’s Young Earth Creationist commentary on Genesis 1-11. In order to explain flood geology Sarfati supposes that after the flood the animals that Noah had taken on board disembark and then filled the entire world. Now, how do you suppose that the hippopotami on board made it from the mountains of Turkey where the ark landed to the rivers of Central Africa or how the little koala bears and platypuses crawled all the way from Turkey to Australia or the sloths to South America. Well, Sarfati’s answer is that plate tectonics had not yet separated the supercontinent into the world's separate continents thus enabling the animals to migrate to their various habitats. But they had to do it in a hurry. All the continental drift and mountain building such as the raising of Mount Everest all took place rapidly since the flood just a few thousand years ago. What about the dinosaurs, you might ask? Well, since they were contemporaneous with Noah he must have taken them on board the ark, too. Sarfati solves the problem of room on board by suggesting that Noah took juvenile specimens – two of every genus. Not two of every species; two of every genus. Now, since there were at least 500 dinosaur genera, Noah must have had at least a thousand dinosaurs on board the ark which he then released into the world upon disembarkation. Just think about that for a minute. Only three hundred and sixty seven years separate the Flood from the call of Abraham – three hundred sixty seven years. That means that the whole history of dinosaur evolution and speciation plus extinction took place in less than four hundred years unless we are to think that there were still dinosaurs roaming the Earth at the time of Abraham. Truly Young Earth Creationists live in a different universe than most of us do. This is crank science and Christians should not be attracted to it.

Leaving aside Young Earth Creationism, there is on other interpretations no incompatibility between Genesis 1 and scientific theories about the origin and evolution of life.

**START DISCUSSION**
Student: I was reminded that in Genesis 7 it says and then restates multiple times: and all flesh died that moved upon the Earth. All in whose nostrils was the breath of life and those on the dry land died and every living substance was destroyed which was on the face of the ground. Both man and cattle and the creeping things and the fowl of heaven and they were destroyed from the Earth and Noah only remained alive and they that were with him in the ark. So talking about compatibility – how would you describe the compatibility of those very clear verses that reference the whole Earth directly with the idea that there wasn’t a flood where everything died.

Dr. Craig: The verses you cite illustrate the very point I'm making. If we adopt a literal interpretation of the Flood story then this is in massive, massive conflict with modern science – with geology, paleontology, the distribution of animals around the world, dinosaur evolution and extinction, all the things that I've just mentioned. As I say, given that massive conflict, it seems to me that the person who adopts a Young Earth Creationist interpretation of these passages has little choice but to either revise the doctrine of inspiration so that the inspiration of Scripture is consistent with Scripture's teaching error, or he could say that these scientific and historical facts are not part of the teaching of Scripture but are just the sort of husk in which these deeper scriptural truths are embodied but aren't really part of what Scripture intends to teach and therefore don't represent errors. Either of those alternatives is a huge revision of the doctrine of inspiration which I think we ought to be very reluctant to adopt. That's one reason I favor the mytho-historical interpretation. It will not force those kinds of revisions in the doctrine of inspiration, but it will require you to read the passage in a non-literal way.

Student: I think one of the things that we have to wonder about is our ability to know exactly what the facts are so far back that a model has to be created for it. There was no one there to see it. I mean, the facts are not repeatable facts like we do in science. It's a model that says, oh, well, this is how we believe the world works and this is how evolution works and this is how geology works – it couldn't have happened this way. So you have to start by saying I believe in the science models of climate change – no, I don't – and in all kinds of models because there was no one back there, and to be able to repeat it in the scientific principle of repeatability. I think maybe there might be a better way that says the Bible is my source of truth and I'll take that as the beginning.

Dr. Craig: I think the difficulty with that partly is that, while you're right that for the theories of the early universe such as the ones that I mentioned that attempt to explain how we can see the stars are based on mathematical models, when it comes to this flood geology now you are talking about historical epochs where people were alive. As I said, there's only three hundred sixty-seven years between the Flood and Abraham. So you've got to squeeze in the whole history of dinosaur evolution and extinction into less than four hundred years and that is a historical epic. That's not based on modeling. There were
people around at that time. It seems to me that the prospects for creation science are extremely dim, and that's why I said I think if you're going to go with this interpretation you're going to need to revise your doctrine of inspiration because I think there's little hope for an alternative science.

Student: What you're saying is you assume that the Bible is wrong. Just like when we said the Bible says that they lived to be hundreds of years and we don't have the mechanism for knowing how did that happen and all so it couldn't happen because it doesn't happen today. I say: it says it happened, it happened.

Dr. Craig: I'm not assuming that the Bible is wrong. On the contrary, I said that the two most plausible interpretations of these passages is either the literal Young Earth view or the mytho-historical view. What I would say is that in light of modern science, history, and linguistics, the literalistic interpretation is falsified. So one isn't assuming that it's false. Rather, it's saying that in light of the evidence that we have it has been falsified. There was no worldwide flood a few thousand years ago that destroyed all terrestrial life. And you can't squeeze plate tectonics and mountain building into a few hundred years between the Flood and the call of Abraham. So I just would plead with folks who are attracted by this interpretation to realize what it's going to cost. There's a really high cost attached to this view, I think.

Student: It's been a while since I've done any reading on this but some of these passages about the Flood and so forth I had read a while back that the language that's translated “in the whole Earth” and so forth could have related more to a local flood. It didn't have to be translated in exactly those words. Could this – and I'm not doing a very good job of explaining but – could this have been a more local flood?

Dr. Craig: That is a possibility that has been defended, for example, by Hugh Ross in his *Navigating Genesis*. Ross argues that the flood was intended to be merely a local flood in Mesopotamia. I am like our previous questioner though here who said that the language of Genesis 6-9 just doesn't seem to be consistent with a local flood. It talks about how all life under the heavens was destroyed. The picture there is that the world has returned to the primordial state of Genesis 1:2 where it was covered by this primeval ocean and then, as it were, creation begins anew with Noah and his family afterwards and the animals on board the ark. Much as I would like a local flood interpretation to be true, I just can't convince myself that that is the correct reading of the passage. If you're interested in a discussion of this, take a look at John Walton’s book *The Lost World of the Flood* co-authored with Tremper Longman in which he argues similarly that the local flood interpretation of the narrative is not the most plausible interpretation, but nevertheless he doesn't think that there was a worldwide flood. He thinks that the author is using hyperbole and exaggeration. I agree with Walton that it's not describing a local flood but
a worldwide flood, but I don't think this is best to be explained simply by appeal to hyperbole and exaggeration. Rather, I think that it's to be accounted for by the mytho-historical genre of this literature that doesn't intend or require that it be read in a literal way.

_Student:_ I'm just kind of confused. You talk about a geological flood worldwide but that a local flood also doesn't seem possible. I'm just kind of confused. What other option would it be then?

_Dr. Craig:_ To say that it is not intended to be taken literally.

_Student:_ That's what I'm trying to get at. What exactly would that mean then?

_Dr. Craig:_ It would mean that this is a mytho-historical account of the destruction of the world showing God's displeasure with human sinfulness and his being counted upon to bring judgment upon evil and sin but then also showing the grace of God in preserving this one family so that wherever there is the judgment of God it's always tempered with a measure of grace. I think that's the deeper lesson to be learned from the story.

_Student:_ Another point that you'd have to throw out I think is the science of coming to understand DNA and the transition and the migration of peoples across the world. They can trace using DNA markers – they have a pretty good idea of when people left Africa and went into Asia and Europe and North America and it wasn't 3,000 years ago.

_Dr. Craig:_ Yes. There was a news release just this week that Jan showed me that said scientists have dated remains in Idaho to about 16,500 years ago – that's before the end of the last ice age. These peoples had migrated from Asia apparently down the Pacific coast and then began to settle in the Americas already 16,500 years ago. So you're quite right about the mass migrations of human beings that were taking place even prior to the end of the ice age.

_Student:_ Having read a little bit of people like Michael Licona and all that, this idea that there might be hyperbolic, I would say, descriptions in Scripture of say like the horses in Solomon's stables, things like that where you would just say, yes, there was a ton of this. Or everybody got killed by Samson's ass jawbone. All that stuff. There's things like that . . . would you say that the event itself perhaps may be founded upon in fact but that the description is hyperbolic of the effect that it had?

_Dr. Craig:_ OK, I thank you for that clarification. That would be Walton and Longman's view of the Flood. They would say that this is written in hyperbolic, exaggerated language that they think Ancient Near Eastern peoples would have recognized. The dimensions of the ark, for example, are so huge that the people back then would have recognized no single human being could have built such a thing. And Walton gives some accounts of the Creation Museum – in, is it Kentucky? – that required all this massive
construction equipment and everything to build the replica of the ark. He says the people back then would have known that no human being could have built something this large. So these dimensions weren't taken in a literal way. So that would be their view that it's hyperbole and exaggeration for effect, as it were, of an event that actually took place. I want to clarify as well, I think it's very plausible that there is some kind of local flood that lies at the historical root of the story. It could have been, for example, as some have hypothesized, the flooding of the Black Sea basin. When the waters of the Mediterranean burst through the Straits of Bosphorus and there was a catastrophic flooding of the Black Sea – that could have been remembered. Or the Persian Gulf at the end of the last ice age because so much of the water of the Earth was in the form of glaciers, the sea levels were lower so that the Persian Gulf was a green oasis. The Straits of Hormuz were the coastline at the end of the last ice age. And what happened was as the glaciers melted the sea levels rose and the Persian Gulf was formed. It was inundated. Some have suggested this could be at the root of these flood stories that are common to Mesopotamia and the Hebrew Bible and so forth. So, yeah, I do want to affirm that there could well be historical events at the root of this. But that it was worldwide seems to be ruled out by scientific evidence. Now, I'm not persuaded that Walton and Longman are right in just saying this is mere hyperbole. That seems overly simplistic to me. They might be right with regard to the dimensions of the ark, but for the whole thing I suspect that it's to be explained by the genre of writing that this is, namely it's not simply a straightforward literalistic historical account, but it's a mytho-historical account.

Student: What would you say about things like the Tower of Babel or, for example, Eleazar’s sword being stuck to his hand against the Philistines? I think that’s in 2 Samuel.

Dr. Craig: OK, that’s not in Genesis 1-11. So let's stick with Genesis 1-11 and the Tower of Babel. You’ll remember I said that taken literalistically these stories would be in massive conflict with science, history, and linguistics. That third point was what I was thinking of with regard to the Tower of Babel. The idea that all human languages originated relatively recently through an event at a Babylonian ziggurat is just completely impossible given what modern linguists know about the origin of the various language groups that exist in the world. I would say something very similar there. Again, it's very interesting. What the literalists often do is to try to localize the phenomenon in order to save it. They save it by localizing it. Well, there wasn’t a worldwide flood – it was a local flood. It isn’t the origin of all the world’s languages – it’s just that the people at that Babylonian ziggurat had their languages confused. But, again, when you read it in the context of Genesis 10 it seems to be teaching that the peoples of the world – that's where the different languages originated, in the confusion of tongues at Babel. And prior to that everybody spoke a universal human language. I appreciate the motivation. I feel it myself! I mean, I want to affirm that these stories are true, but I don't think you can save
truth by the device of trying to interpret them as merely local events. As our friend back here said, I don't think the language of the narratives are going to permit that. And they do the same thing with the Garden of Eden. *It's not true that there was no rain on Earth or that there was no vegetation before Adam was created. It's just a local story. There wasn't any rain in the Garden. There wasn't any vegetation there.* Despite the universalizing statements of the narratives. This is a consistent hermeneutical pattern. You try to save literal truth by localizing it, and I'm not persuaded that that's legit. I think it's better to say that what we're dealing with here is with a genre of literature that doesn't need to be pressed for a kind of wooden literalism.

**END DISCUSSION**

Alright. I said that had to be the last sentence, but I'm going to be here next week and we'll continue this discussion. I realize that this material is challenging. It's challenging to me as well, honestly. I've really struggled and wrestled with this, but I'm sharing with you the tentative conclusions which seem most plausible to me.  

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110 Total Running Time: 33:40 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)
Lecture 28: Is Genesis 1 in Conflict With the Theory of Evolution?

Last time I argued that apart from Young Earth Creationism and a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 there's just no incompatibility between Genesis 1 and the modern scientific theory of biological evolution. The Scriptures don't say anything about the mechanisms that God might have used to create life or bring about biological complexity, and so it's hard to see how, apart from the Young Earth interpretation, there could be any incompatibility between what the Bible says and modern evolutionary theory.

Some Christians would disagree with this because according to the standard theory of evolution the mutations which serve to drive the evolutionary process forward are random and therefore cannot be designed or occur for a purpose. But this inference involves a fundamental and very important misunderstanding about what evolutionary biologists mean when they use the word "random." When biologists say that the mutations responsible for evolutionary change occur randomly they do not mean by chance or purposelessly. If they did then evolutionary theory would be enormously presumptuous since science is just not in a position to say with any justification that there is no divinely intended direction or goal of the evolutionary process. How could anyone say on the basis of scientific evidence that the whole scheme was not set up by a provident God to arrive at Homo sapiens on planet Earth? How could a scientist know that God did not supernaturally intervene to cause the crucial mutations that led to important evolutionary transitions, for example the reptile-to-bird transition? Indeed, given divine middle knowledge, not even such supernatural interventions are necessary in order for God to guide the evolutionary process for God could have known that if certain initial conditions were in place then given the laws of nature certain life forms would evolve through random mutation and natural selection, and so he put such initial conditions and laws in place knowing that life would evolve from them.

Obviously, science is in no position whatsoever to say justifiably that the evolutionary process was not under the providential direction of a God endowed with middle knowledge who determined to create biological complexity by means of random mutation and natural selection. So if the evolutionary biologists were using the word "random" to mean "undesigned" or "purposeless" or "unguided" then evolutionary theory would be philosophy not science. But the evolutionary biologist is not using the word "random" in that sense. This fact, which is ignored by both critics of theistic evolution as well as apologists for naturalistic evolution, became very clear to me in the course of my preparation for my debate with the eminent evolutionary biologist Francisco Ayala on the
viability of intelligent design in biology.\(^{111}\) According to Ayala, when evolutionary biologists say that the mutations that lead to evolutionary development are random they do not mean occurring by chance; rather they mean irrespective of their usefulness to the organism. They mean that these mutations occur irrespective of their usefulness to the host organism. This is hugely significant. The scientist is not, despite the impression given by partisans on both sides of the divide, making the presumptuous philosophical claim that biological mutations occur by chance and hence the evolutionary process is undirected or purposeless. Rather, he means that the mutations do not occur for the benefit of the host organism. If we take "random" to mean irrespective of their usefulness to the organism then randomness is not incompatible with direction or purpose. Alvin Plantinga has made this same point in his book *Where the Conflict Really Lies*. According to Plantinga there is not even a superficial conflict between evolutionary biology and theism. Plantinga chastises scientists who have recklessly asserted that according to evolutionary biology the evolutionary process is undirected or purposeless or unguided. Such claims are not, he says, properly part of the biological theory itself; rather, they are what he calls a philosophical add-on, that is to say an extra-scientific assertion. In support of this point, Plantinga quotes the prominent evolutionary biologist Ernst Mayr who says the following, “When it is said that mutation or variation is random, the statement simply means that there is no correlation between the production of new genotypes and the adaptational needs of an organism in a given environment.”\(^{112}\) There isn't any correlation between the mutations and the needs of the host organism to adapt to its environment. That's the same definition as given by Ayala – that they occur irrespective of their benefit to the host organism. Such a definition of "random" is wholly compatible with God's willing or even causing mutations to occur with a certain end in view.

Let me give an example. Suppose that God in his providence causes a mutation to occur in an organism – not for the benefit of that organism but for some other reason – for example, maybe it will produce easy prey for other organisms that God wants to flourish, or maybe because he knows that it will eventually become a fossil that Jones will someday discover which stimulates Jones' interest in paleontology so that he embarks upon the career which God had in mind for him. In such a case the mutation is both purposeful and random.

So unless we adopt a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 (which I've argued is not obligatory for us) there is no conflict between the Bible and standard evolutionary biology. What that means is that the Christian therefore is free to follow the evidence

\(^{111}\) See [https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/debates/is-intelligent-design-viable-craig-ayala-debate](https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/debates/is-intelligent-design-viable-craig-ayala-debate) (accessed September 8, 2019).

where it leads. And in this respect the Christian actually enjoys an advantage over the atheist. As Plantinga has put it, for the atheist, evolution is the only game in town. Thus the naturalistic biologist Richard Lewontin has admitted,

> We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated.113

So, as Plantinga says, for the materialist (for the naturalist) evolution is the only game in town, no matter what the evidence, no matter how absurd the results. But the Christian is not so restricted and so he can actually be more open-minded and more objective than the atheist in following the evidence where it leads.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* I understand what you're saying about it's essentially God's hand guiding evolutionary theory. How does that explain the Cambrian explosion which was a whole bunch of new species that occurred once when there was a gap between the previous species and the new species?

*Dr. Craig:* The Cambrian explosion is actually the origin of phyla, which is a higher classificatory order of creatures than species. You've got species and genera and orders and families. Phyla would be the broadest. As our questioner indicates, one of the amazing things about this so-called Cambrian explosion is that there are actually more phyla that existed at that time than exist today. It is not as though additional phyla have evolved; quite the contrary, there's been a winnowing of phyla from the ones that existed in the Cambrian explosion. There are fewer today, not more. So the question is: What is the origin of these phyla in the Cambrian explosion? We don't find the sort of fossilized predecessors for these creatures. What I'm suggesting is that it is fully compatible with the Bible to offer any kind of explanation for that scientifically. If you want to say that this occurred through fantastic mutations that were in pre-Cambrian organisms, that's theologically unobjectionable. It might be scientifically objectionable. We're not

pronouncing on that. But theologically it would be unobjectionable. Or you might say that God and his middle knowledge put the conditions in place with the laws of nature knowing that this is what would happen and therefore it was all superintended and planned by God. Or you could say that God actually intervened at that point, which is, I think, maybe what you might have been hinting at. That this represents a miraculous, supernatural input into the evolutionary process that produced all of these new phyla. That's an option as well. As I say, I think the Christian theologically can be open to all of these. But obviously the naturalist cannot because he has nothing but material causes to work with.

Student: I think I understand what you're saying. I'm not sure I agree that most Darwinists don't mean “random” to mean truly random. I just looked up an article online where an anti-evolutionist Jay Richards, who's written several books, directly responds to Alvin Plantinga’s Where the Conflict Really Lies. In his review he says “for Darwin and most Darwinists, in fact random doesn't just mean uncorrelated to a physical mechanism that works in favor of organisms. Random mutations have some or another cause, to be sure, but the cause, in the Darwinian view, is blind, unguided, and purposeless.”

Dr. Craig: I disagree with Jay on that. I know him. The point that Plantinga is making is whatever careless or reckless statements may be made by evolutionary biologists, they are making extra-scientific assertions that are not properly part of the theory. I think here Ayala and Mayr have been better guides to what is part of the scientific theory. I think that the plausibility of Ayala and Mayr’s claim is underlined by the fact that if these scientists were making these kinds of claims then, as I say, it's just utterly presumptuous. It would be doing metaphysics or philosophy, not doing science. So it seems pretty implausible that Jay Richards is right that this is part of the theory rather than that these are reckless and unjustified statements being made by evolutionary biologists.

Student: You had the point of God produces something like a mutation that might not help the host but helps out others such as becoming more of an easier prey. I thought that'd be an interesting aspect on the philosophical side of the problem of evil and suffering. Now you are having, okay, this is an answer to that. It may make them more of a prey but now it ends up benefiting the larger community.

Dr. Craig: This question of God's involvement in the evolutionary process is an enormous question in theodicy, or the problem of evil and suffering, because you have these millions and millions of years of nature red in tooth and claw (as the saying goes) where evolutionary development presupposes this kind of survival of the fittest and competition for survival that is ruthless and merciless in the natural realm. That's a question I'm not addressing at this point. We've talked about the problem of evil.

https://evolutionnews.org/2012/04/whats_in_a_word_1/
elsewhere. But you're right that this is where that would connect. It would suggest that God might produce easy prey for organisms that he wants to flourish, and that's just fine. There's nothing morally evil about that. Certainly it would involve suffering, but you can't just equate suffering with moral evil. There's nothing evil about God's doing such a thing.

*Student:* I have a couple of issues here. One with randomness period. Because changes in biological systems are non-random. We call on different existent genetic packages to produce different effects depending on the circumstances. So I have a problem with randomness. And in support of that, the second point would be cost to substitution. J. B. S. Haldane’s idea that any change in an organism – suggested change – would produce a disadvantage until that change was effected. It would be at a disadvantage. He said you have to consider cost of substitution for any change. I think this is a problem for randomness period.

*Dr. Craig:* Let's speak to the second point first. Although these mutations in general will tend to be deleterious, there can be cases where there's a change of the environment in which what would have been a deleterious mutation suddenly can become beneficial, and so it can get spread throughout an isolated population more quickly. So although there would be quite rightly a cost to be considered to any mutation, it's not the case that they would all be deleterious. There could be cases in which the mutation might be beneficial. As to your first point, I think you are quite right to say that apart from quantum theory we're not talking about real randomness here because they're obviously causal factors that contribute to mutations. So what people mean when they say by something being by chance they mean that it's the result of two independent causal chains that happen to meet at a certain juncture to produce an effect. The causal chains leading up to this effect are independent of each other and therefore in that sense the event is said to occur by chance; namely it occurs as a result of two independent or more causal chains. But obviously there are causes leading to that event. So I think you're quite right that even among evolutionary biologists who make these statements that this is occurring randomly they don't mean random in the sense that sometimes people say quantum events are random or indeterminate. They would mean it's occurring by chance in that sense. But where they would, I think, step over the line is when they begin to assert that therefore the evolutionary process is unguided or purposeless or undirected or that these mutations do not occur for a reason. That's where they go beyond the limits of science and begin to make philosophical assertions.

*Student:* It seems we're accepting evolution as fact, and that may be the path that we're looking at right now. But what makes us think that evolution – small-e is very apparent around us. But large-E we never have seen. I say that I've never seen the large-E evolution – something turning from a mole into a bat. But we see adaptation an awful lot.
I believe that evolution was designed to explain life around us without God. We saw all of these fossils and we can't trace fossil evolution anywhere. It always breaks up. So why are we accepting evolution as fact?

*Dr. Craig:* I don't think we are accepting evolution as fact at this point. What I've been arguing for is the compatibility of Genesis 1 with evolutionary biology. What I've said is, as I said in response to this question, the Christian is free to follow the evidence where it leads, and if it leads to the need for miraculous interventions and supernatural input then he can. He's open to that. He can conclude that. But I'm merely arguing here for compatibility, not for or assuming the truth of evolutionary biology.

*Student:* Could what we have been discussing come under the umbrella of theistic evolution?

*Dr. Craig:* Yes, I think it could. Theistic evolution is often defined in different ways, but certainly one version of it would be that God is responsible for setting up the process of biological evolution which has led to *Homo sapiens* on this planet – that God is ultimately responsible. Now, within that general framework, as I say there are all sorts of different ways you could do that. One might contemplate supernatural interventions along the way – miraculous acts along the way. Or one might think of major miraculous interventions on God’s part. Or one might adopt a middle knowledge perspective where God simply knew what would happen if the initial conditions and the laws of nature were in place so that you don't even need to have miraculous interventions in order for the process to be directed or supervised. If you don't recall middle knowledge, go back to our class lectures on the attributes of God when we talked about divine omniscience. We had several sessions on middle knowledge which is God's knowledge of what would happen indeterminately in any set of circumstances. So, right, what I'm suggesting is that theistic evolution is something that is compatible with the Bible if you're not a Young Earth Creationist.

*Student:* I just wanted to clarify something on the adaptation if it's not beneficial to the organism. You were saying if it's random it could necessarily have a cause – it would be God’s hand within that to cause that adaptation to lead to something further perhaps. If the adaptation is not beneficial, what does evolution say why that adaptation would continue to be within that organism. I always understood it to mean it would have to be beneficial for it to be replicated.

*Dr. Craig:* This is what the point someone else was making. If this mutation or adaptation or change is detrimental to the organism then it will be unlikely to produce more offspring. It's more likely it'll be killed off or will not survive, and that's this whole aphorism of the survival of the fittest. Those organisms which have the greatest ability to reproduce their offspring will be the ones that will spread their genetic material most
widely in a population. So if the mutation or adaptation is deleterious it will tend to be weeded out by natural selection. That was the source of my illustration – maybe God wanted to make easy prey for some predator, and so he causes lame or otherwise deficient three-legged quadrupeds or something like that because he wants the predators to flourish.

Student: Really what we're saying is that in the evolutionist’s mind, random would mean by chance and we're saying as a Christian or theological point of view it could have been divinely led either by middle knowledge and creating an environment where it would tend to happen or God set in place that mutation. It was sort of his providence to do so.

Dr. Craig: I think that what you've characterized as the Christian position is correct. But I want to go back to the first part of your statement. I'm not saying that this is what the evolutionary biologist is saying. This is what the naturalist like Lewontin was saying. It's philosophical naturalism that says that it occurs without purpose, direction, or guidance. But for the scientist who is careful to stay within the strict parameters of science he will not assert that this process is unguided, purposeless, or undirected. He will say merely that the mutations occur irrespective of their benefit to the host organism in which they happen.

Student: I think when people hear evolution in its purest form there's an assumption that he is also making a theological statement that there is no divine involvement. And you're saying that he's really not commenting on that one way or the other; he's just observing scientific evidence.

Dr. Craig: Yes, and that is precisely why I'm leading off with this point in our discussion right at the beginning. This is an absolutely watershed issue; it's pivotal that if the evolutionary biologist speaking qua scientist does not mean that these mutations occur without a view toward guidance or directedness or purpose or something then there's just no conflict here theologically.

Student: I've heard my whole life from Christian sources that Genesis depicts special creative acts by God and that evolution as contemplated by Darwin – Origin of Species 1859 – cannot account for biological complexity. I have never heard of any example since 1859 where macro-evolution has occurred in the sense of a new species has evolved or a new organ has developed like hearing, eyesight, or something like that that previously didn't exist. It seems to me it's a huge concession to those who are critical and reject Christianity to say that Darwinianism, random mutations, and natural selection can produce biological complexity. Richard Dawkins certainly means exactly what you're saying these scientists should not say. Because he says in The Blind Watchmaker, which is his answer to William Paley who said creation is like a complex watch that has to have a designer, he says no it does not. He thinks there is no place for a designer or creator in
the process that produces biological complexity. It just seems to me it's a tremendous concession to say or suggest that random mutations, natural selection can produce the complexity we see around us. It seems inconsistent with Psalm 139 where David says I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. If all God did is sprinkle an occasional unrecognizable beneficial mutation into this process of mostly harmful mutations and somehow those became the basis for new species or new organs it seems to diminish the creative work of God.

Dr. Craig: Let me reiterate what I said earlier. I haven't said anything to suggest that the standard account of the origin of biological complexity, much less of life, is scientifically adequate. I haven't said anything to that effect. What I've just been arguing is that the Christian is free to follow the evidence where it leads because there's no incompatibility between Genesis 1 and God's using the mechanisms of random mutation and natural selection to produce biological complexity on this planet. Now, if you adopt a Young Earth perspective where you interpret Genesis 1 literally as six consecutive 24-hour days in a creation week a few thousand years ago then absolutely you've got a conflict. I agree with that. But my claim is that leaving the literalistic Young Earth view aside and looking at those other interpretations that we've surveyed, they are quite compatible with evolutionary biological theory. As for God's providence, the idea here would be that God is so provident over the world that he can guide the evolutionary process from the first primordial cells right up all the way through to Homo sapiens as the crown of creation. This would exhibit rather than deny God's providence. It would say this is not a blindly unfolding process despite what Richard Dawkins says, but that this is a process supernaturally intended and guided by God. I don't think it's a concession to say that the Bible is compatible with evolutionary theory. On the contrary, I think it would be very dangerous if we were to say that the Bible is incompatible with evolutionary theory because that sets up this opposition that could be very, I think, detrimental to the church. I think it's better to leave the question open and say follow the evidence where it leads.

Student: I think your argument and Plantinga’s argument is very strong. You can't do a metaphysical statement from scientific, and so you're absolutely right. I think both books are true – God's inspired Scripture and the book of the world (his creation). There's no lie. We are leaving out what the historical mythology truth is in there – that there's an angelic realm. If, as a programmer, I direct another programmer to write a program to do something, I get credit for it. So when you say God created, he created this creation through his angelic creation as well. Remember we're to redeem by bowing our knee to Christ we're supposed to offer an example for salvation to the fallen angels – to the angels. That’s why they were involved in this. If you look at some of the Hebraic expressions of gathering powers to make the sun and stuff, he commands the earth to bring forth. There is no random macro but there is angelic beings affecting that. I'm
saying there's a spiritual realm out there that helped create and is involved directly and is part of us.

Dr. Craig: Whether the miraculous interventions were directly from God or via the mediation of angels I think is neither here nor there. One can be open to either alternative. As I said, I think the Christian could say that the key mutations in the development of life that led to *Homo sapiens* were caused by God or caused by angels, and science could say nothing against that. There's no way a scientist could know whether or not these key mutations in the history of life were divinely caused or not.

Student: I just wanted to ask a question of clarification. When evolutionary biologists such as the ones you've listed say that evolution is not random . . .

Dr. Craig: No, wait. They say it is random. People like Ayala and Mayr – it is random, but they don't mean by “random” purposeless or unguided or undirected.

Student. Right. But when they say that, are they beginning with by looking at the science and saying well this seems to be going towards some end therefore there must be some purpose to this or are they just looking at the functions on the microbiological level and saying these things are made to operate this way.

Dr. Craig: I don't think either one because they're not going to be making any statements about the purpose for which a thing exists. There is a kind of view called organism with respect to evolutionary development that sometimes theorists have fallen into in thinking that the process is directed toward a goal – that humanity, for example, is the goal of the evolutionary process. It's very easy for us standing at the pinnacle of creation to look back and see everything ascending to us; this is the sort of conceit of humanity on a naturalistic view that we're the goal toward which it's following. Actually, I got the word wrong here. It slipped right out of my mind as I was saying it. It's orthogenesis. Orthogenesis is the idea that there's a direction to the evolutionary process. Theorists would say that that's not a scientific pronouncement that they can make. That's a philosophical question which they're not equipped to address as a scientist.

Student: I think that answers that. As a quick example, if I was standing by a lake and I didn't see any people standing around but I saw a rock skipping across the lake, I wouldn't think that rock didn't just get up and skip across the lake. Somebody had to have thrown it. There had to have been some origin of that rock skipping. I guess I was trying to picture evolution in that way. Is a scientist looking at that going, *Who threw that rock?*, or are they trying to figure out, *Did nature somehow skip that rock?*

Dr. Craig: I think the question there would be that the scientist wants to discover the cause of the rock skipping across the water, but he would not be asking the question, *For what reason is that rock skipping across the water? Is that purposefully thrown? Is there
a reason for this rock skipping? Or will he simply be inquiring about the causal chains that led up to the observed phenomenon? And that is a quite legitimate scientific question. The question will be raised: Can you provide a convincing account of the causal chains that lead up to, say, *Homo sapiens*, or will there be, again pun intended, missing links along the way?

*Student:* One of the things that I don't think should be overlooked, and I just say this based on my own anecdotal experience of talking with people who claim that evolution and theism are incompatible, is that they adhere to what I call terrarium theology where they think of the world as a sort of terrarium where God's goal is to make people happy and then when we look at the grand scheme of the universe we see that it's hostile. So when they claim that it's random, well it doesn't jive with God as I conceive of God, therefore it's incompatible with theism.

*Dr. Craig:* I have said something similar to that in my work on the problem of evil. We tend to think that if God exists then surely the purpose that he has for us in life is to make us happy in our little terrarium here. We are God's pets, and God's role is to give a nice environment for his human pets. But, of course, on Christian theism we are not God's pets and the purpose of life is not happiness as such but to find the knowledge of God. And so it may well be that in a world that is filled with natural evil and evolutionary suffering and so forth that God's purposes will be most effectively achieved to bringing millions and millions of people freely into a knowledge of himself.115

115 ?Total Running Time: 41:43 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)
Lecture 29: Methodological Naturalism

Last time I argued that contrary to what you often hear on both sides of the creation-evolution debate that the contemporary theory of biological evolution does not assert that mutations are undirected or unguided and that therefore the evolutionary process is purposeless. Rather we saw that what evolutionary biologists mean when they say that mutations occur randomly is that they occur irrespective of the benefit that they might bring to the host organism. And that definition is not at all incompatible with the evolutionary process being directed or guided by God or even by God's miraculously intervening in the evolutionary process to cause key mutations that would bring about evolutionary advance.

This raises a related issue – methodological naturalism. Many philosophers and scientists would argue that science by its very nature is committed to a sort of methodological naturalism. It's important to understand that this is not synonymous with metaphysical naturalism. Metaphysical naturalism is a thesis about the nature of reality – that reality consists simply of space-time and its contents (the physical world). That's metaphysical naturalism. But methodological naturalism holds that science seeks only natural explanations for phenomena in the world. It's simply part of the methodology of science to seek natural explanations for various effects. Therefore supernatural explanations of some phenomenon would not even be permitted into the pool of live explanatory options. When you look at the pool of live explanatory options for some body of empirical data science would not even look at supernatural explanations because it is methodologically committed to the quest to find natural explanations of the data. So these supernaturalistic explanations wouldn't even come into consideration. Therefore even many Christian scientists would agree that they are restricted methodologically to seeking for natural explanations. This would of course then preclude appealing to God as an explanation of the origin of life and the evolution of biological complexity.

What might we say about methodological naturalism? I think what's striking about methodological naturalism is that it is not a scientific viewpoint but rather a philosophical viewpoint. It is not an issue to which scientific evidence is relevant. Rather, it is about the philosophy of science – the nature of science. As such we should ask ourselves: Why should we be committed to this philosophical thesis? As the intelligent design theorist William Dembski has pointed out, methodological naturalism would prevent us from inferring design even if we were to discover that every atom in the universe carried a label on it “Made by God.” You still would be prohibited methodologically from inferring that God has made these things. More seriously, suppose that life and biological complexity really were the result of creative, miraculous interventions at various points in the past on the part of God. Suppose that we actually do live in a world like that – where
God has intervened in the evolutionary process to bring about forms that would not have otherwise evolved. It would be a tragedy – wouldn't it? – both scientifically and personally if we were debarred from discovering the truth about reality simply because of a methodological constraint. Methodology is supposed to aid us in the discovery of the truth about reality not hinder us in it. So there are, I think, serious questions that can be raised about a strict methodological naturalism.

But leave that point aside. The more important point that I want to make is that we are not now concerned with what a scientist might infer as the best explanation of biological complexity. Rather, our question, as we've seen, is: How, from a theological standpoint, should we integrate what the Bible teaches with what we discover through empirical evidence? We are not trying to justify a design inference. Rather, we are trying to integrate our theology with the empirical evidence. We are trying to understand how these two bodies of truth fit together best. Even if the scientist works within the constraints of methodological naturalism, there is no such constraint on the systematic theologian who is free to craft an integrative or synoptic view of the world that takes account of both the data of modern science and the data of divine revelation.

So the systematic theologian could admit that the neo-Darwinian theory of biological evolution may very well be the best naturalistic theory that we've got. If, as a result of methodological naturalism, the pool of live explanatory options is limited to naturalistic hypotheses then (at least until very recently) the neo-Darwinian theory of biological evolution driven by the mechanisms of random mutation and natural selection was basically the only game in town. Rival naturalistic hypotheses just could not equal its explanatory power, explanatory scope, and plausibility. It was the best naturalistic account. No matter how improbable it might seem, no matter how enormously far its explanatory mechanisms have to be extrapolated beyond the testable evidence, no matter the lack of evidence for many of its tenants, it's still the best naturalistic explanation because there isn't any other naturalistic explanation that even comes close to it. Philip Johnson, one of the pioneers of the intelligent design movement, has said that he is quite prepared to agree to the evolutionary theorist’s claim that evolution is the best naturalistic hypothesis available for explaining biological complexity. It is the best naturalistic theory, he would agree. But what he protests is the claim that evolutionary theory is the best explanation *simplicitur*, or the best explanation period. Were we to admit into the pool of live explanatory options non-naturalistic hypotheses then he thinks it would no longer be evident that evolutionary theory is the best explanation of the data.

So we are going to approach our question from a theological standpoint and ask how, given the biblical data and the empirical evidence, we should best understand the origin of life and the development of biological complexity. As we do so I want to emphasize
that I approach these questions not as a professional biologist but rather as a theologian with a layman's interest in these scientific questions.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* Do you think the bent towards methodological naturalism is a primary cause of why so many people appeal to the God-of-the-gaps explanation when somebody gives . . .

*Dr. Craig:* Let's define some terms. You mentioned the so-called God-of-the-gaps. This has become almost an aphorism in contemporary culture. If there's anything that is anathema – anything! – that must not be appealed to, it is the God-of-the-gaps. What is meant by that phrase? What that phrase refers to is using God to stop up the gaps in our scientific knowledge. If there's something that is at the present day scientifically inexplicable you can say, *A-ha! God did it. This is where God intervened.* The danger of this kind of God-of-the-gaps reasoning is that as science advances and closes those gaps God gets progressively squeezed out of the picture and becomes more and more irrelevant. Notice that that danger doesn't say anything at all about the truth of God's interventions or his activity in the world. In a sense, the person who is warning against God-of-the-gaps is just giving a little bit of evangelistic advice. He's saying it's best not to use arguments for God that are based on scientific ignorance because they might come back to bite you, and the Christian evangelist can say, *Well, thank you very much. Maybe that's good advice, and I'll heed that.* But this really isn't an issue about the truth of theism or how God brought about biological complexity. Maybe there really are gaps. Maybe there really have been divine miraculous interventions along the way. But it's just saying it's sort of impolitic to do this because it could be counterproductive. Well, thank you very much. Now, I do think this is related to methodological naturalism in that one of the motivations for methodological naturalism would be you're not going to be trying to use God as a stopgap measure to plug up scientific ignorance. If you have a methodological naturalism in play then you will always be seeking to find natural explanations for natural phenomena and therefore you cannot fall prey to positing a God-of-the-gaps because that won't even be permitted into the pool of live explanatory options.

*Student:* Would that not be why the person (in the context of a debate with somebody who has the methodological naturalistic perspective) . . . would that bias them more to say or just to throw that out as an explanation anytime somebody posits God being an explanation for anything at all.

*Dr. Craig:* If he thinks of it as a scientific inference then he will say this is methodologically excluded. One of the burdens of intelligent design theorists like William Dembski has been to argue that they are not in fact postulating a God-of-the-
gaps. Indeed, intelligent design theorists aren't positing God at all. They are very emphatic that they are not inferring to God as an explanation. Rather they are inferring to intelligent design. And they would say that this is an inference that is common in scientific pursuits. They will give many examples. For instance, cryptography where you're trying to decode a message and you can tell the difference between just random letters and an encoded message. Or insurance fraud where you see whether or not a fire is the result of arson – whether it has been deliberately set – or was this just the product of natural causes. You can infer to an intelligent designer who has set the fire. Or plagiarism charges – is it just an accident that someone reproduced word-for-word the writing of some other person or is this to be attributed to intelligent design? Or archaeology – when archaeologists are able to infer that certain objects they discover are in fact human artifacts like arrowheads and pottery shards rather than products of metamorphosis and sedimentation. So the ID theorist will say we are not in any way postulating a God-of-the-gaps. Number one, we're not postulating God to begin with but just some sort of intelligent designer, but secondly they would say we are making a principled inference to intelligent design not simply appeal to ignorance. We are not using design just to stop up the gaps in our knowledge any more than a cryptographer or a SETI researcher trying to find signals of intelligent life from outer space or an insurance fraud investigator is postulating design simply to plug up the gaps in our knowledge. So this is a very hot question that is discussed among intelligent design theorists. Fortunately, it needn't be settled by us in this class because, as I say, we're not adopting a scientific perspective. I think that the distinctive thesis of these intelligent design theorists is that they want to argue that the inference to intelligent design is a scientific inference. It's not a philosophical inference in their book. I, as a philosopher, am quite prepared to make philosophical inferences of that sort, but they want to say that the scientist can infer intelligent design and that therefore he is not bound by this sort of methodological naturalism. But, as I say, we are not approaching these questions as scientists in this class. I'm a theologian – a systematic theologian – and so what I'm asking is: Given the different sources of knowledge that we have as Christians (physical science, biology, literature, psychology, divine revelation) how do we integrate all of these into a coherent synoptic worldview that adequately takes account of all of these different sources of knowledge?

Student: I'm very excited about this next part that you are about to do. What I've always thought of is that those that do not believe in God at all have to have an explanation. So they are grasping for something out there that could have caused these things without God. It’s not that they're trying to find the best explanation, it's they need some explanation, and therefore I'm going to say that macro-evolution actually happened even
though there's no proof whatsoever that it did happen. So I'm very interested very much in this discussion.

_Dr. Craig:_ Notice what he is talking about here. It is not methodological naturalism, but metaphysical naturalism – those who are atheists who don't believe that there is anything beyond space-time and its contents. I think, as you rightly say, for them it's the only game in town. It's got to be true because there isn't any sort of supernatural alternative. You’ll remember last week I quoted from the naturalistic biologist Richard Lewontin when he says that no matter how absurd the scenarios, no matter what the evidence is, we have an _a priori_ commitment to materialism and therefore this must be true. And we're not bound by that, I think. Certainly not metaphysically, and I think that it's worth asking: Are we even bound by that methodologically? But ultimately we don't need to decide that methodological question because we're not approaching this through the discipline of science.

_Student:_ Science is: I postulate this and I test it and is there evidence? Is it repeatable? All that. As we look back over time, there's a different type of science. It's forensic science. I'm postulating what might have caused this to happen. It's not real science – I don't mean that to sound that way, but it's not: I do it and I have a hypothesis, I test it, it's repeatable, it's never falsified. There's no way to falsify a lot of the postulates of how the world was created and how . . . we say it must have gone from this animal to this animal – look at the bones. OK, well show me today. Show me any evidence of how that actually happened in macro-evolution.

_Dr. Craig:_ I'm not at all ready to write off the historical sciences as pseudoscience. There are a number of sciences such as cosmogony (which studies the history of the universe), paleontology, geology, archaeology. There are historical sciences that don't just study the present (the here and now) but attempt to study the past as well. You're quite right. These sciences will be based upon postulating certain hypotheses to explain the observable data like fossil evidence, for example. It would be, I think you'd agree, absurd to say that these are not the remains of animals that actually lived – that maybe God put them in the sediments to deceive us. Something of that sort. I think any reasonable person would say that these are the vestiges of lifeforms that used to exist that now no longer exist. And so one will need to explain that – how did they come about, why did they die, how did they originate, and so forth. Immediately you're embarked upon a historical science. As to whether it can be falsified, someone, I think, has rightly said that these theories can be falsified. If you were to find, for example, a rabbit in the Pre-Cambrian rocks, that would be a decisive falsification of the scientific theory of evolution. I do think it's falsifiable, but that's not to say that it is the best explanation of the evidence. We'll need to look at that more down the road.
Student: I would say in defense of ID and in theism that it's a better explanation for what we do know, not for what we don't know. So I would say the onus on the methodological naturalist is the evolution-of-the-gaps not the God-of-the-gaps.

Dr. Craig: I think you are making a good point. Dembski, Stephen Meyer, and so forth have all said we are not inferring intelligent design based upon ignorance. It is based upon what we do know about the complex structure of proteins, for example, about the nature of biological complexity, that an intelligent design inference is warranted. Now, that is arguable, certainly. But I think it is far too facile to respond to ID theorists by just saying that's God-of-the-gaps reasoning. That is far too easy.

Student: I've been reading up on Dr. Bart Ehrman's stuff as a natural historian. Would you say that he ends up using the methodological naturalism for his naturalist ideals?

Dr. Craig: Yes. As you very perceptively noticed, this same methodological naturalism controls historical inquiry for many historians and even biblical scholars. If you adopt a kind of methodological naturalism in history (that only natural events can explain the phenomena) that immediately means the historian could never be justified in inferring miracles. No matter what the evidence you could never infer that a miracle has occurred. So when Ehrman comes to the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus, in his Teaching Company lectures he grants – even argues for – the historicity of the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb and his burial by Joseph of Arimathea. He agrees to the post-mortem appearances of Jesus to various individuals and groups. And he agrees that the original disciples suddenly and sincerely came to believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead. But he said we cannot make an inference that God did this. That kind of inference is not one that the historian as a historian can make. Therefore he says, I simply remain agnostic about this. That would be a perfect illustration of how in another field you have this analogical methodological naturalism at work.

Student: You were speaking of principled inferences – making inferences based on what we do know. But my question was what do you take to be the necessary and sufficient conditions for a principled inference? So, for example, I could see with respect to the Kalam cosmological argument how you can infer God because the other explanations aren't just improbable, they're completely impossible.

Dr. Craig: Yeah, that's kind of a special case.

Student: But with respect to this, we're more so dealing with inference to the best explanation.

Dr. Craig: Intelligent design theorists have developed different answers to this question. Dembski calls it “specified complexity.” It would be when you discover this feature of some event – specified complexity – that you can know that it's neither due to chance nor
to physical necessity and therefore a design inference is warranted. This will be a combination of being able to establish the great complexity of some event or high improbability of the event plus an independently existing pattern to which the event conforms. It's called specified complexity. By contrast, the biochemist Michael Behe, who wrote the best-seller *Darwin's Black Box*, proposes a different feature of phenomena that would justify design inference that he calls “irreducible complexity.” This is the complexity of a compound system which is such that if any one of the elements were removed it wouldn't function at all. The function would be destroyed. All of the elements need to be present and functioning. So that would be a different approach. Another approach would be by Robin Collins who avoids either of these proposals (of specified or irreducible complexity) and he argues on the basis of a Bayesian model of probability theory. He would say that the probability of, for example, the fine-tuning of the universe is much higher on theism and what we know of the laws of nature than it would be simply on the laws of nature themselves and non-theism. Therefore the inference to theism is justified on probability grounds. So it's a variety of approaches. Clearly these people, whatever you think of them, are not just saying, *Gee, we can't explain this scientifically so God must have done it.* That just is not an honest interaction with their work.

*Student:* Those of us who are trying to understand this, and the scientists included, shouldn't we divide the question of biological complexity into the origin part and then the development part? The development part would be the development or progress based on maybe common descent or design or whatever. But on the origin part, it seems to me that . . . at least I haven't heard, maybe you know of any credible scientific naturalistic theory to explain the origin of life. I know there were the experiments in the 50s of Urey and Miller that I think have been discredited. Would scientists admit that there is really no naturalistic explanation for the origin of life – the first cell? So there is really no game in town that they have to explain the origin of life.

*Dr. Craig:* You anticipate me. If you look at the outline, you'll see that the next point is going to be on the origin of life, and then we'll discuss the development of biological complexity after that. I think we'll see that what you just said is, in fact, correct.

*Student:* When a scientist uses methodological naturalism, when it gets to the point of the origin of the universe or the origin of life then they are left with such bizarre explanations like oscillating universes that never really had a beginning therefore we can't say there was a cause because there never was a beginning, or that there was an alien who came to Earth and that's how life started. It seems to me when they're pushed into a corner they don't have an answer so they come up with these really bizarre sort of explanations that can't be denied. I mean you can't go back and prove that.
Dr. Craig: I think you're quite correct in saying that when pushed to the limit they will often appeal to alternatives that are desperate, that are highly improbable. For example, with regard to cosmology you mentioned oscillating universes, or the idea that the arrow of time flips over and runs in the opposite direction at some point in the past, or even revising the laws of physics such as Roger Penrose is constrained to do in order to make his model – conformal cyclical cosmology – work. So one might be pushed to desperate expediences or, I think, one could simply remain agnostic at that point and just say, *We don't have an explanation but given my methodological constraints I can't infer a supernatural explanation. I am just left with no explanation.* I would say with regard to the resurrection of Jesus that would be the main response. These naturalistic resurrection theories like apparent death, conspiracy, these are almost universally rejected today. But scholars like Ehrman or Paula Fredrickson or Spong or others will simply say at this point: *Who knows? Something happened. Something incredibly powerful must have happened to birth this Christian movement in the middle of the first century, but what it was we don't know and we can't say.*

Student: I just wanted to make a comment. It seems like the general public seems very willing to accept an alien brought life to Earth or the oscillating or string theory rather than to be open to a supernatural explanation even though the evidence seems to be more in favor of that. I've heard people say there was an alien, and they don't have any trouble repeating that as if that has more credibility.

Dr. Craig: I think you're making a point there that I tried to make in the question of the week on our Reasonable Faith website with respect to the resurrection, namely that postulating a supernatural cause for an event like this carries with it all kinds of worldview implications that are going to affect you and how you live, your moral life, your spiritual life. All sorts of implications and ramifications are going to come with that that many people just are not willing to make. Therefore, as you say, desperate alternatives will be preferred like that Jesus of Nazareth was an alien from outer space and that the ship beamed him up or something like that from the empty tomb.

**END DISCUSSION**

Let's turn to the question of the origin of life. What does the evidence indicate about the origin of life? You’ll remember in our discussion of the fine-tuning of the universe in our excursus on natural theology we saw that for life to originate and evolve on any planet anywhere in the cosmos there have to be finely tuned initial conditions present in the Big Bang itself in order for this to happen. But even given those incomprehensibly finely tuned initial conditions, there's still no guarantee that life will originate somewhere in the universe. These fine-tuned conditions of the universe are necessary conditions for the
origin of life but they are not sufficient conditions. In order for life to originate other conditions have to be in place on Earth which are astronomically improbable.

As was alluded to a moment ago, most of us were probably taught in high school or elementary school that life originated in the so-called primordial soup. By chance chemical reactions perhaps fueled by lightning strikes. Back in the 1950s a scientist named Stanley Miller was able to synthesize amino acids by passing electric sparks through a methane gas. Of course amino acids are not alive, but proteins are made out of amino acids and proteins are found in living things so the hope was that somehow the origin of life might be explained. You might think, wait a minute, that's a pretty big extrapolation. Amino acids constitute proteins, proteins are found in living things, therefore the ability to synthesize amino acids meant somehow that life can be originated chemically. And I would agree with you. I think that's a pretty big leap. But that is what most of us were taught, I think, in school. In the primordial soup that either covered the Earth in its oceans or else perhaps in warm pools on the land through lightning strikes and chemical reactions somehow primitive life was formed. Now, it could be that God set up these natural conditions that he knew would result in the origination of life. But is this the way he did it? Well, all of these old chemical origin of life scenarios have in fact broken down and are now rejected by the scientific community. This fact was documented in the groundbreaking book by Roger Olson, Walter Bradley, and Charles Thaxton called *The Mystery of Life’s Origin: Reassessing Current Theories*. They point out that there probably never even was such a thing as the so-called primordial soup. For the natural processes of dilution and destruction would have prevented the chemical reactions that supposedly led to life. Miller's experiments were performed in a tiny glass-enclosed artificial environment in the laboratory where the natural processes of destruction and dilution would not come into effect. But of course in the primordial oceans of the Earth, these sorts of destructive processes could not be precluded and therefore they would have prevented the chemical reactions that would supposedly have led to the formation of life.

That's just Bradley, Olsen, and Thaxton's first point – that the natural destructive processes in the primordial oceans would have prevented these chemical reactions that supposedly led to life that allowed Miller to synthesize his amino acids. But they have much more to say about this, and that's what we'll look at next time.116

116 Total Running Time: 40:00 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)
Lecture 30: Three Aspects of the Evolutionary Paradigm

Last time we began looking at the scientific evidence concerning the origin of life on this planet, and I explained that the famous experiments during the 1950's conducted by people like Stanley Miller ultimately failed to prove productive in explaining how life originated on this planet. The book by Bradley, Olsen, and Thaxton (The Mystery of Life's Origin117) documents the collapse of this attempt. You’ll remember I explained that they pointed out that the very processes of natural destruction and dilution in the primordial waters would have prevented the chemical reactions that supposedly led to life. They also point out, however, that thermodynamics poses an insuperable problem for these chemical origin of life scenarios because there just isn't any way to harness the raw energy of lightning strikes or energy from the sun in order to drive chemical evolution forward. There just isn't any sort of mechanism available on the primordial Earth whereby this raw energy could be harnessed to drive chemical evolution forward.

Moreover, Bradley, Olsen, and Thaxton point out that there was no way to preserve any of the products of chemical evolution in order for the supposed second step in the process to take place. The scientist can artificially isolate the products of the first chemical development and then subject them to a second step, but in the primordial seas there wasn't a way of collecting and preserving any products of chemical evolution in the first step for the supposed second step. The same processes that formed them in the first place would also serve to almost immediately destroy them again so that even if the first step could be successfully achieved the second step would not.

Finally, Bradley, Olson, and Thaxton point out that it was originally believed that billions of years were available for life to originate on Earth by purely natural processes. Given billions of years there would be untold billions and billions and billions of chances for life to originate in the primordial soup. The problem is that we now have fossil evidence of life on Earth going back as far as 3.8 billion years ago. Now, when you think that the age of the Earth is probably around five to six billion years, that means that the window of opportunity between the time that the Earth cooled down enough and the seas formed on the one hand and then the first origin of life 3.8 billion years ago on the other hand is being progressively closed. The window of opportunity for life to originate is getting increasingly narrow. In fact, Bradley, Thaxton, and Olson estimate in their book that it is probably a window of only about 25 million years, which is far too short for these naturalistic scenarios. So rather than having billions of years available for life to form by

chemical evolution, only around 25 million were probably available which was far too short.

So for all of these reasons and more, the old chemical origin of life theories have broken down. The situation has not essentially changed since Thaxton, Bradley, and Olson wrote their book. Today there is a plethora of alternative, speculative theories with no consensus on the horizon. So the origin of life on Earth remains scientifically inexplicable as things now stand.

More recently, Steve Meyer in his book *The Signature in the Cell* has calculated the odds of getting even a single functioning protein molecule by chance to be approximately one chance out of \(10^{164}\). So just to get a single protein molecule, not to speak of life, is around one chance out of \(10^{164}\). Meyer says this is a trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion times smaller than the odds of finding a single particle by chance among all of the possible particles in the universe.\(^{118}\) He writes, “Protein function depends upon hundreds of specifically sequenced amino acids, and the odds of a single functional protein arising by chance are prohibitively low given the probabilistic resources of the entire universe.”\(^{119}\)

Francis Crick, who was the co-discoverer of the DNA molecule, has said that the origin of life on Earth is “almost a miracle.”\(^{120}\) In fact, Crick was driven to the hypothesis that the origin of life on Earth is so improbable that it was probably not originated here but rather seeded from some other planet located elsewhere in the universe and brought here on meteorites, which is, of course, an unfalsifiable hypothesis. There’s no way to test such a hypothesis.

Sometimes people will say, *Well, but if the universe is infinite in size then no matter how improbable the origin of life it will originate somewhere by chance.* Given an infinitely large universe then no matter what the odds, no matter how improbable, somewhere on some planet life will have to originate. So why not here? The problem with this objection is that it can be used to explain away virtually any improbable event no matter how improbable that event is. So you could say, *Well, somewhere in an infinite universe it would happen.* For example, it might be unfathomably improbable that the accused's fingerprints would materialize on the murder weapon and that his DNA would be found on the corpse. *But, hey, in an infinite universe anything can happen, and the improbable will happen somewhere.* Rational behavior would become literally impossible. No matter how improbable something is, it can always be explained away by saying that in an infinite universe it would happen somewhere by chance.


\(^{119}\) Ibid., p. 273.

In fact, on this view, one could never have any evidence that the universe is infinite, because if it is infinite, it would become impossible to assess the probability or improbability of the evidence. So you could not even have any evidence that the universe is infinite if it is infinite. Thus the objection is ultimately self-defeating and so cannot be rationally affirmed.

Now, as I said, the Bible doesn't say how life originated. It just says God said, *Let the earth bring forth vegetation, let the waters swarm with fish and other marine life.* The Bible isn't a science book. It doesn't tell us what means God used or whether he used any means at all to bring about the origin of life on this planet. But I think we can say that the scientific evidence is certainly consistent with the origin of life being, in Francis Crick's words, a miracle, that is to say, an event which was supernaturally brought about by God. So minimally we can say that science and the Bible are not in contradiction on this point. In fact, if anything, I think that the scientific evidence is actually clearer than the Bible that the origin of life is due to some sort of supernatural intervention on the part of a Creator God.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* That 25 million year window, does that include even the extreme environment microorganisms? Because they say that you get the volcano soup at the bottom of the oceans and that was sort of the beginning of everything. You're saying even to get to the point where the Earth was cool enough for that you have to have that 25 million.

*Dr. Craig:* Yes. He's speaking of these volcanic vents that have been found in the deep ocean where you have these very primitive life forms that are around these volcanic vents and derive heat from that in order to live. What we're talking about here is something much, much prior to that. We're talking about the origin, as you said, of some sort of a microorganism like a single-cell animal that obviously couldn't occur when the Earth was still a molten mass cooling down or when it was so hot that any rain from the atmosphere would immediately evaporate again. It had to cool down to the point that you could have seas form. What they're estimating is that once those are in place it's only about 25 million years until we begin to find the fossil evidence of life, and of course we don't know how much further back it went than that when they didn't leave perhaps fossils from these soft-bodied microorganisms. So the window of opportunity is, in terms of geological time, very narrow.

*Student:* These probability theories of improbable events – you talked last year I think about that. If I've got a very improbable event and it occurs (it happens; I win the lottery which is very improbable, but I win it). How do you test that? How do you use probability then to say it couldn't happen if it did?
Dr. Craig: Very good question, and here intelligent design theorists have spent a lot of time discussing that question. Some, like William Dembski that we talked about last time, will freely say that being astronomically improbable is not enough to warrant a design inference. He would say that that improbability needs to be conjoined to an independently established pattern to which it conforms. It will be this union of high improbability (it has to be above one chance out of $10^{80}$, he would say\(^{121}\)) plus this independently established pattern that tips you off to a designing intelligence. Others will use the probability calculus to say that you are justified in inferring a designer in case there is an alternative hypothesis to chance on which the event is considerably more probable. So you're not simply inferring design because of high improbability. There needs to be another alternative that if true would make that event more likely to occur. In a case like that you would infer that it's not simply happening by chance. There needs to be an alternative that would make the observed fact more probable.

END DISCUSSION

Let's move on to the evolution of biological complexity. Given the origin of life, we still want to know how did complex biological organisms (especially multicellular organisms) evolve.

Part of the difficulty in assessing contemporary evolutionary theory is that the word “evolution” is an accordion word, that is to say, it can be expanded or contracted in its meaning depending upon the context. The evolutionary biologist Francisco Ayala, in his book *Darwin's Gift to Science and Religion*, distinguishes three distinct aspects of the contemporary evolutionary paradigm. The first aspect is what he calls “evolution.” Ayala defines evolution as “the process of change and diversification of living things over time.”\(^{122}\) Ayala says, “This is what biologists mean when they say that evolution is a fact.”\(^{123}\) What are we to make of this? This definition of evolution is so broad as to be innocuous. Of course living things change and diversify over time! If this is all that biologists mean when they say that evolution is a fact then nobody would care to dispute this. The fact of evolution in this sense is agreed to even by Young Earth Creationists. After all, they think that all of the human races evolved from Adam and Eve, and yet look at the differences between, say, an Australian aborigine and a fair-skinned Laplander.

But I think that Ayala probably means to imply much more by this definition of evolution than simply the change and diversification of living things over time. I think that he probably takes it to imply what we may call the thesis of common ancestry, that all living

\(^{121}\) This number comes from the fact that it is estimated that there are $10^{80}$ protons, neutrons, and electrons in the observable universe. See Meyer, *Signature in the Cell*, p. 212.


\(^{123}\) Ibid., p. 141.
things are descended from some primordial ancestor. Organisms other than the very first are all descended from earlier organisms with changes. Now, this is a far more significant claim. It implies that there exists a sort of evolutionary tree of life that all living things stem from some single primordial ancestor, rather than that there are multiple trees stemming from a multiplicity of ancestors. Such a thesis would obviously demand vastly greater evidence than the innocuous truth that living things change and diversify over time. That’s what we might call the thesis of common ancestry.

The second aspect of the contemporary evolutionary paradigm identified by Ayala is what he calls “evolutionary history.” This is the reconstruction of the universal tree of life showing the various lineages that branched off from one another. This second claim obviously presupposes the thesis of common ancestry. In other words, it presupposes that there is a universal tree of life rather than multiple trees. Ayala explains that evolution in this sense is a matter of great uncertainty. He says,

Unfortunately, there is a lot, lot, lot to be discovered still. To reconstruct evolutionary history, we have to know how the mechanisms operate in detail, and we have only the vaguest idea of how they operate at the genetic level, how genetic change relates to development and to function. . . . I am implying that what would be discovered would be not only details, but some major principles.¹²⁴

Because he believes in the thesis of common ancestry, Ayala accepts that there is a universal evolutionary tree, but he recognizes that scientists have not been able to reconstruct it, and one of the reasons for that inability is our failure to understand evolution in the third sense of the word, namely, the mechanisms that explain evolutionary development. Without a thorough understanding of the mechanisms of biological evolution it will not be possible to reconstruct evolutionary history, and so that remains a matter of uncertainty.

Let's turn to that third aspect of the contemporary evolutionary paradigm, namely, the explanatory mechanisms behind evolutionary change. According to Professor Ayala neither descent with modification nor common ancestry represents Charles Darwin's unique contribution to evolutionary theory. He points out that, contrary to popular impression, evolutionary theories of life and the thesis of common ancestry were many and were well-known prior to Darwin. For example, there is Lamarck's version of evolutionary theory proposed in his Philosophical Zoology of 1809. Darwin's Origin of the Species was not published until 1859. So 50 years prior to Darwin we had an evolutionary theory and common ancestry proposed by Lamarck. On Lamarck's view, species turn into one another due to environmental changes. These environmental changes produce behavioral changes which make the animals adapt to the environment

and thereby produce evolutionary change. For example, due to a change in the climate, the giraffes had to forage among the foliage higher in the trees rather than on the ground and so as they stretched their necks to try to reach the higher foliage they would adapt and eventually become long-necked animals over time in response to these environmental changes.

Darwin’s contribution lay in providing a mechanism to explain evolutionary change, namely, natural selection operating on variations in living things. Organisms which are well-adapted to their changing environments survive while the maladapted die off and fail to reproduce. It is this mechanism which Darwin used to explain the observed adaptedness of organisms to their environment without the necessity of a designing intelligence. Ayala writes,

It was Darwin’s greatest accomplishment to show that the complex organization and functionality of living beings can be explained as a result of a nature process, natural selection, without any need to resort to a Creator or other external agent.125

So according to Darwin’s hypothesis, natural selection would weed out those offspring that were not well-adapted to the environment and so as the environment would change those variations in the animal population that were well-suited or well-adapted to the new environment would survive and the others would die off. So over time evolutionary development would occur.

Unfortunately, Darwin had no explanation for the variations among living organisms upon which natural selection operates. It’s been aptly said, I think, that while Darwin’s theory explained the survival of the fittest, it could not explain the arrival of the fittest. It explained why the well-adapted survived, but it didn’t explain where these variations came from in the first place. Thus, for example, Ian Tattersall of the American Museum of Natural History writes in his book The Fossil Trail, “Darwin’s theories of inheritance were totally wrong, even though he has escaped the pillorying suffered by the unfortunate Lamarck.”126

With Gregor Mendel and the development of modern genetics, scientists were able to supplement Darwin’s theory of natural selection with a mechanism for supplying an explanation of the variations on which natural selection works. Accordingly, we can call this third aspect “neo-Darwinism.” Darwinism – the original Darwinism – was simply a theory of natural selection but without any explanation for where the variations came from. But neo-Darwinism is the synthesis of natural selection with Mendelian genetics.

126 Ian Tattersall, The Fossil Trail: How We Know What We Think We Know about Human Evolution, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 16.
According to Tattersall, by the mid-1940s a synthesis had been achieved in evolutionary biology to which almost everyone subscribed. This emerging “Evolutionary Synthesis” or “Modern Synthesis” as it came to be grandly termed, “was . . . an attractive and ultimately highly reductionist formulation, involving the integration of Darwinian ideas of natural selection with changing frequencies of genes in populations.”

So mutations would produce variations in a population and then natural selection will weed out the maladapted so that only the well-adapted survive. In this way evolutionary change takes place. This is what is called the Modern Synthesis or neo-Darwinism.

The basic principles of the Modern Synthesis were threefold, and these are again from Ian Tattersall.

1. Evolution was a gradual, long-term process, essentially consisting of the accumulation within lineages of small genetic mutations and recombinations. Over enough time, the accumulation of minor changes would result in large effects.

2. This generation-to-generation change was controlled by natural selection, environmental factors promoting adaptation within the lineage by the differential reproductive success or failure of different variants. As environments changed, populations would change to keep in step and maintain or improve their adaptedness.

3. This same process of the gradual accretion of genetic (hence physical) change could be extrapolated to explain higher-level phenomena, such as the origin of new species and of biotic diversity.

So the third step is this step of extrapolation of these mechanisms to explain not only the minor changes within a population but these larger macroscopic higher-level phenomena such as the origin of new species.

We’ve seen that Ayala, despite the paradigmatic status of the Modern Synthesis, thinks that we have only the vaguest understanding of the mechanisms behind evolutionary change. He writes,

The mechanisms accounting for these changes are still undergoing investigation. . . . The evolution of organisms is universally accepted by biological scientists, while the mechanisms of evolution are still actively investigated and are the subject of debate among scientists.

I think you can see how misleading it is therefore when people assert that evolution is a proven fact which is universally accepted by biologists. That is true only in the first sense

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127 Tattersall, *Fossil Trail*, p. 87.
128 Ibid., p. 88.
of the word “evolution” as descent with modification or, at the very most, as the thesis of common ancestry. But evolution in the second and the third senses of the word explained by Ayala is not an accepted fact. According to Ayala,

The second and third issues—seeking to ascertain evolutionary history as well as to explain how and why evolution takes place—are matters of active scientific investigation. Some conclusions are well-established. Many matters are less certain, others are conjectural, and still others . . . remain largely unknown.¹²⁹

So when we assess the contemporary evolutionary paradigm and its truth, we need to be very clear which aspect of the paradigm we are discussing. One can easily mislead people by switching the meanings of the word “evolution” mid-discussion so that in fact one is equivocating— for example, saying that evolution is a universally accepted fact among biologists in the first sense of the word, and taking that then to mean that the mechanisms of genetic mutation and natural selection are universally accepted as adequate in the third sense of the word.

START DISCUSSION

Student: You've talked about how you think the Genesis creation account is not incompatible with the modern evolutionary theory. In that sense do you mean the neo-Darwinism and basically all of the random mutations—not just the core evolutionary term that you used—but you think in all senses of random mutations the Christian creation account is potentially compatible with that, not that it necessarily happened in the way that they say it did, but that we don’t know? Is that what you are saying?

Dr. Craig: Yes, that is right. In fact, I would say that not only for neo-Darwinism but for Darwinism and Lamarckianism. I don't think you could give a biblical disproof of Lamarckianism. It seems to me that the Christian is free to follow the evidence where it leads, and if Lamarck was right so be it. But if the neo-Darwinian synthesis is right, so be it. I don't have a peculiarly biblical objection to any of these views.

Student: I have a question about common ancestry. Can you go into more about what that means and what your thoughts are on the subject?

Dr. Craig: My thoughts about it we will do next time. We're just laying out here the ambiguity of the term “evolution” and the different senses in which it's understood and the degree to which these represent the consensus of evolutionary biologists. Just to be clear again—the thesis of common ancestry would say that the animal kingdom and the plant kingdom all eventually go back to some first form of life—some microorganism—that then has exploded in its evolutionary development over time. That's the idea of

¹²⁹ Ibid.
common ancestry. It means that any organism except the first is descended from a prior organism.

*Student:* Do the theories at some point give a rationale for sexual reproduction? Because when you look at a single cell and then it goes into requiring sexual reproduction, it would require both male and female to evolve simultaneously up those chains within a generation.

*Dr. Craig:* There are a number of these sorts of, shall we say, leaps or transitions in the evolutionary process that do remain ill-understood. Another one would be the origin of sentience, the origin of mind. The origin of sexual reproduction would be another. Now, I confess this isn't an area that I've read on. I'm just aware from secondary literature that it is one of those very controversial subjects of which I think Ayala spoke when he said some is conjectural, some is completely unknown. You're putting your finger there I think on one of those key links.

*Student:* A couple of other issues I think not addressed. Why would it be a single tree of life and not a bush of life where you have multiple starting points?

*Dr. Craig:* OK, let's just pause there for a moment to be sure. When I said “tree,” in reviewing my notes I was a little uncomfortable with using that because it does imply a kind of linearity that isn't what biologists think. They do think that it's more like a thicket; like you say, it's a bush. But here's where the metaphor though is apt – it all goes back to a single origin. So whether it's a bush or whether it's a tree, it's got a single organism at the root from which then the metaphorical plant stems. Now where this is significant (and this was brought up the other day in class), how do we know that there weren't multiple origins? And that's not the same as saying a bush. It's to say that instead of a monophyletic origin of life maybe there's a polyphyletic origin of life. Remember we said that in the Cambrian explosion all of the modern phyla exist. In fact, there are more phyla in the Cambrian than there are today. There's been attrition of the number of phyla. So how do you know that the origin of life wasn't polyphyletic rather than monophyletic? I asked an evolutionary biologist this question a few years ago. He backed away almost immediately and said, *Oh, well, we don't know that. I just mean that within the lifeforms with which we're familiar that they evolved from common ancestors.* But when you get back to this he admitted he didn't really know; he couldn't say.

*Student:* The other problem I would say is ascendancy. There's no reason to assume ascendancy. I mean, there could be descendancy; there could be lateral movement. Or maybe using the *The Selfish Gene* idea that Dawkins has, well, maybe the first cell says, *I don't want any other cells.***

*Dr. Craig:* I don't think we need to use the metaphor of ascent in order to characterize the theory. In fact, a moment ago I called it “descent” – that we're all descended from a
common ancestor. But if you think of us as the climax of creation maybe we're all ascended from one. So whether you use descent or ascent I think isn't material to what the theory is saying. 

END DISCUSSION\textsuperscript{130}
Lecture 31: Examining the Thesis of Common Ancestry

In our last class we saw that the word “evolution” is an accordion word with a wide variety of meanings. Specifically we identified three senses in which the word is often used. First, it's used to simply describe descent with modification. At the most this would imply the thesis of common ancestry – that all organisms are descended from a prior organism. Secondly, it can be used as a description of the evolutionary tree of life – a reconstruction of evolutionary history. And, thirdly, it can be used to describe the mechanisms for evolutionary change. In the neo-Darwinian synthesis this refers to random mutation and natural selection. We saw, according to Francisco Ayala, one of the most eminent evolutionary biologists of our day, that although biologists accept evolution as a fact in the first sense of the word (that is to say, descent with modification), the other two meanings of the word remain a matter of investigation and are often quite uncertain and even conjectural.

Before we look in more detail at these different aspects of the current evolutionary paradigm I want to correct a mistake that I made in a previous class in response to a question. This week an evolutionary biologist emailed me and said that I misspoke when I said that all of the current animal phyla that exist in the world were already present in the Cambrian and that there had been an attrition of those phyla. I looked into this, and what I found is that in the pre-Cambrian fossil record there are about one to three phyla that are already attested at that point. Then in the Cambrian stratum there appear about 20 phyla. That would make then a total of 23 phyla that existed at the time of the Cambrian. There has been a winnowing of that number. Some have since gone extinct. But what I did not realize was that since the Cambrian, 4 more animal phyla have arisen in the fossil record, and that there are around 9 phyla that are extant today but have no remains in the fossil record whatsoever. So that would make about 13 phyla that have arisen – animal phyla that is – that have arisen since the time of the Cambrian. So at the time of the Cambrian you had around 23 extant phyla. Some of those have gone extinct, but then since then 13 more phyla have appeared in the evolutionary record. So just to set that straight.

When we look at these three different aspects of the current evolutionary paradigm that I just mentioned, the second one (that is to say, reconstructing evolutionary history or the tree of life) is really just the outworking of the other two. So I want to focus on the thesis of common ancestry first, and then second the neo-Darwinian mechanisms of evolutionary change. Let's talk first about the thesis of common ancestry.

Are all living things descended from a single primordial ancestor? Here the evidence seems to be mixed. The strongest evidence in favor of the thesis of common ancestry derives from the genetic similarity of virtually all living things. Almost all living
organisms share the same genetic code or DNA. In fact, it's striking how similar organisms are in their DNA to one another. Moreover, this genetic similarity between organisms corresponds to their position on the evolutionary tree of life. Organisms on the same branch of the tree are much more similar to each other genetically than they are to organisms on a different branch of the tree. For example, a bat and a whale are much more similar genetically than a bat and a lizard or a bat and a sponge. This genetic similarity provides evidence of common ancestry since sharing a common ancestor would explain why all living things share the same genetic code and why the more similar that animals are to each other the more genetically alike they are. The creationist could respond to this argument by saying that God simply used the same design plan over and over again in creating different biological lifeforms. The genetic similarity of different organisms doesn't imply that one has evolved from the other. Rather, God has simply built them on a similar genetic design plan. To give an analogy, Ford and General Motors use the same sort of design plan to manufacture their automobiles, but that obviously doesn't imply that a Chevrolet has evolved from a Ford. They simply have similar design plans. So one could perhaps say that God repeatedly used the same design plan in creating various organisms. Namely, he used the same fundamental sort of genetic structure for the different unrelated organisms that he created. There was no reason to reinvent the wheel each time.

Now, I think we have to say that that certainly is a possibility, but it might seem more plausible to say that the genetic similarity of all living things is due to their being related to each other by descent. The biologist Dennis Venema of Trinity Western University outlines three specific points about the genetic phenomena which are difficult and rather awkward for the special creationist to account for.131

First of all, he says the genetic similarity between organisms is far in excess of what is required in order for DNA to do its job. A strand of DNA, if you remember your high school biology class, serves as a template to make messenger RNA for a short region spanning a gene. The next step then is to translate the messenger RNA into a sequence of amino acids in order to synthesize various proteins. The DNA letters A, C, G, and T (these are called nucleotides) combine with each other in sets of three to specify various amino acids. They form triplets. For example, A-C-T, C-G-A, and so on and so forth. The genetic code permits exactly 64 different combinations of these nucleotide bases. This is $4^3$. You form $4^3$ triplets and you get 64 different combinations of these nucleotide bases. But these 64 different combinations do not specify 64 different amino acids, interestingly enough. Instead they only code for about 20 amino acids. Often the same amino acid can

therefore be produced by different nucleotide combinations. The different combinations will produce the same amino acid. So two organisms wouldn't have to share the same genetic similarity on the deep structural level of the genetic code in order to have the same amino acid sequences and so be the same kind of animal. And yet, time and time again we find that organisms which are thought to be related share not only similar amino acid sequences but also they share the deep similarity of the genetic code combinations. This deeper unnecessary similarity would be explicable if organisms share a common ancestry and so inherited their genetic structure. But it would seem to be unmotivated if each one were simply a special creation.

Secondly, he points out the organization of the genes of related organisms suggests common ancestry. Two species which are thought to have recently diverged from a common ancestor have not only many of the same genes in common but also the same ordering or sequence of the genes along their DNA. This similarity of ordering is not necessary in order for the organisms to have similar body plans and function. So special creation seems to leave this similarity unmotivated whereas common ancestry would make it intelligible why these species derived from a common ancestor would have not only the same genetic code but would also have the same ordering in the sequence of the genes.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Both the first point and the second point say there's no need to have that similarity, but that doesn't mean that the similarity couldn't have been there if God intended it to be.

Dr. Craig: Quite right. It's interesting. When Venema addresses this, what he says is if you were designing two languages and you wanted people to know that they were independent rather than derived from the same thing, wouldn't you make them different? I thought, what is he trying to engage in here – divine psychology? He's attributing to God the desire to make it evident that these organisms don't share a common ancestry and therefore he would be duplicitous if he chose to do it this way? It seemed to me, as you point out, that this is a kind of philosophical point about divine psychology that makes the argument not quite as compelling as it might appear at first. So that's a fair point, I think.

END DISCUSSION

Thirdly, Venema points out the presence of shared so-called pseudo-genes in related organisms suggests common descent. What is a pseudo-gene? A pseudo-gene is a defunct genetic sequence that has been inactivated through mutation. It was once a functional gene but it has mutated and now so no longer functions in the organism in which the pseudo-gene is found. Organisms which are thought to be closely related are found to
have the same non-functioning pseudo-genes even in the same order even though these
defunct genes do nothing in either organism. Such similarity would make sense given
common ancestry. The descendant would inherit the pseudo-genes as well as the
functioning genes of his ancestor. But it's hard to explain why God would reproduce in
one organism the broken parts of another organism. To borrow the automotive analogy
once more, it's hard to see why a designer and manufacturer would reproduce in one
model the broken and non-functional door handle in an earlier model.

START DISCUSSION
Student: Does he give any examples?
Dr. Craig: Yes, thank you. The example he gives I kind of wanted to hold off a little bit
because it will be inflammatory. But the example is the similarity in human beings and
chimpanzees with respect to olfactory genes. These are genes that give you a sense of
smell. What you discover is that chimpanzees have the same defunct pseudo-gene in the
same order that has been mutated, and we human beings have the same thing even though
it serves no purpose. So it would seem that we and the chimpanzees are both descended
from a common ancestor. A different example would be whales and hippopotami, of all
things. Whales were once thought to be land animals. They're mammals after all. They
still breathe the air, right? So whales also have a pseudo-gene for the olfactory sense, and
it's very similar to the one in hippopotami. This led scientists to think that the ancestors of
whales were the same as the ancestor that evolved into hippopotami. What was
discovered then later was fossil evidence of primitive animals that shared similar ankle
bones in hippos in marine mammals. They showed a fossil similarity. That fossil
similarity seemed to confirm what the genetic evidence had already suggested. That
would be a couple of examples that Venema mentions. There are others as well that are
examples of these pseudo-genes. I think you would agree that this is, I think, a more
persuasive argument than the first two that we just mentioned. It really does seem to be
more plausible to explain these pseudo-genes as a result of inheritance rather than to
think that a designer would reproduce broken parts from some other independent
organism in an organism in which they serve no purpose.

END DISCUSSION
These arguments, I think, are far from compelling. And even if persuasive fall far short of
demonstrating anything so sweeping as the thesis of common ancestry. But they do make
special creation look rather ad hoc in light of the evidence. So the genetic evidence is one
of the best evidences in support of the thesis of common ancestry.

START DISCUSSION
Student: With the similarities when we say that the two organisms have very similar genetic makeup, I think I watched something recently from the ID theorists where they say that the parts that they used to say were the junk DNA is no longer. They've actually found functionality with that. When they say it's similar, is it accurate to say that they're only accounting for the part of the genetic code that codes for proteins and not all the other strands out there? So when they're looking at it, they say the strands that are coding is like 99% the same but then when you add all the rest of the so-called what they used to call junk DNA no longer the similarity isn't as similar as it used to look like.

Dr. Craig: I'd have to look at that more closely to be able to answer with confidence. It's hard to believe that someone like Venema could overlook that point, but I'd have to look again to see if he's talking about the whole genome or just, as you say, those operating coding parts of it.

END DISCUSSION

On the other hand, the fossil evidence stands in opposition to the doctrine of common ancestry. When Darwin proposed his theory, one of its major weaknesses was that there are no organisms around today which stand midway between other organisms as the transitional forms between them. We don't see transitional forms between the animals that are living today. Where are they? Darwin answered the objection by saying that these transitional animals which existed in the past have become extinct and eventually their fossil remains will be discovered. However, paleontologists have unearthed a good deal of fossil remains of extinct animals since Darwin published his *Origin of the Species*, and by and large they have not found these transitional forms. Instead, what they have found are just more distinct animals and plants which have died off. These extinct forms are simply like leaves on the canopy of the evolutionary tree of life. The common branches that connect the leaves have not by and large been found. Ian Tattersall of the American Museum of Natural History (whom I quoted previously) writes as follows:

The [Modern] Synthesis. . . elegantly explained virtually all evolutionary phenomena in terms of the gradual accretion of genetic changes in evolving lineages, under the guiding hand of natural selection. . . . The implication of this was that the fossil record should consistently show smooth intergradations from one species to the next; but, inconveniently, it too often didn’t. Species, it has turned out, tend to appear rather suddenly in the fossil record, to linger for varying but often very extended periods of time, and to disappear as suddenly as they arrived, replaced by other species which might or might not be closely related to them. For a long time—indeed, since Darwin himself—this failure of the fossils to accord with expectation was explained away by the famous incompleteness of the record. But as the years passed and more and more fossils were found, the
predictions of the Synthesis became increasingly out of sync with what was actually there. The time was evidently ripe for a reappraisal of paleontologists’ expectations from theory—and thus of the theory itself.\textsuperscript{132}

In 1972 Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould published a paper entitled “Punctuated equilibria: an alternative to phyletic gradualism.” Eldridge invoked what he called allopatric speciation to explain evolutionary change. You can remember the meaning of this word by its etymology. “Allo” means “other” or “different” and “patric” comes from the same root that words like “patristic” or “paternity” or “paternal” come from. In contrast to someone who is a compatriot (that is to say, shares your same country), allopatric would mean belonging to different regions. This allopatric speciation occurs when a geographical barrier of some sort separates a widespread species into isolated populations, and then the isolated populations evolve differently. The process of geographical separation followed by reproductive isolation has the effect of dramatically decreasing the size of the gene pool in the new species. Small gene pools belonging to smaller populations are inherently more unstable than large ones. The new species will therefore be more susceptible to change than the parent species, and this change may prove to be adaptive in the new situation. So evolutionary change is seen on this theory as being a rapid but sporadic process whereby a single parent species gives rise to two separated daughter species.

According to Punctuated Equilibria evolutionary change is still gradualistic. The theory is not positing leaps of evolutionary development. But the transitional forms would have been isolated in local populations which may have been quite small. Because of their local nature the remains of such transitional forms will be harder to find and therefore much rarer. Nevertheless, it still needs to be said that the almost complete absence of such forms in the fossil record still remains striking even on Punctuated Equilibria.

It's important to understand in this connection the difference between intermediate forms and transitional forms. It is certainly true that there are fossil remains of various intermediate forms, for example, the famous Archaeopteryx which is a bird but has both reptilian as well as avian features. For example, the Archaeopteryx has teeth in its beak and has claws on its wings and so has certain reptilian features. But an intermediate form is not the same thing as a transitional form. An intermediate form is an organism which exhibits features of two different kinds of animals. It looks like a blend of these two different kinds of animals. A transitional form is an organism which is the evolutionary bridge from an earlier animal to a later animal. An intermediate form may not be a transitional form. For example, Archaeopteryx is an intermediate form in that it exhibits

\textsuperscript{132} Ian Tattersall, \textit{The Fossil Trail: How We Know What We Think We Know about Human Evolution}, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 151.
the features of both birds and reptiles, but it's not a transitional form between reptiles and birds. Birds appear in the fossil record millions of years before Archaeopteryx appears. So it is not the evolutionary bridge between reptiles and birds. The same is true of the famous feathered dinosaurs. These are not dinosaurs on their way to becoming birds. They are intermediate forms but they are not transitional forms.

If the thesis of common ancestry is correct, we're not talking about there being a few intermediate forms in the fossil record like Archaeopteryx. Rather, as Michael Denton emphasizes in his book *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*\(^\text{133}\), if the thesis of common ancestry is true there should be literally millions and millions of transitional forms in the fossil record. Think, for example, of all the transitional forms that would have to exist in order for a bat and whale to have a common ancestor. And yet they're not there in the fossil record. Moreover, a bat and a whale are actually rather closely related in the grand evolutionary scheme of things in that they're both mammals and they're both vertebrates. How many transitional fossils should there be for a bat and a sponge to be descended from the same ancestor? This problem can no longer be dismissed by saying that we just haven't dug deep enough. The transitional forms have not been found because they are not there to be found.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student*: Are there any examples that they put forth as transitional fossil remains?

*Dr. Craig*: There must be, but I can't name one off the top of my head. You have, of course, earlier versions of the same animals, but to have an actual transitional form between two species would be harder to find. I can't think of one off the top of my head.

*Student*: The difference between a species (which is kind of our man-defined grouping of morphology and various things) and kind. The Bible says the kinds – animals followed their kind. Species is something we've defined. Dachshunds and dingos and cocker spaniels and coyotes are different species but they're all part of the dog kind. I think we have to be careful when we say . . . I think species is rather amorphous, but not kind.

*Dr. Craig*: I think the point you are making is quite right that Genesis, even taken literally, doesn't commit you to the fixity of species because that's a modern biological category that you can't impose on these ancient Hebrew writers. The author of Genesis 1 isn't trying to write a scientific treatise on the classification of animals. If you want to see such a classification, take a look at Aristotle's work on the different kinds of animals. Aristotle actually does write a book in which he offers a classification of various animals. It's intended to be a scientific treatise, and that's not what Genesis is. So by no means I think are we committed as Bible-believing Christians to the fixity of the species.

**Student:** I'm trying to understand better what is meant by the term “intermediate form.” I had the thought if, for example, bats and platypuses did not exist today but someone found them in the fossil record, would they be hailed as an intermediate form?

**Dr. Craig:** Ah! That's interesting. I don't think anyone would think that a platypus was a transitional form between ducks and mammals, or ducks and beavers, for example (even though it has a bill; it has some features that look like a duck). Or, to give another example, you've probably heard of so-called lungfish which exists today. These are fish which can crawl up out of the water onto the shore and breathe for a while and get along in air before they go back into the water again. They are hypothesized to be very much like the imagined transitional forms when the life came out of the primordial seas and moved onto the land. But the lungfish are not themselves these transitional forms. They're intermediate in that they have amphibian and fish-like features, but they're not the evolutionary bridge from one to another. By an intermediate form, what we mean is something that blends features found in different organisms.

**END DISCUSSION**

By way of summary, the data concerning the doctrine of common ancestry are mixed. I think that the genetic evidence does lend support for it, but the fossil evidence seems to tend against it. The absence of transitional forms in the fossil record combined with the evidence of genetics suggests that if the thesis of common ancestry is true then something is wrong with the explanatory mechanisms of neo-Darwinism. The explanatory mechanisms need to give a good account of both the genetic and the fossil evidence. Next time we will turn to an examination of those neo-Darwinian mechanisms.134

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134 Total Running Time: 35:36 (Copyright © 2019 William Lane Craig)
Lecture 32: Evidence for the Neo-Darwinian Mechanisms

During our last session we examined the evidence for the doctrine of common ancestry, and we saw that the evidence for that thesis is mixed. I think the genetic evidence provides significant support for it, but the fossil evidence seems to tend against it. The absence of transitional forms in the fossil record combined with the evidence of genetics suggests that if the thesis of common ancestry is true then there's something wrong with the explanatory mechanisms of neo-Darwinism. The neo-Darwinian explanatory mechanisms need to be able to give us a good account of both the genetic and the fossil evidence if they are to commend themselves to us.

Before we look more closely at those neo-Darwinian mechanisms, I want to say a word about a couple of questions that were asked last week that I had to beg off on. One of them was if I could think of any transitional forms. You'll remember we distinguished between a transitional form (which is a sort of evolutionary bridge from an ancestral organism to a later organism) and an intermediate form (which is a kind of blend of two different types of organisms). The intermediate forms are not necessarily ancestral to each other. Someone asked: What would be an example of a transitional form? On the way home, I thought of two possible examples. One is an organism called a Tiktaalik. This was a fish that lived about 375 million years ago in the so-called Devonian period. Like the modern lungfish, it was a fish that had the ability to raise itself up out of the water on its bony fins and so spend a brief time in the air. Many evolutionary biologists think that the Tiktaalik is a transitional form between fish and land animals. Another example that is very evident would be the Australopithecines. You can remember this from the expression australo which means “southern” (as in Australia), and pithecus which means “ape.” What these Australopithecines were were bipedal apes that evolved over a million years ago in southern and eastern Africa. Many evolutionary biologists think that humans evolved from these Australopithecines. There are many different kinds of Australopithecines attested in the fossil record, and most of them were probably just dead ends on the tree of primate evolution. They didn't lead to anything further. But many evolutionary biologists think that it may well have been that one of the lineages of these Australopithecines did lead to homo or to man. Those would be a couple of examples of proposed transitional forms in the fossil record. But you'll remember the point we were making last week was that on the neo-Darwinian theory we're not talking about a few isolated transitional forms; rather there should be millions and millions of these if the neo-Darwinian mechanisms are correct.

The other question that was asked was about the comparison between the genome of chimpanzees and human beings. You'll remember that I remarked on the fact that the
The genetic sequence of chimpanzees is strikingly similar to that of human beings. They appear to be very closely related. Someone asked me: Are you talking about just that part of the DNA that codes for proteins or are you talking about the entire genome that includes so-called junk DNA as well as this DNA that is coding? The similarity, I can report, between humans and chimps which is genome-wide is 95%. So including the junk DNA, the entire genome, we are about 95% similar to chimpanzees. If you include only the protein-coding sequences (that part of the DNA) the similarity between humans and chimps is 98%. It's striking to compare this with the genetic similarity between mice and rats. Mice and rats seem pretty close together, but in the case of mice and rats, the genome-wide similarity between mice and rats is about 70%. They're about 70% similar in their genome. If you ask just after the coding portion of the DNA then the similarity between mice and rats is about 82%. So 70% and 82% compared to humans and chimps which is 98% and 95%. In other words, the difference between mice and rats genetically is far, far in excess of the difference between human beings and chimpanzees genetically. Now, lest anybody be so foolish as to say, well, then this shows that we're just like apes or that we're just like chimpanzees, what you need to remember is that a difference in the genotype or the genetic structure of an organism can result in monumental changes in the phenotype, that is to say, its appearance and structure and other properties. In other words, all it takes is a change in a few genes and there can be utterly revolutionary consequences in the organisms. So while chimps sit around in forests picking lice off of each other, human beings fly to the moon, write symphonies and novels, build cathedrals, have modern medicine, and ride in nuclear submarines. So don't be deceived by the genetic similarity between chimps and humans into saying we're just like the apes. But that does answer the question that was posed whether or not we're talking about just coding portions of the DNA or the entire genetic sequence.

Before we look at the neo-Darwinian explanatory mechanisms of genetic mutation and natural selection, I think it's worth emphasizing just how extraordinary an extrapolation neo-Darwinism involves. Many of us would probably think that if random mutation and natural selection could explain, for example, the evolution of the horse from a tiny three-toed creature up to a modern thoroughbred today that would really show the power of these neo-Darwinian mechanisms. In fact, evolution within a single kind like that is just nothing compared to the whole range of life. You might think if we could show that random mutation and natural selection could explain, say, how a bat and a whale evolved from a common ancestor that would really show the power of these explanatory mechanisms. Think again!

This figure illustrates the major phyla or divisions of multicellular animals.
Notice that a bat and a whale are both mammals and vertebrates in the first category – the top category with the picture of the fish. Mammals is just a subcategory of the vertebrates. So even the evolution of a bat and a whale from a common ancestor would be an utter triviality compared to the wide range of the animal kingdom. It would do nothing to explain, for example, how a bat and a sea urchin (which is about the fifth figure down) would be evolved from a common ancestor, not to speak of the difference between a bat and a sponge (down on the bottom of the chart). So the idea that natural selection and genetic mutation are able to explain how everything could have evolved involves an enormous extrapolation – an incredible leap of faith in the efficacy of these neo-Darwinian mechanisms.
If that takes your breath away, get a load at this next chart. This shows you the wide categories of life on Earth.

Notice that that entire previous slide that we looked at is contained in that little twig in the upper right-hand corner called “Animals.” I love the modesty of that – “Animals.” That's all of them! Look just to the right of that – “Plants.” The whole plant kingdom is included in that little twig. And these are just eukaryotes – just the twigs on the branch of eukaryotes, which are cells that have membranes containing chromosomes in them. There are still the other two domains containing bacteria and archaea to be accounted for and to come from the LUCA which is the Last Universal Common Ancestor from which allegedly all life arose. The extrapolation of the neo-Darwinian mechanisms from peppered moths and fruit flies and finch beaks to the production and evolution of every living thing on Earth is a breathtaking extrapolation of gargantuan, Brobdingnagian, proportions. And we know that in science such extrapolations sometimes fail. For example, Albert Einstein, having successfully crafted a special or restricted theory of relativity to relativize uniform motion to reference frames, tried to extend or extrapolate the theory of relativity to a general theory of relativity that would relativize all motion including acceleration and rotation. Unfortunately for Einstein, that effort was a failure. The so-called general theory of relativity is really a theory of gravitation. It is the gravitational theory that is Einstein's greatest accomplishment and which replaced Newton's theory of gravity. But Einstein was not able to craft a general principle of relativity that would relativize away accelerated and rotary motion in the way that he had been able to for uniform motion. So that's just one example in science of where an attempted extrapolation in fact failed. Again, I think we're compelled to ask: What is the
Francisco Ayala, whom I've quoted previously, gives a very typical case of the evidence offered on behalf of these neo-Darwinian mechanisms. Ayala appeals principally to three phenomena. First is the experience of breeders. Secondly is the famous peppered moth experiments. And thirdly would be the development of drug resistance on the basis of random mutation.

With respect to the first of these – the experience of breeders – Ayala appeals to the experience of breeders in producing new varieties of, say, roses or dogs. But such experience obviously does nothing to justify the extrapolation of these mechanisms to the production of grand evolutionary change. Indeed, quite the contrary. The experience of breeders tends to show the limits of these mechanisms. For example, despite decades of effort, breeders have never been able to get chickens to lay more than one egg per day. So breeding actually tends to show the limits of what natural selection and mutation can do rather than their almost infinite plasticity.

Ayala also appeals to the famous peppered moth experiments. But all that happened in that case was that the proportion of light-colored moths in the population decreased and the proportion of dark-colored moths in the population increased. Light-colored moths never evolved into dark-colored moths. It was just a matter of their relative proportions in the population. Taken as evidence of the power of natural selection and random mutation to produce grand evolutionary change, to call such evidence paltry would be to pay it an over-compliment, I think.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I've read a quote many years ago by Dr. Jerry Coyne from the University of Chicago that said that when he found out that the peppered moth experiment was all false, that the moths themselves were glued on the trees, and all of the pictures and everything else, he said it was like being a six-year-old and being told that Santa Claus didn't exist.

Dr. Craig: Coyne is a very aggressive anti-religious evolutionary biologist. That’s an interesting testimony. What you are referring to is that the pictures in the journals were not of the moths naturally lighting on the bark of the dark trees, they were in fact pinned there by the researchers and then the photographs were taken. The moths actually nest up in the leaves.

Student: I emailed him several times. We communicated back and forth for a while until he figured out that . . . I was asking him how did the genes start having dark rather than
once I have dark having the proportions change. He's a smart guy. He figured out I was a creationist and stopped.

**Student:** What weakens the genetic case is that changes in biological organisms are non-random. It's like the cave fish whose eyes have lost their effectiveness. If they're taken out of the cave and put in lighted environments, several generations later they get their eyes back. So the mechanism, the genetic packages, are there and so in the case of the feathered moth it didn't evolve or devolve, it's just that the environment made one variety of the moth more predominant than the other, and then when the environment cleaned up then the mix went back to about 50/50.

**Dr. Craig:** I'm not familiar with the illustration of the cave salamanders and other creatures that lose sight or color, but if what you're saying is correct it sounds very much like Darwin's finches – that the larger beaks tended to predominate when they were in dry weather (drought) but then during the rainy season the beak proportions would return to what it was before because the information was still there.

**Student:** Just another note in connection with Denton you mentioned last week. He also made the point that you have in these trees of life you have organisms that have origin in the same branch or what have you but have widely different gestation rates and mutation rates, but yet they're called similar.

**Dr. Craig:** Yes, I was careful to state my points modestly with respect to the shared genetic code and the similarity of the genetically reconstructed tree of life to a tree of life constructed on the basis of morphology or body plans. It is true that there are places where they don't line up. Turtles, for example, don't seem to fit in well. But those are outliers. The overwhelming pattern, the large-scale pattern, I think is quite supportive of a parallelism, shall we say, between the genetic structure of these animals and their morphological characteristics.

**Student:** I was watching this nature show which we all do on Sunday evenings a lot of times, and they were talking about the octopus and how different the octopus was compared to any other species. It was amazing transformation the way this octopus could change colors and morph and go into places. But they described it – they said this is more like an alien creature than any other entity on the planet. In other words, it evolved distinctly differently from everything else. And its appearance, the way it changes color and the way that it can morph and go into these tiny places. An invertebrate, in other words.

**Dr. Craig:** Yes, it's a fantastic animal. The thing that's most noteworthy and famous about the octopus is its eye. The eye of the octopus (in my understanding) is the closest kind of eye to the human eye that exists in nature. The octopus also has a so-called camera eye, and yet obviously it's utterly unrelated – well, it's not closely related shall we say – to
human beings on the evolutionary tree. They would be very, very far apart. This is a phenomenon that has been called convergent evolution where it seems like two independent evolutionary pathways both arrived at something very, very similar – in this case, the eye. So that's another puzzle to be explained – how do you have convergent evolution?

END DISCUSSION

I wanted to make the point about the finch beaks that I just mentioned in regard to an earlier question. On the Galapagos Islands when Darwin visited those, he measured finch beaks of different sizes of the birds that were there. But, again, like the peppered moths, nothing really evolved here. Again, it was just that the proportion of the finches with large beaks increased during the dry season (during the times of drought) and then the proportions with small beaks would decrease during those droughts. But when the rains would come then the normal proportions of the beaks would return among the population of finches there. So it wasn't as though the finches were evolving into something else. It was just a matter of decreasing proportions in the population.

Ayala also mentions in this connection the speciation that occurs among fruit flies in the Hawaiian Islands. The Hawaiian Islands are extremely isolated and so tend to be sealed off from outside influences. Yet, 500 species of fruit fly exist in the Hawaiian Islands. This is 1/4 of all the species of fruit fly that exists in the entire world. It would seem bizarre to think that God somehow favored fruit flies in the Hawaiian Islands that he would create 1/4 of all the world's species of fruit flies in Hawaii. The evidence, I think, would more persuasively point to their common ancestry and evolution. I think we could agree that this is well within the limits of what neo-Darwinian mechanisms can achieve. It could produce a multiplicity of different fruit flies on the various islands. This is probably due to genetic drift of the flies among the islands – a non-adaptational change in them in these various populations of flies on the islands. But, again, that hardly would go to justify the extrapolation of these mechanisms to the grand evolutionary scenario. It's a pretty big leap from fruit flies to explaining the entire history of life on this planet.

Finally, Professor Ayala appeals to the ability of organisms to develop resistance to drugs and poisons through random mutation and natural selection. He points out how an unacceptably improbable double mutation can occur one step at a time to produce cumulative change. Then he extrapolates this process to explain vast evolutionary change. But of course the question is precisely: Can the example of adaptation or resistance to drugs and poisons be extrapolated in that way?

In his book, The Edge of Evolution, Michael Behe argues that, in fact, such an extrapolation is illegitimate. He maintains that the very evidence of organisms’
development of drug resistance is a powerful indication of the limits of random mutation and natural selection to evolutionary change.

He uses the example of malaria and the human immune system. Malaria and the human immune system have been waging war against each other for over 10,000 years. Since the advent of modern medicine human beings have been developing anti-malarial drugs to try to destroy this organism. Unfortunately for us, the malarial population is huge. The average person infected with malaria has over one trillion malarial cells in his body. Therefore malaria mutates extremely rapidly and so has been able to develop resistance to every drug that we've hurled at it. Simple single point mutations are enough to make malaria drug-resistant. For example, one mutation in an amino acid at point 108 suffices to render malaria drug-resistant to the drug pyrimethamine.

On the other hand, Behe points out there is tremendous selective pressure for the human immune system to develop some sort of a defense against malaria, but it hasn't been able to do so. Instead, what's happened is that a mutation has occurred in the human respiratory system – not in the immune system, in the respiratory system – which makes some people immune to malaria, namely sickle hemoglobin. Unfortunately, the downside is that it also produces sickle cell anemia which is eventually deadly.

This is where things get really interesting. Despite its incredible mutation rate which has enabled malaria to overcome every drug we've thrown at it, malaria has never in all those thousands of years and trillions of mutations been able to overcome sickle hemoglobin. Molecular biology explains why. Resistance to a drug can result from a simple single-point mutation. But overcoming sickle hemoglobin would require multiple simultaneous mutations or else a sequence of mutations occurring blindly, and both are just too improbable to occur. So we see the limits of random mutation and natural selection in malaria's inability to overcome sickle hemoglobin in the human respiratory system.

We're out of time, so let's close there. Next time we'll look at Behe’s example of how HIV provides another example – another case study – in addition to malaria.\textsuperscript{135}
Lecture 33: Inadequacies of the Neo-Darwinian Mechanisms

We've been looking at the adequacy of the neo-Darwinian mechanisms of random mutation and natural selection to draw the extraordinary extrapolation from local effects such as finch beaks and peppered moths to the evolution of all life on Earth from a common ancestor. We looked at the experience of both breeders as well as the peppered moth experiments, and then turned to the question of drug resistance in microorganisms as a result of random mutations. You'll recall that Michael Behe looks at malaria as a counter-example to this claim. Malaria mutates at a tremendously rapid rate, and as a result it's been able to overcome every drug that we've developed against it. But the human respiratory system has also mutated and developed something that malaria has not been able to overcome, namely sickle hemoglobin. The reason that malaria can overcome drugs and poisons is because in order to do so relatively simple mutations need to occur. But, according to Behe, in order to overcome sickle hemoglobin you would need to have multiple mutations either occurring simultaneously or blindly step-by-step, and this is simply too improbable to happen. Therefore, despite trillions of cells and tens of thousands of generations, malaria has never been able to mutate enough to overcome sickle hemoglobin.

Behe looks at HIV as another case study. HIV mutates 10,000 times faster than malaria. In the last 50 years alone the AIDS virus has mutated as much as all the cells that have ever existed on this planet. In just 50 years! It has tried out every possible combination of up to six-point simultaneous mutations and thus has become resistant to every drug that we've developed. But, Behe says, “through all that, there have been no significant basic biochemical changes in the virus at all.” “. . . on a functional biochemical level, the virus has been a complete stick-in-the-mud.”

Behe concludes,

The studies of malaria and HIV provide by far the best direct evidence [we have] of what [Darwinism] can do. . . . Here we have genetic studies over thousands upon thousands of generations, of trillions and trillions of organisms, and little of biochemical significance to show for it. . . . Our experience with HIV [and malaria] gives good reason . . . to think that Darwinism doesn’t do much—even with billions of years and all the cells in the world at its disposal.”

Finally, Behe claims that studies on the bacterium _E. coli_ carried out by Richard Lenski and his colleagues also support the same conclusion. Lenski published results of their research on 40,000 generations of _E. coli_ grown in the laboratory. I've read that it's over 65,000 generations today. They discovered that while there were a couple score beneficial
mutations that occurred in these *E. coli* bacteria, nevertheless, they were degradative or degenerative in nature. That is to say, they involved the *loss* of genetic information or the *loss* of protein function. There's no indication that these bacteria were on their way to building new complex systems. So Behe thinks that Lenski's work lines up well with the results of malarial and HIV studies. In a huge number of tries, one sees minor changes, some beneficial, but overwhelmingly degradative with no new complex systems evolving.

Malaria, HIV, and *E. coli* represent three fundamentally different forms of life – a Eukaryote (that has a nucleus), a virus, and a Prokaryote (a cell without a nucleus). In each of these cases the evidence for the efficacy of the neo-Darwinian mechanisms is the same: it doesn't do very much.

I quote from Michael Behe's online blog:

> Instead of imagining what the power of random mutation and selection might do, we can look at the examples of what it has done. And when we look at the best, clearest examples, the results are, to say the least, quite modest. Time and again we see that random mutations are incoherent and much more likely to degrade a genome than to add to it. And these are the positively selected beneficial random mutations. . . . There is no evidence that Darwinian processes can take the multiple, coherent steps needed to build new molecular machinery that fills the cell.

Thus, the argument from the development of drug resistance in microorganisms appears to completely backfire. Far from providing evidence of the power of the neo-Darwinian mechanisms to produce grand evolutionary change, our experience with drug resistance in bacteria and viruses and microorganisms reveals the severe limits of those mechanisms.

So, again I ask, where is the evidence for the extraordinary extrapolation that neo-Darwinism involves? Behe says “the evidence for common descent seems compelling,” but “. . . except at life’s periphery the evidence for a pivotal role for random mutations is terrible.” If he's wrong about this, then what is the evidence? I am genuinely open to it. Just tell me what it is.

So when I, as an objective albeit lay observer, look at the evidence, it seems to me that we haven't been given any good reason to think that the neo-Darwinian mechanisms are sufficient to explain that extraordinary diversity of life that we see on this planet during the time available.

**START DISCUSSION**
**Student:** Sometimes you see comments in the popular press to the effect that evolution has designed us to be, for example, compassionate or empathetic. Or you'll see articles that say, for example, risky behavior by adolescents is something that evolution created. And all of these characteristics have some kind of, the popular thinking is, survival benefit for the species, maybe not the individual but species. Based on what you're saying as you're discussing Behe, it seems like that's just magical thinking to think that evolution has designed these characteristics, and nobody has ever identified the genetic basis for these characteristics, the expressions that we see, or the so-called evolutionary history that got us there.

**Dr. Craig:** Yes, there's been a great deal of discussion whether altruism for example can have an evolutionary basis because it seems the very opposite of having reproductive advantage if you're willing to sacrifice your life for someone who's not even a kinsman. From what I've read, most of this does seem to just be hand-waving; that in fact it is largely conjectural as to whether or not our moral beliefs can be traced to some sort of genetic basis. But I want to say as a philosopher that even if they can this is really irrelevant to the question of their objectivity because to think that that would undermine the objectivity of the moral values and duties we believe in is to commit the genetic fallacy. It's a textbook example of the genetic fallacy which is the fallacy of trying to invalidate a viewpoint by explaining how the person came to hold it. Even if evolution has programmed into us belief in the noble morals and ideals that we have, that does absolutely nothing to prove that those are not objective and true.

**Student:** It strikes me that Christians are often accused of magical thinking by believing in divine creation or the New Testament miracles, and it seems to me the shoe’s on the other foot here.

**Dr. Craig:** OK, fair comment. Each person can make up his own mind.

**Student:** Along those same lines, a lot of times in the publications they ascribe cognitive qualities to evolution – that evolution do this or decided this – which is completely contradictory to, especially, naturalistic evolution.

**Dr. Craig:** That doesn't invalidate the theory, but you're quite right that often in sloppy presentations of it anthropomorphic language will be used about natural selection (thinking of what it will do, and choosing to do this or that), and that is to misrepresent the theory.

**END DISCUSSION**

In their book *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, the physicists John Barrow and Frank Tipler list ten steps in the course of human evolution, each of which – *each of which* – is so improbable that before it could occur the sun would have ceased to be a
main-sequence star and incinerated the Earth. These include things like the development of a DNA-based genetic code, the evolution of aerobic respiration, the evolution of glucose fermentation into pyruvic acid, the development of an endoskeleton, and so on and so forth: Ten steps in the evolution of Homo sapiens, each of which is so improbable that before it could happen the sun would have gone through the course of its stellar evolution, become a red giant, and incinerated the Earth.

As a result Barrow and Tipler report,

> There has developed a general consensus among evolutionists that the evolution of intelligent life, comparable in information-processing ability to that of Homo sapiens, is so improbable that it is unlikely to have occurred on any other planet in the entire visible universe.

But then the inevitable question arises: Why think in that case that it has evolved by means of these neo-Darwinian mechanisms on this planet? Indeed, doesn't the evidence suggest just the opposite? In fact, Tipler himself now believes that the evolutionary process must have been guided in order to arrive at Homo sapiens.

I mentioned earlier that during the 1970s within the evolutionary community rumblings began to be felt about the inadequacy of the Modern Synthesis. Those rumblings have continued to grow so that today it is widely recognized that the neo-Darwinian mechanisms are inadequate and so need to be supplemented by additional new mechanisms. In November of 2016 a conference of the Royal Society in London held a conference devoted to the theme of the problems in the Modern Synthesis. As you might expect, numerous new mechanisms were suggested but no consensus emerged except that the standard picture needs major revision.

Stephen Meyer was one of the attendees of this conference, and among the competing alternatives presented were the following that he lists.

1. Evolutionary developmental biology. This is sometimes affectionately called evo-devo. Developmental biology is the development of the embryo in-utero. Many evolutionary developmental biologists will emphasize mutations in the genes that control the expression of other genes during the embryonic development of an organism. For example, a mutation in the so-called Hox genes which are master regulatory genes that affect the location, timing, and expression of other genes might have a disproportionately large effect on development and thus it could play a significant role in modifying animal body plans. So evo-devo advocates have thus broken with the Modern Synthesis regarding the notion of gradualism, the size or the increment of evolutionary change. It could occur in leaps through these embryonic developments. One challenge to this proposal however is that Hox genes in all animal forms are expressed well after the body
plan is already established in-utero. Earlier mutations that occur proved to be inevitably lethal to the organism.

2. Self-organization. Self-organizational theorists try to explain the origin of order in living systems by reference to purely physical or chemical processes. They often point to simple geometric shapes or repetitive forms of order which arise from purely physical or chemical processes. For example, crystals. Think of a snowflake, for example, and the beautiful order that that exhibits. Or vortices, that is to say whirling whirlpools of water or convection currents brought on by temperature in the air. These all illustrate self-organizational processes. Advocates see the embryological development of cells into the different cell types of distinct tissues (like brain cells, heart cells, liver cells, and so forth) to be due to epigenetic information, not genetic information. Epigenetic information will be information that is outside of the genetic structure. It's not part of the genome, and it specifies the position of the cell or the cell membrane for example relative to its context during embryological development. Advocates of the self-organizational thesis therefore reject the neo-Darwinian assumption that animal development is determined entirely by genetic structure. They deemphasize the role of random mutations in producing change. So on self-organizational theories you have a stronger emphasis on spontaneous order arising through epigenetic information. One challenge this theory faces, however, is that it doesn't explain the origin of the epigenetic information that governs cell differentiation.

3. Neutral evolution. Advocates of neutral evolution downplay natural selection in favor of neutral processes of mutation and genetic drift as the mechanisms responsible for evolution. Evolutionary biologists think that new forms of animal life originated in small populations that got separated from the larger populations. But advocates of neutral evolution argue that in these small populations natural selection will have difficulty overcoming the effects of random genetic drift, meaning that the beneficial mutations are likely to be lost before they can become fixed in the population. So any evolution that takes place in the organisms of small populations is due almost completely to these neutral factors and is almost completely unaffected by natural selection. They just drift neutrally without respect to adaptive advantage. One problem for this view is that there is apparently no experimental evidence that neutral processes like recombination, genetic drift, and mutation can actually produce the genetic complexity required.

4. Neo-Lamarckianism. You'll remember we talked earlier about Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, the French biologist who preceded Darwin. Lamarck and Darwin both believed, in fact, that heredity was a matter of the use or disuse of certain organs by animals that then could be transmitted to their offspring through reproduction. With the identification of chromosomes as the entity responsible for the transmission of inheritance however Lamarckian theories fell out of favor. The gene now became the locus of all heritable
change. After the discovery of DNA in 1953 biologists equated genes with specifically arranged nucleotide sequences on the DNA molecule. Recently, however, biologists have recognized that some biological information—epigenetic information—resides in structures outside the DNA, and perhaps these non-genetic sources of information influence the course of evolution. Changes in the non-genetic structures of an organism could affect subsequent generations in the course of evolution. I was fascinated to learn that Massimo Pigliucci, whom I debated years ago at UGA, is an advocate of neo-Lamarckianism, which I thought was rather charming. One problem that this view faces is that there is no case of induced epigenetic change which then persists permanently within a population which is what neo-Lamarckianism says happens.

5. Natural genetic engineering. Organisms on this view do not generate mutations randomly but rather they can modify themselves in response to environmental changes. On this view organisms have a pre-programmed adaptive capacity for engineered change where organisms respond intelligently to environmental influences rearranging or mutating their genetic information in regulated ways in order to maintain viability. A problem for this view is that theorists do not explain where the programming that accounts for the pre-programmed adaptive capacity of living organisms comes from in the first place.

In summary, I think you just get a feel here for the debate that is going on among evolutionary theorists today in an effort to provide adequate explanatory mechanisms for evolutionary change. When I was at a conference on the doctrine of creation three years ago one of the speakers offered a critique of what he called Darwinism. During the Q&A afterwards an evolutionary biologist from a major university stood to his feet and challenged him—*Why do you keep talking about Darwinism?*, he said. *Darwinism has been dead for over 100 years.* The speaker replied, *Well, then, neo-Darwinism.* At which the biologist replied, *Neo-Darwinism has been dead since the late 1960s.* And the speaker didn't know what to say at that point. Now, I was more than mildly surprised. Neo-Darwinism is dead? Haven't we been taught for years that it is an incontrovertible fact? That those who challenge it are either religious kooks or ignoramuses on the level of flat-earthers? The Modern Synthesis which dominated 20th century biology for much of the century and which most of us learned in schools is dead? I recall a remark in this connection by William Dembski about mavericks who challenge a scientific paradigm. Dembski said at first they are simply ignored (Ignore them and they'll go away). When they don't go away then they are ridiculed and laughed at. As their critiques continue and can no longer be ignored they are refuted by advocates of the established view. Next they may come to be tolerated. Finally, the response to them is, *Well, we knew that all along!* *Ho-hum!* The contemporary state of the debate shows, at least I think, that the Modern Synthesis is inadequate to explain evolutionary change and so at least needs
supplementation by additional mechanisms. Doubtless those mechanisms will include some of those that we have just briefly surveyed such as the epigenetic information emphasized by evo-devo theorists. But notice our original question remains unanswered: Are these mechanisms even taken collectively adequate to explain the grand evolutionary story required by the thesis of common descent? I'm rather confident that the whole story has not yet been told, and that even if the doctrine of common ancestry is true these mechanisms are insufficient to explain the biological complexity that we have today. Something more is at work.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student*: If someone were to question taking something like *E. coli* or HIV and looking at it going through a long series of mutations – the extrapolation of that to something much more complex like a human – what could we say to them in response to that?

*Dr. Craig*: That that extrapolation needs to be justified. I mean, after all, the point that Behe makes in choosing these simple microorganisms is the rapidity with which they reproduce and mutate. They have mutation rates that are just fantastic compared to, say, horses and elephants and other large-scale animals. He's picking organisms like bacteria, microorganisms, and viruses that would be the best candidates for random mutation and natural selection to have a significant effect on their development.

*Student*: If the mechanisms of evolutionary change and diversity are unknown, can we reject common ancestry and the mechanisms of that? I mean why do we keep talking about it and talking about evolution and common ancestry, I think it's all bunk.

*Dr. Craig*: You kind of got a fork in the road here, I think. Well, they're two routes that you could take. One route would be to say that the thesis of common ancestry is true but that these mechanisms are inadequate to account for it. That would allow you to be in line with the genetic data that has convinced most biologists that all forms are genetically related to each other but that these mechanisms can't explain it. The other one would be to go back to the thesis of common ancestry and say, wait a minute, maybe these mechanisms do have a kind of limited effectiveness. They can produce small-scale evolutionary changes but not massive ones, and so maybe the thesis of common ancestry isn't true. Then you're going to need to explain the genetic evidence. You're going to need to provide some alternative for that. But that would be a different way of doing it.

*Student*: Concerning about epigenetic – I'd read about that. Your DNA is not your destiny and in some other things. Neo-Lamarckianism. They found that in Finland (because they had accurate histories of populations for centuries) when you had bumper crops people tended to overeat and had shorter lifespans, but when they didn't have a lot of grain they had healthier greens. It turns out that they now know (and what's odd and what I want to point to is) that it seems like it's designed in there if you eat a lot of greens only healthy
genes get expressed and it's by the methane bonding the closer it is and it controls which genes get expressed. Who put the design to have that? It is like God’s trying to train us to take care of ourselves. So there's a design in there that we have. It's not something new. The epigenetics is only controlling what’s already in there to be expressed. All that’s designed. One of the later things they went on (this is after the DNA is not your destiny), they said a zygote that even where the binding of the nucleus of the films that attached to the cell wall, if you move any of those you change the outcome. They said everything, every bit of information organizational, is used. There's four layers of programming of the DNA, and the methane from eating greens is just one of them.

Dr. Craig: I haven't heard about that specific case, but you're quite right in emphasizing things like even spatial orientation and location can affect this.

Student: If there are all these problems with the mechanisms of evolution that we've been discussing, how does this fit in if one were to accept theistic evolution?

Dr. Craig: That will be the question that we will take up next time. If you look at your outline you will see now that we come to a point of theological synthesis where we try to say: How should we understand this as Christians? We'll look at that when we meet again.

END DISCUSSION
Lecture 34: Progressive Creationism – Integrating the Scientific Evidence with the Genesis Narrative

We today come at long last to the concluding section of our excursus on creation and evolution.

How might one integrate the scientific evidence that we've surveyed with the Genesis narrative? It seems to me that so-called progressive creationism fits the evidence nicely. Progressive creationism suggests that God intervenes periodically to bring about miraculously new forms of life and then allows natural evolutionary change to take place with respect to those life forms. Progressive creationism differs from theistic evolution in the degree of confidence that is placed in the explanatory mechanisms of evolutionary biology. Theistic evolutionists repose great confidence in the adequacy of those mechanisms to produce grand evolutionary change. Progressive creationists are more skeptical. On the progressive creationist viewpoint, grand evolutionary change would require miraculous creationist acts of God as he intervenes in the process of biological evolution to bring about significant evolutionary change. This does not necessarily envision acts which are independent of natural mechanisms. Perhaps God miraculously causes, for example, chemical combinations or mutations at key junctures that would not in all probability occur by purely natural means. This sort of creationism is progressive over time and may involve natural mechanisms.

How would this view comport with the thesis of common ancestry? I think that this doctrine could either affirm or deny the thesis of common ancestry. That would depend on whether or not you think that God's miraculous acts of intervention would be acts of creation ex nihilo. For example, we can imagine a bare lake existing at some point in the distant past. All of a sudden, out of nothing, some ducks would appear on the surface of the lake miraculously created by God. I think it's certainly within God's power to create ducks in this way, but I must confess that it smacks a little bit too much of magic to me. I noticed that when God creates in the Genesis narrative he uses nature. For example, he says, *Let the earth bring forth vegetation and fruit trees. Let the earth bring forth terrestrial animals.* He creates man out of the dust of the earth, not ex nihilo. He uses means. So it may well be that God uses pre-existing chemicals and lifeforms as the stuff on which he acts miraculously. For example, to create birds God could bring about a systemic macro-mutation so that a bird would hatch out of a reptile egg. Something of that sort is so fantastically improbable it would never occur by the normal mechanisms of mutation and natural selection, but God could produce a system-wide mutation that would yield grand evolutionary change as a result. Nor need the progressive creationist envision such extreme examples of mutational change wrought by God. Such a view would explain the presence of a similar genetic code among living organisms and the
genetic traces which are indicative of common ancestry. But it would also explain why we don't find many transitional forms in the fossil record. Because of progressive creationist interventions, grand evolutionary change wouldn't leave any fossil traces (or few) of transitional forms. Rather you would find discontinuity along with genetic similarity.

So some kind of progressive creationism is the view that I personally find the most attractive. But again I want to reiterate that these are issues on which I have no final and fixed viewpoint. Like you, I am an interested layman in these subjects, interested in learning and studying further, and exploring them more deeply.

START DISCUSSION

Student: I guess the bottom line here is that if God exists anything is possible.

Dr. Craig: Yes, but it's not the bottom line because we're not interested in just possibilities. We're interested in what provides an integrative synthesis of both the scientific evidence and the biblical material. For example, while Young Earth Creationism is possible, it would fly in the face of scientific evidence and therefore wouldn't provide a good integrative view. So it's not enough just to appeal to possibility. We need to find something that will do justice to all of our sources of knowledge about the origin of lifeforms.

Student: The question that would be: how long would this progressive bit be from day to day leaving a fossil record? I think it would imply that in certain periods of time that there was death when there shouldn't have been because death only arrived after sin so you had fossil records there.

Dr. Craig: Wow. OK, you raised a question that would take us in a very different direction. When you say there would be death where there shouldn't have been, you are presupposing an interpretation of the Genesis story that I just reject. If you ask why, we spent months on that some time ago, and I can't go back and rehearse all that again. But I simply see no reason to think that the evolutionary timetable is incompatible with Genesis chapter 1 or the first eleven chapters of Genesis. So I'm presupposing the geological timetable that is accepted in modern science and asking how can we best integrate our theology with what we learned from contemporary science about the origin of life and biological complexity.

Student: What would be the dividing line between deism (where God sets things in order and then just lets them happen) and then this progressive creationism where he's still personally involved.

Dr. Craig: This is a great question. He's asking about the difference between theistic evolution and progressive creationism. I think this is a kind of continuum. It's not as
though there is a clear dividing line. Based upon my discussions with theistic evolutionists – next month I'll be participating in a panel discussion at the Evangelical Philosophical Society on this very question – I think that we would say that the theistic evolutionist reposes a great deal of confidence in the explanatory mechanisms of evolutionary biology (things like random mutation, natural selection, epigenetic factors that influence embryological development, and some of these other new proposals that we talked about a few weeks ago), whereas the progressive creationist is more skeptical of the adequacy of those explanatory mechanisms to produce the grand evolutionary story that the past seems to tell.

Student: Progressive creationism, which does seem to resemble a theistic evolution, one issue that comes up is whether we are diluting the inference from the complexity of nature to the existence of a creator. The two passages that are usually cited for natural theology are Psalm 19 and Romans 1. Psalm 19 says, *The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament showeth his handiwork*. Romans 1 says, *God's invisible attributes, eternal power and divine nature, are clearly seen from what is made and people suppress that truth in unrighteousness*. It seems like if we don't maintain the argument that that is the inference people should draw from the complexity of nature we are giving up or watering down the design argument. I wrote down in my notes a few weeks ago when you started this topic, we're not trying to justify the design inference. It seems to me that that's what we want to do. I just wonder what your comment is.

Dr. Craig: As natural theologians we might want to run a design argument, but that's not our project here. Our project here is theological integration. We want to assume the truth of divine revelation and of the Bible, and then we want to see how that is best integrated with the data of modern science. So we're not interested now in an argument for the existence of God based upon biological complexity. Having said that though, I would be very cautious about placing too much theological freight on those verses that you cited. I think one can affirm that the creation shows forth the glory of God clearly without having to deny that things are evolutionarily related to one another. Indeed, the whole progress of evolution from the prebiotic soup right up through *Homo sapiens* on this planet itself, I think, bespeaks divine design and the existence of a creator. The very evolutionary process, it seems to me, cries out for design. You'll remember I quoted Barrow and Tipler concerning ten steps in the evolution of *Homo sapiens*, each of which is so improbable that before it would occur the sun would have completed its stellar evolution and incinerated the Earth. And yet, all ten, in their view, have occurred. These are persons who endorse the standard evolutionary paradigm. They're not creationists. They say that this has happened, but that it is so improbable that I think it cries out for saying that God exists and is behind it all. I'd be careful about trying to load too much onto those verses
which simply says that on the basis of nature around us we can see that there is a divine creator.

*Student:* Of course, Dawkins, as we've talked about, presents sort of what I take to be the standard view of neo-Darwinians, for example, in *The Blind Watchmaker*. There's no room for God, he says, in the evolutionary process. But it seems to me that (I guess this may be a diversion but) if you run the design argument based merely on the initial conditions of the Big Bang (the fine-tuning argument) then you lose the impact that is described in Psalm 19 and Romans 1 because we can't see the initial conditions of the Big Bang. We can see the complexity of nature, and to me that's the power of the design argument. From what you see, you infer a designer.

*Dr. Craig:* All right, but I didn't appeal to fine-tuning in my answer to your question. I think you're quite right in what you said, but that wasn't my response. My response was that when you look at nature around us the existence of a designer and creator is evident. I'm sure that what Paul was talking about was not biological evolution or fine-tuning. He was talking about the grandeur of the heavens above, the beauty of the animal world, the intricacy of a leaf and its structure. This is an appeal to ordinary experience that any ancient person could have as he looked around the world and saw its beauty. You can show similar statements in Aristotle and Plato that read just like Romans 1, written wholly independently of biblical revelation in which Aristotle says when you look at the grandeur of the skies and the stars at night and the world around us he says it's indisputable that there exist gods and that the world is the handiwork of these gods. I think Paul is offering a kind of ordinary, common-sense argument there, and that where biological evolution and so forth would become relevant would be when the person tries to deny that inference, like Dawkins does, by postulating, for example, naturalistic evolutionary mechanisms to explain what we see around us. But you've heard my criticisms of those mechanisms. I am skeptical of them, and therefore think that it's very attractive to think that God has intervened miraculously in the evolutionary process along the way. Otherwise it wouldn't have evolved the complexity that we do see.

*Student:* Can you clarify the word “progressive” – what do you mean by that?

*Dr. Craig:* Over time. This isn’t meant in a political sense. [laughter] In other words, it's not a creationism that imagines a single act right at the beginning, but it imagines ongoing creative acts of God throughout history to bring about evolutionary change. Thank you for asking for that clarification.

**END DISCUSSION**

Let's talk now about theological considerations. I found that theological considerations are, in the mind of many people, both Christian and non-Christian alike, just as important or even more important than scientific considerations in thinking that a progressive
creationist account such as I've suggested will not work. There is a sort of unholy alliance today between Young Earth Creationists and naturalistic evolutionary biologists aimed at invalidating any account that would integrate theism and evolutionary biology. Young Earth Creationists and naturalists agree that theism and evolutionary biology are incompatible. Creationists conclude that therefore evolutionary biology is false, whereas naturalists conclude that therefore theism is false. So what are the arguments that convince them both that a progressive creationist account cannot be true?

The objections are basically versions of the problem of evil, not the problem of moral evil, but the problem of natural evil. Two aspects of evolution are thought to be incompatible with God's goodness, power, or wisdom: the flaws in nature, and nature's cruelty.

First, let's talk about design flaws in nature. It's pointed out that certain features of organisms are not optimally designed. For example, in the human eye the optic nerve passes through a hole in the retina resulting in a blind spot in our visual field. In the octopus eye, by contrast, which closely resembles our own eye, no such hole is required and there is no blind spot as a result. There are various ways in which the Christian theologian might respond to these alleged flaws. First, he might challenge the assumption that these alleged flaws really are flaws at all. Take for example the claim that the placement of the optic nerve in the human eye is flawed. Might God have a good biological reason for so designing the eye? Yes, indeed. As Michael Denton explains, the difference in the placement of the optic nerve in the human eye in comparison with the cephalopod eye is because of the need for a greater supply of oxygen in warm-blooded animals. So this alleged flaw turns out not to be a flaw at all. Over and over again we found that what we had first thought were flaws in nature's design have, with greater understanding, turned out not to be flaws at all. But suppose that there are flaws that seem to be the result of the adaptation of previous structures by natural selection? Fine. Even special creationists usually hold that the kinds created by God in Genesis were on the biological level of the order or family and that evolution took over from there. So, for example, God created the common ancestor of the family Ursidae, or the bear family, which has since evolved into eight different species of bears. It's hardly surprising then that one species of bear has evolved the so-called panda's thumb which is sometimes touted as a design flaw. It hardly needs to be said that theologians who don't embrace special creationism but accept the thesis of common ancestry are not at all surprised that organisms would bear the imprint of their ancestors. So I don't think this argument from design flaws is very serious as a theological problem at all.

What, then, about animal behaviors that strike us as cruel? Once again, even creationists embrace evolution within broad kinds which permits organisms to change. For example, pathogenic, or disease-producing, bacteria were once free-living organisms which
evolved to become pathogenic parasites. Genome sequencing has revealed this to be a sort of “devolution” characterized by a massive loss of genes.

Now, of course, this appeal to limited evolution within broad kinds won't ameliorate the general problem of animal suffering. Here I think we need to consider more critically the nature of animal suffering. Michael Murray in his book *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw* explains a pain hierarchy within the animal world that consists of three levels. Level 1, the lowest level, is just information states in the organism that cause aversive behavior to stimuli. Level 1 is the information-bearing neural states that are produced by noxious stimuli and results in aversive behavior on the part of the organism. Examples of something like this would be when you poke an amoeba with a needle it recoils and pulls back, not because it senses pain but simply because it has an aversive reaction to noxious stimuli. Level 2 is a first-order awareness of pain by an organism. Level 3 is a second-order pain awareness that one is oneself experiencing level 2. So we have: first, information-bearing neural states produced by noxious stimuli resulting in aversive behavior, then at level 2 a first-order subjective experience of pain, and then at level 3 a second-order awareness that one is oneself experiencing level 2.

Spiders and insects – the sort of creatures that exhibit the kinds of behavior that is often mentioned by the detractors of creation – exhibit level 1. For example, praying mantises may decapitate their partner after copulation. But there's no reason to ascribe to spiders and insects a level 2 pain awareness. It's plausible that they aren't sentient beings at all that have some sort of inner subjective experience. That sort of experience plausibly doesn't arrive until you get to the level of vertebrates in the evolutionary scheme of things. Vertebrates would have a level 2 pain awareness. Organisms on level 1 alone are effectively like little machines which do not in any way suffer. Sentient life, such as vertebrates, do have a subjective experience of pain as is obvious when we see animals suffer. But even though higher animals do experience pain, nevertheless the evidence is that they don't experience level 3, that is to say, the awareness that they are themselves in pain for animals are not self-conscious beings. As the philosopher Immanuel Kant put it, they cannot put the “I think that” in front of their states of awareness. They do not have a transcendental ego which is capable of objectifying their own selves. The opponent of progressive creationism or theistic evolution would have to show that animals are self-conscious in order to attribute this sort of third-order pain awareness to them, but there's no clear evidence for this. Biologically, self-awareness seems to be connected with the prefrontal cortex of the brain which is either missing or underdeveloped in all animals except for the humanoid primates (the great apes and *Homo sapiens*), and thus even though animals may experience pain they are not aware of being themselves in pain. God in his mercy has apparently spared animals the awareness of being in pain.
This is a tremendous comfort for those of us who are pet owners! It means that even though your cat or your dog may be in pain, he or she really isn't aware of being himself or herself in pain. Therefore, your dog or cat doesn't suffer the way that you would if you were in pain because you would be aware of being in that pain state.

What this also means is that arguments based upon nature's so-called cruelties are guilty of the fallacy of anthropopathism, which is ascribing human feelings to non-human entities. We human beings have an inveterate tendency to ascribe personal agency to non-human creatures and even to objects. For example, we talk to our cars, to house plants, to our computers. When we attribute agency and pain awareness to animals, we commit the fallacy of anthropopathism.

Of course, questions still remain, why did God create a world featuring an evolutionary prelude to the appearance of man? Maybe a world with evolution is a richer and more wonderful world of creatures. After all, seriously, aren't you glad that God created dinosaurs? I am! Ever since I was a boy, I've been thrilled with the age of the dinosaurs and the Ice Age mammals with their wonderful prehistoric creatures. What's not to love about these fascinating, wonderful, colorful, and often bizarre creatures? Why shouldn't God delight, as we do, in all creatures great and small?

But I suspect that the final answer to the question is going to have to do more fundamentally with God's wider plan for humanity, with his desire to create an ecosystem where autonomous human beings can flourish and make an uncoerced decision to embrace or to reject God's offer of saving grace. Any viable ecosystem will involve animal predation and death for the health of the system as a whole. To give an example, I heard several years ago of a decision on the part of the Canadian government to introduce wolves into the wild in Canada in order to preserve the health of the caribou herds upon which they preyed because in the absence of the wolves to pick off the aged and the sick the caribou were over-grazing and as a result starving to death. So, for the good of the caribou, predators had to be introduced into the wild so that they might flourish.

Proponents of the so-called Gaia hypothesis, which emphasizes that the entire world is like a living organism, have emphasized how this ecosystem as a whole functions to produce its life-giving qualities. You can't just consider the welfare of any individual organism in isolation from the whole. God's ultimate purpose for this planet concerns bringing men and women freely into his Kingdom. The evolutionary history of the Earth is ecological scene-setting as it were for the advent of human beings on this planet and the working out of God's purposes among them. The primeval forests of those prehistoric ecosystems laid down the deposits for the fossil fuels which have made human advancement and modern civilization possible. Should God then have just created the Earth with the illusion of age with fossil fuels that were never in fact laid down by primitive forests? Why think that that would have better achieved God's purposes for
humanity? How do you know that God's purposes for the human race are not better achieved by having a genuine ecological history on the Earth rather than creating an illusory history or a world with no apparent history at all. How do we know how many people or what percentage of people would have freely come to know God and his salvation in such worlds? What would best serve to advance the Kingdom of God on this planet is the overriding consideration in what God permits or disallows, and we are largely ignorant of what that entails. We are in no position at all to speculate about such matters. But then we're in no position to speculate whether or not evolution was not a viable way for God to create life on this planet.

START DISCUSSION

Student: The whole thing about the consciousness – the self-awareness and all that – and about how animals are conscious and they feel pain but they're not aware that they feel pain. I've always had a difficult time grasping how that works, and even more of a hard time trying to explain to people how that might work. I know you've mentioned in other contexts the phenomena of blindsight which is so weird to me. If you show them a picture, they can't tell you what the picture is but if you throw a ball at them they'll catch the ball or they could walk through an obstacle course.

Dr. Craig: That is the analogy that Michael Murray gives for this third-level awareness. Some people are blindsighted. As you indicate, for all practical purposes, they are blind. They have no visual apprehension of things. But, in fact, they really can see. As you say, if you threw them a ball they'll catch it. If you ask them to come to the other side of the room they will walk around the table. They can see but they don't know that they can see. It's rather analogous to being in pain, but not being aware that one is oneself in pain. This second-order awareness requires the apprehension of oneself as a self – what philosophers call a transcendental ego. The ability of the self to stand back and objectify itself and think about itself. It seems that apart from the advanced primates this ability doesn't seem to exist in the animal world. Hopefully that analogy can make it more comprehensible.

Student: I seem to recall – I can't remember if you said this or maybe you were quoting from Michael Murray – he talks about where, I think it was, Nazi scientists or somebody were cutting people's brains a certain way and there were some people who, when they got poked or made to feel pain, they felt pain but it doesn't bother them.

Dr. Craig: I'm not familiar with that, but there are these different neural pathways. So you're suggesting this person who doesn't have this third-order awareness can feel the pain – Yes, I'm in pain. That really, really hurts, but it doesn't bother me. I'm not worried about it. My wife actually experienced something like that when she had laughing gas
during childbirth. She said it didn't anesthetize her. It didn't take away the pain. She felt it, but she didn't care. That's something like this.

END DISCUSSION

With that, let me draw our session to a close in view of the time.

I think that the theological objections to progressive creationism are ultimately unsuccessful. So whether considered scientifically or theologically, I think progressive creationism provides a plausible and attractive integration of theology and science.\textsuperscript{137}