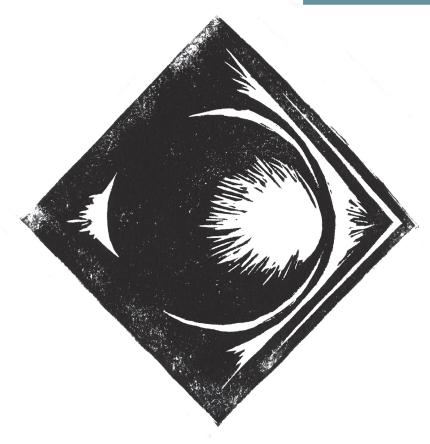# FROM CHAOS TO COSMOS

CREATION TO NEW CREATION

SIDNEY GREIDANUS

"Sidney Greidanus poured a lifetime of preaching Christ from the entire Bible and teaching others to do so into this guided tour of Scripture's unfolding history of creation, redemption, and consummation. With brevity and clarity, he shows our beauty-creating God at work, bringing order to the 'formless and void' deep. Then, when Satanic lies and human rebellion injected chaos, disorder, desolation, and death, the Lord executed his eternal plan to redeem and reorder his creation through Jesus Christ. This study is full of God's Word, set into context by Greidanus's insightful comment. It offers fresh and ancient perspectives on Scripture's unity and its central focus: Christ the Redeemer."

Dennis E. Johnson, Professor Emeritus of Practical Theology, Westminster Seminary California; author, *Him We Proclaim*; *Walking with Jesus through His Word*; and *Journeys with Jesus*

From Chaos to Cosmos

Short Studies in Biblical Theology

Edited by Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt

From Chaos to Cosmos

Creation to New Creation

Sidney Greidanus

About the cover: The goal for the cover illustration was to convey the nature of God's creation using the contrast of black and white, which is characteristic of relief printing. The image represents the formation of light out of darkness and creation out of the void—the progression from chaos to order. The interior image is framed by the contrasting rigid shape of the outlining square—depicting that the restoration of a harmonious cosmos is under the sovereign control of God.

*This book is dedicated to the memory of
my parents, Nies and Sjoukje Greidanus (née Tiersma),
and my parents-in-law,
Lambert and Reingje Visscher (née Breman).*

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."
"Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors,
for their deeds follow them!"
Revelation 14:13

Contents

List of Abbreviations

BA	*The Biblical Archaeologist*
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
MT	Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Old Testament
LXX	Septuagint
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WeslTJ	*Wesleyan Theological Journal*

Series Preface

Most of us tend to approach the Bible early on in our Christian lives as a vast, cavernous, and largely impenetrable book. We read the text piecemeal, finding golden nuggets of inspiration here and there, but remain unable to plug any given text meaningfully into the overarching storyline. Yet one of the great advances in evangelical biblical scholarship over the past few generations has been the recovery of biblical theology—that is, a renewed appreciation for the Bible as a theologically unified, historically rooted, progressively unfolding, and ultimately Christ-centered narrative of God's covenantal work in our world to redeem sinful humanity.

This renaissance of biblical theology is a blessing, yet little of it has been made available to the general Christian population. The purpose of Short Studies in Biblical Theology is to connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers. Each volume is written by a capable scholar or churchman who is consciously writing in a way that requires no prerequisite theological training of the reader. Instead, any thoughtful Christian disciple can track with and benefit from these books.

Each volume in this series takes a whole-Bible theme and traces it through Scripture. In this way readers not only learn about a given

theme but also are given a model for how to read the Bible as a coherent whole.

We have launched this series because we love the Bible, we love the church, and we long for the renewal of biblical theology in the academy to enliven the hearts and minds of Christ's disciples all around the world. As editors, we have found few discoveries more thrilling in life than that of seeing the whole Bible as a unified story of God's gracious acts of redemption, and indeed of seeing the whole Bible as ultimately about Jesus, as he himself testified (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

The ultimate goal of Short Studies in Biblical Theology is to magnify the Savior and to build up his church—magnifying the Savior through showing how the whole Bible points to him and his gracious rescue of helpless sinners; and building up the church by strengthening believers in their grasp of these life-giving truths.

Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt

Preface

Studying the chaos–cosmos theme from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 is a fascinating journey. It deepens our understanding of the original creation and the coming new creation. It helps us see not only the unity of the Scriptures but also the centrality of Christ in the Scriptures. The chaos–cosmos theme makes us aware of the various forms of chaos caused by the fall into sin and God's cursing the ground: pain, suffering, enmity, violence, enslavement, and death. But it also makes us aware of God's sovereignty over chaos: his turning chaos into cosmos (or micro-cosmos) merely by speaking, his grace for his fallen creatures, his aim to deliver them, his faithfulness to his covenant promises, and, by making ever new starts, his intent to restore his creation to the cosmos he intended it to be in the beginning.

In this book I quote Scripture extensively, sometimes providing quick explanations in square brackets. I have inserted italics in biblical quotations to emphasize words and phrases important for our topic. In the footnotes I provide more detailed explanations, references, and parallel passages. Articles, essays, and books that are not listed in the select bibliography are referenced in the footnotes. For the sake of consistency, the pointing in all Hebrew and Greek transliterations (also in quotations) have been upgraded to the latest *SBL* standards.

May this book help many preachers, teachers, churches, study groups, and individuals to discern the unity of Scripture and the centrality of Christ as we trace the chaos–cosmos theme along the biblical storyline of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation.

—————

1

The Chaos–Cosmos Theme in Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua[1]

The chaos–cosmos theme falls under the overarching biblical theme of God's kingship and God's coming kingdom. It is also a subset of the biblical storyline of creation, fall, redemption, new creation.

Some biblical scholars prefer not to use the word *chaos* because the Hebrew does not use *chaos* but rather several other words, such as *without form*, *void*, *darkness*, *the deep*, *the waters*, *the seas*, *Rahab*, *great sea creatures*, and *Leviathan,* and because scholars use *chaos* in many different senses, some assuming that chaos is inherently evil.[2] We can still use this common term, however, if we define it correctly. Among several options, *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* offers a good, initial definition of *chaos*: "The infinity of space or formless matter supposed to have preceded the existence of the

---

1. Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua are the historical books in which chaos ("darkness," "the deep," "the waters," "the flood," "the sea," "the Jordan") plays a major role.

2. See, for example, Eric Vail, *Creation and Chaos Talk*, 16–25, 77–154, 210–13; John Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*, 27–28; and Rebecca Watson, *Chaos Uncreated*, 1–3,13–19. Watson states, "Any attempt to translate this vocabulary in terms of 'chaos' would require careful definition, and is best avoided" (16).

ordered universe." *Webster's* also offers us a workable definition for *cosmos*: "The world or universe regarded as an orderly, harmonious system."

Starting out with these rather general definitions of *chaos* and *cosmos*, we can add the more specific forms of chaos and cosmos as we move through the Scriptures from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. Genesis 1 begins with, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"—an orderly, harmonious universe.[3] Revelation 21 and 22 describe "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1)—another orderly, harmonious universe. Between these cosmic bookends (called *inclusio*) we find microcosmic units of disorder and restored order—units such as the earth, the animal kingdom, humanity, nations, and individuals. All of these ordered microcosmic units prefigure the end-time orderly cosmos described in Revelation.[4]

The Ancient Near Eastern Background

We must understand the biblical chaos–cosmos theme against the broader background of the ancient world, in which chaos was associated with the sea, the waters. Israel shared with its ancient Near Eastern neighbors the worldview of a three-storied universe. John Day explains: "All those passages in the Old Testament which speak about God's control of the sea at the time of creation naturally presuppose the archaic worldview shared by the ancient Israelites along with other peoples of the ancient Near East that both above the domed firmament of heaven and below the earth there is a cosmic sea. Rain was regarded as having its origin in the cosmic

---

3. Bruce Waltke points out that "Wisdom of Solomon uses the Greek words *ho kosmos* to refer to Genesis 1:1." "Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3," *BSac* 132, no. 527 (1975): 218.

4. I intend to show the progression of the chaos–cosmos theme in broad historical strokes as it develops in the canon as we have it: Genesis-Exodus-Joshua; Wisdom-Psalms-Prophets; and in the New Testament, Gospels-Acts-Epistles-Revelation.

sea above the firmament and coming down through the windows of heaven, while the world's seas and lakes were thought of as being connected with the subterranean part of the cosmic sea (cf. Gen. 7:11)."[5]

The chaos–cosmos theme in Scripture has many similarities with ancient Near Eastern myths. According to the ancient Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian head god, Marduk, created heaven and earth when Marduk battled the ocean goddess Tiamat:

> The Lord spread out his net, encircled her,
> The ill wind he had held behind him he released in her
> > face.
> Tiamat opened her mouth to swallow,
> He thrust in the ill wind so she could not close her lips.
> The raging winds bloated her belly,
> Her insides were stopped up, she gaped her mouth wide.
> He shot off the arrow, it broke open her belly,
> It cut to her innards, it pierced the heart.
> He subdued her and snuffed out her life,
> He flung down her carcass, he took his stand upon it. . . .
> He split her in two, like a fish for drying,
> Half of her he set up and made as a cover, heaven.
> He stretched out the hide and assigned watchmen,
> And ordered them not to let her waters escape.
> He crossed heaven and inspected (its) firmament. . . .
> Spreading [half of] her as a cover, he established the
> > netherworld. . . .
> Then the great gods convened.
> They made Marduk's destiny highest. . . .

---

5. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*, 4.

They established him forever for lordship of heaven and
>   earth. . . .
His word shall be supreme above and below.[6]

When Babylonian literature was rediscovered in the late nineteenth century, many scholars assumed that Israel simply took over the Babylonian creation myth. For example, the influential Hermann Gunkel claimed that the *Enuma Elish* was simply transferred to Israel, where it lost many of its mythological and polytheistic elements until "in Genesis 1 it is, as far as was possible, completely Judaized."[7] As Robin Routledge points out, however, "While there may be enough points of similarity to suggest that the writer of Genesis knew the Babylonian myth and used some of its imagery, it is widely recognized that there is nothing to indicate dependence. The conflict motif [battle against chaos] and ultimate exaltation of the creator god which is a central feature of *Enuma Elish* is missing from Genesis 1."[8]

---

6. *Enuma Elish*, tablet 4, lines 95–104, 137–141; tablet 5, line 63; and tablet 6, lines 95–96, 100, 104, as translated by Benjamin R. Frost in William W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture* (New York: Brill, 1996), 1:390–402.

7. Gunkel writes, "We have established the following religio-historical sequence concerning the creation myth:

1. *Marduk* myth . . .	The Babylonian myth is transferred to Israel;
2. Poetic recension of the YHWH myth . . .	There it loses many of its mythological elements and nearly all of its polytheistic elements;
3. Genesis 1 . . .	In Genesis 1 it is, as far as was possible, completely Judaized."

Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12, trans. K. William Whitney Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 82.

8. Routledge, "Did God Create Chaos?," 72. Routledge continues, "Whilst *tĕhôm* [Heb. "the deep"] cannot derive from Tiamat, there appears to be general agreement that it is from the same root, and so may have been included as an intentional allusion to the Babylonian myth; though, significantly, in the Genesis narrative *tĕhôm* is not given divine status nor even personified." (73).Tsumura writes, "The background of the Genesis creation story has nothing to do with the so-called *Chaoskampf* [chaos battle] myth of the Mesopotamian type, as preserved in the Babylonian 'creation' myth *Enuma Elish*. In Gen. 1, there is no hint of struggle or battle between God and this *tĕhôm*—water." *Creation and Destruction*, 143.

Contemporary scholars are more likely to look for the background of the chaos–cosmos theme in ancient Canaanite literature.[9] Here we also find a myth about a storm god doing battle with a sea god. The storm god (controlling lightning, rain, and fertility) was Baal, and the sea god (the god of chaos) was Yam. Part of the Baal myth reads as follows:

> The mace whirled in Baal's hand like an eagle,
> (grasped) in his fingers it crushed the pate of prince [Yam]. . . .
> Yam collapsed and fell down to the earth,
> his face quivered and his features crumpled up.
> Baal was drawing up Yam and scattering him. . . .
> "Verily Yam is dead, (and) [Baal] shall be king."[10]

Although this myth also speaks of a god, Baal, battling the sea god for control, the result is not the creation of heaven and earth, but Baal's kingship and his building a palace in the heavens with windows to water the earth.

Biblical authors did not write in a vacuum, of course. To be understood, they had to accommodate their imagery to the prevailing culture, whether Babylonian, Canaanite, or Egyptian. Therefore Genesis, as well as other Old Testament books, must be heard against the background of the stories of the ancient Near East. But just as sermon illustrations using Little Red Riding Hood do not thereby teach that this fairy tale is literally and historically true, so the biblical

---

9. "Since the discovery of the Ugaritic texts from 1929 onwards . . . it has become clear that the immediate background of the Old Testament allusions to the sea monster is not Babylonian but Canaanite. The Ugaritic texts contain not only an account of Baal's defeat of the rebellious sea-god Yam, as a result of which he was acclaimed king, but also allusions to a defeat of Leviathan." Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*, 4. Watson writes, "As a result of the Ras Shamra discoveries in the 1930s, it is now also generally held that the more immediate background of the so-called 'chaos' imagery is Canaanite, rather than Babylonian." *Chaos Uncreated,* 12.

10. The myth of Baal, formerly called "Anat," *Baal* 3A, 23–32, trans. G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, Old Testament Studies 3 (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1956), 83.

authors' use of ancient Near Eastern stories does not mean that they taught that these ancient stories were literally and historically true.

For example, Hebrew poetry called for the use of much imagery. Where were the Hebrew poets to get their imagery? From the stories known in that culture, of course—the ancient myths. Elements of those myths served to embellish the point they tried to make in order to make it more vivid. Instead of looking for similarities between the biblical writings and the ancient myths (often undertaken in order to establish dependence), it is more important to note the differences.[11] These differences make us aware of Scripture's criticism of the pagan myths.

Nahum Sarna has set out the relationship between the biblical references to chaos and those of the myths:

> The references appear to be snippets of what was once an epic about the God of creation and mutinous forces of primeval chaos at the outset of the cosmogonic process. The rebels are variously termed Rahab, Leviathan, sea monster(s) / Dragon (Hebrew *tănnîn*, pl. *tănnînim*); Sea (Hebrew *yām*, pl. *yāmmîm*), River(s) (Hebrew *nāhār*, pl. *něhārîm*); and Elusive Serpent (Hebrew *nāhāš bārīah*). Isaiah [51:9–10] tells that in primeval times, God's arm hacked Rahab in pieces, pierced Tannin, and dried up Yam, the waters of the great deep (Hebrew *těhôm*). Habakkuk [3:8] refers to God's wrath at Neharim and His rage against Yam. The Psalms [74:13–14; see 77:17] depict God driving back Yam with His might, smashing the heads of the monsters on the waters, crushing the heads of Leviathan, crushing Rahab so that he was like a

---

11. Terrence Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament*, notes the following dissimilarities: "Emphasis upon history rather than nature, the lack of theogony [birth of gods] and a conflict among the gods, the absence of interest in primeval chaos, the prevailing monotheism, and the high value given human beings" (66).

corpse, and scattering His enemies with His powerful arm. . . . Similar echoes of this myth are found in Job [7:12], who asks God, 'Am I Yam or Tannin that You have set a watch over me?' In another passage, Job [9:13] states that God does not restrain His anger; beneath Him, Rahab's helpers fall prostrate. He stilled the sea, struck down Rahab, and pierced the Elusive Serpent [26:12–13].[12]

Although the Bible uses the same names as the ancient myths, Sarna continues, "What fundamentally distinguishes the biblical references from the other Near Eastern examples is the Israelite, thoroughly monotheistic atmosphere: there is one supreme sovereign God; His foes are not divine beings; the motif of theogony, or birth of gods, is wholly absent; there are no titanic battles in which the outcome appears to be in doubt at one time or another; there is no mention of creation as a consequence of victory in combat; and there is an official, quite different, canonical Genesis creation narrative which expresses numerous polemical, anti-mythic elements."[13]

Aside from the "thoroughly monotheistic atmosphere," there is another fundamental difference between Israel's faith and that of its neighbors. Bernard Anderson explains:

By and large the religions of Israel's neighbors were tied to the sphere of *nature*, where the cyclical rhythms were determinative for man's existence. Israel parted with the religions of the ancient Near East by declaring that *history* is the area of ultimate meaning precisely because God has chosen to make himself known in historical events and to call men to participate in his historical purpose. . . . Israel broke with paganism, and its mythical view of reality, at the crucial point:

---

12. Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*, 57–58.
13. Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*, 59.

nature is not the realm of the divine. The God Israel worships is the Lord of nature, but is not the soul of nature. Israel's sense of God's transcendence resulted in "the emancipation of thought from myth."[14]

14. Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos*, 27, 32. Anderson also says, "In contrast to religions which depreciate history and consequently dehistoricize man, the Bible sets forth a historical drama—a *Heilsgeschichte*—in which man becomes 'truly himself' as a historical being who decides and acts in response to the action of God in history. . . . According to biblical faith, our historical existence is enfolded within the plan and purpose of the God who is not a phenomenon of history but the Lord of history, who is not a power immanent in nature but the sovereign Creator—the God whose purpose and presence were made known in Israel's historical experience and in the fullness of time, according to Christian faith, in Jesus Christ" (30, 41–42).

Questions for Reflection

1. The Bible writers seem to accept the ancient Near Eastern view of a three-storied universe. For example, one of the ten commandments stipulates, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is *in heaven above*, or that is *in the earth beneath*, or that is *in the water under the earth*" (Ex. 20:4). Can you give some more biblical evidence that the Bible writers assumed a three-storied universe? Check, for instance, Genesis 1; Genesis 7–8; and Psalms 24 and 104.

2. Does it bother you that the Bible writers seems to accept a three-storied universe? Why or why not?

3. Give some reasons why the Bible writers would use this ancient worldview.

4. What is our definition of *chaos* and *cosmos*?

5. List some of the words the Old Testament uses for what we would call "chaos."

6. The Bible writers use the same chaos–cosmos terminology as is used in the ancient pagan myths. Give some examples of this.

7. Give some reasons why the Bible writers would use the same chaos–cosmos terminology.

8. Carefully read Genesis 1. In contrast to the pagan myths, which considered chaos evil, where does Genesis 1 say that chaos was good?

9. Think of at least three other ways in which chaos in Genesis 1 is different from that of the ancient pagan myths (for the answers, you will have to look at some footnotes).

10. "What fundamentally distinguishes the biblical references [to chaos] from the other Near Eastern examples"?

11. What is another fundamental difference between Israel's faith and that of its pagan neighbors?

Chaos–Cosmos in Genesis

The foundations of the chaos–cosmos theme are laid especially in the book dealing with the beginning, Genesis.

From Chaos to Cosmos (Genesis 1–2)

According to the ancient Near Eastern myths, as we have seen, the Babylonian god Marduk and the Canaanite god Baal both battled for control with the god of the sea (chaos). By contrast, in Genesis 1 God does not struggle with the forces of chaos, nor is chaos considered a god. In fact, in Genesis the primordial waters are not even personified.[15] According to Genesis 1 it was *God* who created these waters and then, by merely speaking, turned chaos into cosmos.

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The NRSV translates verses 1–2 as a temporal clause, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep. . . ." Bernard Anderson judges that although this translation is grammatically possible, "it poses exegetical difficulties. Chief of these is the problem that the Priestly writer [of Genesis], who intends to stress the transcendence of God as the sole source of all that is, would be adopting the ancient mythical view of a preexistent chaos, independent of God. It is therefore best to follow the Septuagint [the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament] and to read Genesis 1:1 as a complete sentence, a reading which is as defensible grammatically as the translation which makes it part of a temporal clause."[16] Moreover,

---

15. Although "the beginning condition in Genesis consists of primordial cosmic waters as attested throughout the ancient world, this beginning state has no personality and offers no opposition." Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East," 57–58. Walton continues, "Even as it operates within the ancient cognitive environment by dealing with functions, it does so from its intentional monotheism in which there are no threats, no rebels, no conflict, and no need to overcome obstacles" (60).

16. Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos*, 111. Hubbard writes, "Genesis 1:1 performs a double literary function in the narrative: it serves both as a title for 1:2–2:1 and as a summary claim that God created everything (the 'what'). This means . . . that what follows (1:2–2:1) fleshes out the

starting with a complete, independent sentence is in harmony with the generational structure of Genesis where an independent sentence, "These are the generations of . . ." introduces a new sequence a full ten times: Genesis 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1; and 37:2.[17] Along with the ESV and the NIV, therefore, we will understand verse 1 as a complete sentence, which breaks with the ancient chaos myth of a preexistent chaos by declaring, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."[18] God is the Creator of everything in the universe ("the heavens and the earth" and everything in between).[19] In other words, verse 1 speaks of the result of God's creative activity over seven days, which was an orderly universe.[20] As Robert Hubbard puts it, "Verse 1 narrates that God created the universe (earth included), while verse 2 describes earth's conditions immediately after its creation."[21]

details of that claim (the 'how')." "The Spirit and Creation," 72. See also Brevard Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, 39–40; Bruce Waltke, "Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3," *BSac* 132 #527 (1975): 224; John Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*, 123–27; and Richard Davidson, "The Genesis Account of Origins," 61–69. For various positions on this issue, see Routledge, "Did God Create Chaos?," 75–81.

17. See my *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, 16. The NRSV wrongly concludes the foregoing section with the *tôlĕdōt* of 2:4a and begins the new section with verse 4b. It may do so to mark an inclusio between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis. 2:4a. But in doing so, it tears apart the AB/BA chiasm of 2:4, "These are the generations of *the heavens and the earth* when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made *the earth and the heavens*."

18. "The pregnant expression, 'in the beginning,' separates the conception of the world once and for all from the cyclical rhythm of pagan mythology and the speculation of ancient metaphysics. This world, its life and history, is not dependent upon nature's cyclical rhythm but is brought into existence as the act of creation by a transcendent God." Gerhard and Michael Hasel, "The Unique Cosmology of Genesis 1 against Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian Parallels," 11.

19. This is the literary device known as *merism*, whereby two ends of a spectrum are understood to include everything in between.

20. Routledge observes, "One version of this [more traditional] view is that verse 1 describes the creation of this chaos. It seems more likely, though, that 'the heavens and the earth' as a compound expression refers (as in Gen. 2:1, 4) to the *ordered cosmos* rather than to a disordered preliminary stage in its creation. Genesis 1:1 would then be a summary statement which emphasizes (also taking account of the merism 'heaven and earth') that God is the sole creator of *everything*, and the detail of what that means is then set out in the rest of the chapter." Routledge, "Did God Create Chaos?," 77–78. See also Brevard Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, 30–42.

21. Hubbard, "The Spirit and Creation," 73. Hubbard's reasons: Verse 2 "opens with a noun ('Now the earth was . . .') rather than a verb—in other words, with a *disjunctive* clause. A *conjunctive* clause (a verb followed by a noun) would signal that verse 2 reports the next event after the event in verse 1. But the disjunctive clause of verse 2, as it were, hits the 'pause' button, freezing the action so the reader may focus on a single aspect of the cosmos introduced in verse 1, 'the

This means that verse 2 backs up from the cosmos described in verse 1 to the opening stage in God's creative activity and introduces us to what many have called "chaos."

> The earth was *without form and void* (*tōhû*[22] *wābōhû*),
> and *darkness* (*hōšek*) was over the face of *the deep (tĕhôm)*.[23]
> And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of *the waters (ha māyim).*

This verse describes total chaos, piling up five words that will be used in later Scriptures either individually or in combination to refer to some form of chaos: "without form," "void," "darkness," "the deep," and "the waters." Genesis 1 adds two more words that refer to chaos: "seas" (*yāmmîm*) in verse 10, and "great sea creatures/monsters" (*tănnînim*) in verse 21, for the perfect number of seven words at this stage.[24] A few more words and synonyms will be added later in Scripture to allude to conditions of chaos. Note that this original chaos was not evil. God created it. In fact God called the "seas" and even the "great sea monsters" "good" (Gen. 1:10, 21).

---

earth" (72–73). Hubbard adds in note 6, "In such cases, Hebrew grammarians categorize the function of the disjunctive clause as 'circumstantial' (i.e. it introduces the readers to specific circumstances in play at the time)." Accordingly, V. P. Hamilton translates verse 2 as: "And the earth—it was. . . ." *Genesis 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 103.

22. "*Tōhû* (without form) [twenty times in the Old Testament] is used elsewhere to mean, in physical terms, a trackless waste (e.g., Deut. 32:10; Job 6:18), emptiness (Job 26:7), chaos (Isa. 24:10; 34:11; 45:18); and metaphorically, what is baseless or futile (e.g., 1 Sam. 12:21; Isa. 29:21)." Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, 44. See Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, 32. Hubbard writes "I propose that *tōhû wābōhû* be rendered 'lifeless wasteland.' The earth is 'lifeless' (i.e. uninhabited) and 'unproductive' rather than 'disordered' or 'shapeless.'" "The Spirit and Creation," 76. See also David Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 22–35; and Eric Vail, *Creation and Chaos Talk*, (126–32).

23. "*Tĕhôm* here is simply a key, ancient cosmological term based on a common Semitic root (*tiham* [*at*], 'sea'). Specifically, *tĕhôm* designates 'deep, deep waters'—the cosmic, watery abyss that also appears in Egyptian and Phoenician cosmologies. . . . A few other passages understand that *tĕhôm* comprises both the primeval ocean now above the vaulted sky and the ground water that supplies the earth's surface (e.g., Gen. 7:11; Pss. 78:15; 104:6–16)." Hubbard, "The Spirit and Creation," 77. Hubbard continues, "No biblical text . . . portrays the deep as a power independent of God or as a personified entity capable of creating things on its own" (78).

24. Seven words for *chaos* is probably no coincidence in a narrative that uses seven and its multiples many times: seven days, seven times "and it was so," seven times "God saw that it was good/very good," twenty-one times (3 x 7) "earth," and thirty-five times (5 x 7) "God."

The initial description, "without form and void," "has been widely taken to refer to a primordial chaos, which was then transformed by God. This, again, appears deliberately to recall ancient Near Eastern mythology; though the absence of a conflict motif in Genesis 1 suggests that, as with *tĕhôm* [the deep], chaos is passive rather than in active opposition to the Creator. . . . The narrator in Genesis 1 is setting out an authentic and distinctive creation theology, but in so doing is willing to use familiar mythological imagery to present important ideas that might not easily be expressed in other ways."[25]

Was chaos present from the start, preexistent and eternal like God—as the ancient pagan myths taught and materialistic evolutionism today believes? Or did God create chaos? The biblical answer is clear. Only God is eternal and sovereign: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."[26] Therefore it was God who created the chaotic waters.[27] Psalm 95:5 declares "The sea is his, for he made it."[28] God can later use these waters for good (making the earth fruitful; Gen. 2:6; Ps. 104:10, 13) as well as for ill (Genesis 6–7, sending the flood). God alone is sovereign. In Isaiah 45:7 the Lord declares, "I form light [cosmos] and create darkness [chaos]; I make

---

25. Routledge, "Did God Create Chaos?," 73. Hubbard writes, "The divine breath/wind/ spirit/ and the waters are not *warring* antagonists. Genesis 1:2 makes no overt reference to any battle or conflict as do other ancient accounts. . . . Rather, the contrast is between the moving, active, powerful, protective and life-giving 'spirit of God' and the stationary, inactive, powerless, unproductive and inert deep waters. The latter symbolize great potential for life and productivity present in the raw materials of Genesis 1:2 rather than hostile opposition." "The Spirit and Creation," 88.

26. von Rad observes, "The theological thought of ch. 1 moves not so much between the poles of nothingness and creation as between the poles of chaos and cosmos. It would be false to say, however, that the idea of the *creatio ex nihilo* was not present at all (v. 1 stands with good reason before v. 2!)." *Genesis*, 51.

27. "To portray the ultimate boundary of human history, that is, the creation, the biblical tradition makes use of traditional motifs which once circulated in pagan contexts with a completely different meaning." Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos*, 39. Anderson also adds, "It must be reiterated that biblical monotheism tolerates no thoroughgoing dualism which traces the origin of the historical conflict between God and evil back before man to creation, in which case evil would be coextensive with the divine" (167).

28. See also Ps. 146:6: The Lord "made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them"; and Proverbs 8:28: The Lord "made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep."

well-being [cosmos] and create calamity [chaos]; I am the Lord, who does all these things."

According to Genesis 1:2, then, all that existed at this point was a formless, empty, deep ocean covered in darkness. Nothing could grow on this earth; it was lifeless. But there was a ray of hope: "The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). Although the word for *Spirit* can sometimes be translated as "wind,"[29] in this context of God *speaking* (a full ten times "God said"), "Spirit" or "breath" is more appropriate.[30] The Spirit of God was not part of the chaos; it was hovering over (*měraḥepet ʿal*) the waters as an eagle hovers [flutters] over (*yĕraḥēp ʿal*) its young encouraging them to fly (Deut. 32:11). "The phrase [Spirit of God] conjures up images of a powerful force sent by God to influence both humans and nature."[31] The breath of God was about to speak and bring forth order, cosmos.

Then God spoke and, step by step, word by word, turned chaos

---

29. "Basically, the word means 'breeze' or 'breath,' but in some contexts it denotes 'wind' or 'spirit.'" Hubbard, "The Spirit and Creation," 78, with a reference to S. Tengstrom, "*rûaḥ*," *TDOT*, 13, 365–96. Hubbard summarizes his charts on the Old Testament use of *rûaḥ ʾĕlōhîm/yahweh* (80–81) as follows: "The *rûaḥ ʾĕlōhîm/yahweh* asserts incredible influence on people and nature: it 'stirs,' 'drives,' 'lifts,' 'throws,' 'brings out,' 'sets down,' 'makes,' 'blows on' and 'gives rest.' Startling things begin to happen with humans and in nature" (82). See also Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*, 146–51.

30. Hubbard offers three reasons for connecting "the *rûaḥ ʾĕlōhîm* (Gen. 1:2) and the subsequent 'words' spoken by *ʾĕlōhîm* (Gen. 1:3–31). . . . First, the biblical association elsewhere of the presence of the spirit with divine speech at least raises that possibility. . . . It is striking, then, that as soon as the *rûaḥ* line concludes (v. 2), the very next words report, 'And God said. . . .' Second, the narrative's literary flow seems to presume that connection. . . . Genesis 1 reports the active, powerful presence of the *rûaḥ* (v. 2) but not its exit from the scene. . . . Once it debuts, the *rûaḥ* fully participates in creation, empowering, if not executing, the series of divine words. . . . Finally, the assumption of spirit participation compares to the understanding elsewhere in the Old Testament: 'By the word [*dābar*] of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath (*rûaḥ*) of his mouth' (Ps. 33:6 TNIV; cf. Pss. 147:18; 148:8). The synonymous parallelism implies a close connection between 'word' and 'breath.'" "The Spirit and Creation," 86–87. See also Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 75–76; and Scott A. Ellington, "The Face of God as His Creating Spirit: The Interplay of Yahweh's *Panim* and *Ruach* in Psalm 104:29–30," in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 3–16, esp. 5–8.

31. Hubbard, "The Spirit and Creation," 85. Hubbard continues, "Simply and subtly the *rûaḥ ʾĕlōhîm* symbolically asserts the presence of Almighty God amid the darkness and the waters. That very presence affirms that the wasteland still stands under the sovereign sway of Yahweh. . . . The phrase here also asserts the presence of divine power—'primal energy' sent by God and poised to transform the scene in some obvious way" (89).

into cosmos: "God *said*, 'Let there be light [cosmos],' and there was light. . . . And God *said*, 'Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. . . . 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" (Gen. 1:3, 6–7, 9).[32] "The imagery is of a powerful sovereign who utters a decree from the throne . . . and in the very utterance the thing is done."[33] With his word, which is law, the sovereign God controlled the waters by setting their limits.[34] God channeled the waters so that they could make the earth fruitful.[35] Genesis 1:10 states, "God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was *good*." The gathered waters were not evil as in the ancient myths but good. According to verse 21, "God created the great sea creatures [sea monsters/dragons] and every living creature that moves. . . . And God saw that it was *good*." "The word 'good' carries the sense of correspondence to the divine intention, including elements of beauty, purposefulness, and praise-worthiness."[36] Now life could spring up on the earth.

As a climactic creative act, God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion . . ." (Gen. 1:26). Humankind was special, the crown of God's creation. "And

---

32. "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Ps. 33:9); "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible" (Heb. 11:3); See also Ps. 148:5.

33. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 146.

34. See Psalm 33:7: "He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses," and Job 38:8, 10–11: "Who shut in the sea with doors . . . , and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?"

35. See Psalm 104:9–10, 13: "You set a boundary that they [the waters] may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth. You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills. . . . From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work."

36. Fretheim, *Creation Untamed*, 13.

God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was *very good*" (Gen. 1:31).

The second creation account follows up the first by reiterating that the absence of water was *not* good: "When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, . . . then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature" (Gen. 2:5, 7). "Breathed is warmly personal, with the face-to-face intimacy of a kiss and the significance that this was an act of giving as well as making: and self-giving at that."[37] God placed humankind in a fruitful garden near life-sustaining water: "A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers" (Gen. 2:10). From the original chaos, God had created a beautiful, fruitful Paradise—an orderly cosmos.

In the book of Revelation, John describes the new heaven and the new earth and begins with an arresting observation: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more" (Rev. 21:1). The very first description of the new heaven and earth is that "the *sea* was no more." The implication is that the sea had become a symbol of evil that did not fit into the perfect kingdom of God. One of the questions we will pursue later is when and where the sea, chaos, turned so evil that it no longer had a place in God's perfect kingdom.

From Cosmos to Chaos: Struggling East of Eden (Genesis 3)

Unfortunately, God's good creation did not remain "very good" for long. The crown of God's creation disobeyed God. God had allowed

---

37. Kidner, *Genesis*, 60. Compare John 20:22: "And when he [Jesus] had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

them to "eat of every tree of the garden," but God had said, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:16–17). Tempted by "the serpent" (later identified as "that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan" [Rev. 12:9]), they did eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The effects of the fall into sin were felt immediately in the loss of innocence and the breakdown of harmonious relationships. "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. . . . 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?' And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself'" (Gen. 3:7–10).

The man was afraid of the God who had so lovingly created him, breathing "into his nostrils the breath of life." God asked, "Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man then had the nerve to blame both God and the woman. Adam said, "The woman whom *you* gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." The Lord God then turned to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" And she blamed the serpent: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen. 3:11–13). The harmony of Paradise was broken: fear of God, blaming God and the woman, and blaming the serpent. Chaos invaded God's good creation.

Then followed God's judgment: "The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field" (Gen. 3:14).[38] The fact that the serpent was cursed "*above all livestock* and *above all beasts of the field*" suggests that the animal world is also living under God's curse. The

---

38. This is the first time we read in the Bible about God's curse. God's curse is the opposite of God's blessing (Gen. 1:22, 28; 2:3).

lamb has good reason to fear the wolf. The calf has good reason to fear the lion. With the fall into sin, chaos also invaded the animal kingdom.

The Lord continued addressing the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Enmity between Satan and his offspring and the woman and her offspring will lead to much hardship in human history: "You shall bruise his heel." But ultimate victory is held out for the offspring of the woman: "He shall bruise your *head*"—a fatal wound.

With the fall into sin, the chaos of pain and suffering entered the world. To the woman God said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; *in pain* you shall bring forth children" (Gen. 3:16). And to Adam he said, "Cursed is the ground because of you; *in pain* you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (3:17–19).

The fall into sin resulted in pain in childbearing, pain in providing food, coping with thorns and thistles on a ground cursed by God, eating bread by the sweat of your face, and finally succumbing to the last enemy, death.

Then God drove them out of Paradise; they were to live east of Eden (Gen. 3:24).[39] Life had turned into a painful existence in a hostile, cursed world. The blessed cosmos of Paradise had turned into chaos—not the original chaos of Genesis 1:2 but now an *evil* chaotic world: struggles between animals and animals (3:14, see Isa. 11:6),

---

39. "Paradise is irreparably lost; what is left for man is a life of trouble in the shadow of a crushing riddle, a life entangled in an unbounded and completely hopeless struggle with the power of evil and in the end unavoidably subject to the majesty of death." von Rad, *Genesis*, 102.

between animals and humans (3:15), between husband and wife (3:12, 16), between nature and humans (3:17–19), and between humans and God (3:8–10, 12, 22–24).

Today we see this evil chaos east of Eden in the human race in the enmity between people, races, religions, and nation-states: wars, slavery, religious persecution, racism. We see this chaos in the swollen bellies of malnourished children; in people dying from cancer, Ebola, and other diseases and disasters; in the thousands of refugees fleeing their home countries, hundreds of them drowning as they cross dangerous seas in flimsy boats. We see this chaos in the violence perpetrated by drug cartels, in the senseless murders in our inner cities, in the rape of women and children,[40] and in the spread of terror organizations whose goal is to destroy people, nations, and cultural treasures.

In the book of Revelation, John describes the new heaven and the new earth where there will be no more tears, "and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4). As we have seen, John begins this description of the new earth with a striking observation: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and *the sea* was no more" (Rev. 21:1). The implication is that Scripture views our struggles with pain, disease, disasters, and death in this fallen world as a form of chaos that will one day be replaced by a well-ordered cosmos. God will turn our present painful living east of Eden into a harmonious cosmos on the last day, when Christ returns to usher in the perfect kingdom of God.

But even in punishing our ancestors for their rebellion, God

---

40. "The U.N. reports that 200,000 Congolese women and children have been raped during Congo's long-simmering conflict." Aryn Baker, "The Secret War Crime," *Time*, April 18, 2016, 38, http://time.com/war-and-rape/.

showed compassion and grace. There was still some order in the midst of the chaos. God still enabled humans to gather food from the cursed ground and to have children. Unfortunately, these children also rebelled against God. In only the second generation Cain murdered his brother Abel, the voice of his "brother's blood . . . crying to" God from the ground (Gen. 4:10). In the seventh generation Lamech bragged to his wives, "I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me" (Gen. 4:23). The chaos of violence was spreading on earth. At last the Lord intervened.

The Flood: Chaos to Restore Cosmos (Genesis 6–7)

"The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will *blot out* man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them'" (Gen. 6:5–7).[41] Human wickedness had spoiled God's good creation so thoroughly that God decided to allow a chaotic flood to clean up his creation, killing all but a remnant in the ark with the righteous Noah. The flood was neither a natural disaster nor an accident. According to the Genesis account it was a deliberate act of God to cleanse the earth of that which had turned intrinsically evil (Gen. 6:11–13). The sovereign God removed his restraining hand and allowed his corrupted cosmos to return to chaos.

God again shows himself to be sovereign over the waters, and uses these waters to destroy evil. "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all *the fountains of the great deep* burst forth, and *the*

---

41. "The language of blotting out (6:7) suggests a wiping clean of the slate of the world and beginning anew." Fretheim, *God and World*, 81.

windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell upon the earth
forty days and forty nights. . . . And *the waters* prevailed so mightily
on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven
were covered. . . . And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds,
livestock, beasts, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and
all mankind. . . . They were *blotted out* from the earth. Only Noah
was left, and those who were with him in the ark" (Gen. 7:11–23).
With Noah and all creatures in the ark God would make a new start
to restore an orderly cosmos.

A New Start with Noah and the
Creatures in the Ark (Genesis 8–9)

The turning point of the flood narrative is Genesis 8:1: "God remem-
bered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him
in the ark." "This centering text shows that the attention of the text
finally focuses on salvation rather than judgment, on what God does
to preserve creation beyond the disaster, climaxing in the story of the
rainbow and God's unconditional promise."[42]

"And God made a wind[43] blow over the earth, and *the waters*
subsided. The fountains of *the deep* and the windows of the heavens
were closed, *the rain* from the heavens was restrained, and *the waters*
receded from the earth continually. At the end of 150 days *the waters*
had abated, and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of
the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat" (Gen.
8:1–4). By restraining the waters the sovereign God turns chaos into
a mix of chaos and cosmos: "chaos" because Paradise is not restored
and God acknowledges that "the intention of man's heart is evil from

---

42. Fretheim, *Creation Untamed*, 46. Tikva Frymer-Kensky writes, "The flood is not primarily
an agency of punishment (although to be drowned is hardly a pleasant reward), but a means of
getting rid of a thoroughly polluted world and starting again with a clean, well-washed one" (150).

43. *Rûaḥ*. See also Genesis 1:2 and Psalm 104:30: "When you send forth your Spirit [*rûaḥ*],
they are created, and you renew the face of the ground."

his youth" (8:21), and "cosmos" because God retains elements of his original creation order.

By drawing parallels with the creation account of Genesis 1, the narrator emphasizes that God is re-creating the world, making a new start with all the creatures in the ark.[44] As God had originally separated light ("Day") and darkness ("Night"), the waters above ("Heaven") and the waters below ("Earth" and "Seas") (Gen. 1:3–10), before life could flourish, so here God promised to maintain the separations that provided for an orderly cosmos: "While the *earth* remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, *day and night*, shall not cease" (8:22). And as God had originally blessed Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28 ("God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth'"), so here, "God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth'" (9:1).[45] Noah is the new Adam; with him and the creatures in the ark God is making a new start.

Then God made a covenant with Noah and all creatures. God said:

"I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the *flood*, and never again shall there be a *flood* to destroy the earth." And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will

---

44. God reigns over the chaotic waters (Gen. 1:6–9), here by closing "the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens" (8:2; see 7:11). "Early Judaism also understood the new world resulting from the flood to be a new creation (1 En. 106:13; Philo, Mos. 2.64–65; see Jub. 5:120)." Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 60, note e.

45. "Unlike Atrahasis [the Babylonian flood story], the flood story in Genesis is emphatically not about overpopulation [as reason for the flood]. On the contrary, God's first action after the flood was to command Noah and his sons to 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.'" Frymer-Kensky, "The Atrahasis Epic," 150.

remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the *waters* shall never again become a *flood* to destroy all flesh." (Gen. 9:11–15)

"In spite of human sin and violence, God has committed himself to his world; the unconditional covenant of the rainbow, by which he binds only himself, is a sign of that."[46] The bow was a weapon of war. But the rainbow in the clouds is a sign of God's weapon at rest: God is no longer targeting the earth. Brueggemann observes, "The bow at rest thus forms a parallel to the sabbath in 2:1–4a [2:1–3] at the resolve of creation. The first creation . . . ends with the serene rest of God. The re-creation (8:20–9:17) ends with God resting his weapon. God's creation is for all time protected from God's impatience."[47]

Babel: The Chaos of Languages to Restore Cosmos (Genesis 11)

Humankind soon rebelled against God again. Originally, God had given them the mandate "be fruitful and multiply and *fill the earth* and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). After the flood, God repeated this mandate to Noah and his family: "And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and *fill the earth*'" (9:1). But people thought they knew a better way to survive in a hostile environment. They would seek their security not in God but in their own power and glorious city. They said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens,[48] and let us make a

---

46. David J. A. Clines, "The Theology of the Flood Narrative," *Faith and Thought* 100 (1972–73), 128–42, esp. 140. Brueggemann writes, "The flood has effected no change in humankind. But it has effected an irreversible change in God, who now will approach his creation with an unlimited patience and forbearance." *Genesis*, 81.

47. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 84–85.

48. "Here the addition 'to the heavens' shows they are vying with God himself. The Lord, not humankind, dwells in the heavens (Gen. 19:24; 21:17; 22:11, 15; Deut. 26:15; Ps. 115:16)." Waltke, *Genesis*, 179. von Rad writes, "The saga views such a development of power as something against God, rebellion against the Most High, as Babylon in many passages of the Bible is mentioned as the embodiment of sinful arrogance." *Genesis*, 151.

name for ourselves, *lest we be dispersed* over the face of the whole earth" (11:4).

How would God respond to this new rebellion? God had promised never again to send a flood that would destroy all flesh (Gen. 9:15). Yet, for the sake of his creation, God could not let humankind get away with their plan of relying on their ingenuity and unity for survival. The Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.[49] Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.[50] So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city" (11:6–8). Wenham states that this is "the decisive divine intervention that reverses the tide of human history. It is comparable to 'And God remembered Noah' in 8:1. Like 8:1, v 5 occurs at the midpoint of a story and heralds the undoing of what has gone before: there the flood waters start to fall; here the building stops."[51] Genesis 11 continues: "Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth" (v. 9).[52]

Thus God used the chaos of different languages to stop the human rebellion in its tracks. Now, with humanity dispersed over

---

49. Wenham points out that "the structure . . . and sentiments closely resemble 3:22, 'Since man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, now lest they reach out . . . and live forever. . . .'" *Genesis 1–15*, 240.

50. "God resolves upon a punitive, but at the same time preventive, act, so that he will not have to punish man more severely as his degeneration surely progresses." von Rad, *Genesis*, 149. Freitheim observes, "God . . . promotes diversity at the expense of any kind of unity that seeks to preserve itself in isolation from the rest of creation and thereby places creation at risk." *God and World*, 89.

51. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 236.

52. "The name 'Babel/Babylon' does not mean 'gate of the god,' as the Babylonians held, but 'confusion,' and it evokes the similar sounding words 'folly,' and 'flood.' Far from being the last word in human culture, it is the ultimate symbol of man's failure when he attempts to go it alone in defiance of his creator." Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 245.

all the earth, God could again make a new start with one obedient person and his family.

The Lord's New Start with Abram/Israel (Genesis 12–47)

To initiate this new start for an orderly cosmos, God selected Abram, who lived in Ur of Chaldea (Babylonia). "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*' So Abram went, as the Lord had told him" (Gen. 12:1–4).

God told Abram to separate himself not only from his country and his kindred, his more distant relatives, but even from his father's house, his immediate family. Abram was to go to a land the Lord would show him. God wanted to separate Abram from the nations for the time being so that, eventually, "in you all the families of the earth [would] be blessed." And like Noah before him, Abram obeyed God without questioning.

Then the "Lord," Yahweh, made a covenant with Abram:

Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you." (Gen. 17:4–7)

Abraham and his family thrived in the Promised Land. God had provided another "Paradise" for them: "the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lᴏʀᴅ" (Gen. 13:10). Here they could flourish in peace and safety. God established his covenant also with Abraham's son Isaac (26:4, 24) and his grandson Jacob (28:13–15; 35:11–12). But when Jacob and his family suffered through drought in the Promised Land, they decided to move to Egypt, where Joseph governed (41:41). Again the family prospered: "Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly" (47:27). But soon their harmonious cosmos would turn into chaos.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are the seven words for *chaos* in Genesis 1?

2. List the forms of chaos introduced in Genesis 3.

3. List some other forms of chaos we experience in this world.

4. Give the two main biblical reasons why we experience chaos in this world.

5. How have you experienced chaos in your life?

6. The church fathers called Genesis 3:15 *protevangelium*, the first gospel. Explain why. See 1 John 3:8.

7. Give (again) our definition of *cosmos*.

8. List some forms of orderly cosmos in this world.

9. How have you experienced cosmos/order in your life?

10. Name the reasons why there is still some cosmos in this fallen world.

11. List the new starts God made with humanity according to the book of Genesis.

12. What do these new starts tell us about God?

13. What do these new starts tell us about God's promised new creation? (See, e.g., Isa. 65:17–25.)

Chaos–Cosmos in Exodus and Joshua

At the end of Genesis, Israel was flourishing in Egypt. But in time "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (Ex. 1:8). This king oppressed God's people with forced labor (1:11). He enslaved them and would not let them go. Forced labor and slavery are political forms of chaos. Pharaoh even commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile" (1:22). Egypt used the waters of the Nile to kill God's people. "And the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery [chaos] came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (2:23–24).

Later the "LORD," Yahweh, said to Moses, "I also established my covenant with them *to give them the land of Canaan*, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant" (Ex. 6:4–5). Through a reluctant Moses, God would lead his people out of slavery (chaos) back to the Promised Land (cosmos).

Aaron's Staff Swallows up Pharaoh's Staffs (Ex. 7:8–13)

Exodus 7:8–13 has a subtle prelude to the chaos–cosmos theme in Exodus. Moses objected to going to Pharaoh demanding Israel's release because he thought the Egyptians would not believe that the Lord had sent him. So the Lord gave him a miracle to perform before Pharaoh. The Lord told Moses to throw his staff on the ground. "So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent (*nāḥāš*)" (Ex. 4:3). But when Moses actually performed this miracle before Pharaoh, the narrator tells us that his staff did not become a serpent but a dragon

(*tănnîn*—a reference to chaos). We read in Exodus 7:8–13: "Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'When Pharaoh says to you, "Prove yourselves by working a miracle," then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent (dragon, *tănnîn*).'" So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent (dragon, *tănnîn*). Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents (dragons, *tănnînim*). But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said." Pharaoh would not listen even when threatened to be swallowed up by chaos.

As one scholar explains, "Variously translated as 'serpent,' 'dragon,' and 'sea-monster,' and used in parallel with 'Rahab,' and 'the Deep,' *tănnîn* [dragon] is not a garden-variety snake. To the contrary, it evokes the threat of chaos."[53] The fact that Aaron's staff "swallowed up" Pharaoh's staffs should have been a sign to Pharaoh that in the cosmic battle between the God of Israel and Pharaoh, the god of Egypt, the God of Israel would be the victor.[54] But Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he would not let Israel go. It would take a full ten plagues of chaos to convince Pharaoh to let God's people go.[55] And even then he changed his mind when he heard

---

53. Arie Leder, "Hearing Exodus 7:8–13 to Preach the Gospel," 97.

54. "The swallowing of the magicians' staffs by Aaron's . . . is a sign of the fate of the Egyptians at the sea. The only other use of the verb, *bālaʿ*, 'swallow,' occurs in 15:12, where it refers to the swallowing of the Egyptians in the depths of the earth beneath the sea." Fretheim, *God and World*, 115.

55. The first plague turned the fresh water of the Nile into blood, killing the fish (Ex. 7:14–25); the second saw the Nile teem with frogs, which would cover the land and even crawl into Pharaoh's bed (8:1–15); and the ninth covered the land with darkness (10:21–23) as in the original chaos (Gen. 1:2). Beal writes, "The plagues on Egypt that begin the process of the exodus are designed to indicate a de-creation and situation of chaos from which Israel can emerge through the division of water and earth as a new humanity on the other side of the Red Sea." *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 172.

that Israel apparently got lost and was trapped behind the sea (Ex. 14:2–3).

Pharaoh and his army pursued Israel and "overtook them encamped at the sea" (Ex. 14:9). The Israelites complained bitterly to the Lord and Moses: "It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness" (14:12). But Moses said to them, "The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (4:14).

The Lord Saves Israel from the Sea (Exodus 14–15)

Pharaoh's armies were behind and the sea in front. Would the waters defeat Israel on its march to the Promised Land? The Lord told Moses what to do.

> Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind[56] all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. . . .
>
> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the

---

56. *Rûaḥ*. Compare Genesis 8:1: "God made a wind (*rûaḥ*) blow over the earth, and the waters subsided."

> chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. (Ex. 14:21–23, 26–28)

As with the flood, the Lord used the chaotic waters to save his people and to destroy those who defied him.

The Egyptians had enslaved God's people and attempted to destroy them by drowning their baby boys in the river Nile. Now God used the chaotic waters of the sea to eliminate the Egyptians instead. "But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left" (Ex. 14:29). Saved from the sea! As the Lord later promised through Isaiah, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you" (Isa. 43:2).

> Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying,
>
> > I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
> >   the horse and his rider he has thrown into the *sea*.
> > The Lord is my strength and my song,
> >   and he has become my salvation. . . .
> > Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the *sea*,
> >   and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red *Sea*.
> > The *floods* covered them;
> >   they went down into the *depths* like a stone. . . . [57]
> > At the blast of your nostrils the *waters* piled up;
> >   the *floods* stood up in a heap;
> >   the *deeps* congealed in the heart of the *sea*. . . .

---

57. "Throughout the text it is unmistakably clear that the waters and the primordial deeps are at the mercy of Yahweh's authority. [Exodus 15:5], for instance, specifically references the primordial deeps which Yahweh turns loose for his purpose, to cover Pharaoh's chariots and army. Later, in v 8, the waters stand up (at attention) like a wall at the 'blast of your [Yahweh's] nostrils.'" Mellish, "Creation as Social and Political Order," 169.

You blew with your wind; the *sea* covered them;

they sank like lead in the mighty *waters*. . . .[58]

The Lord will reign forever and ever. (Ex. 15:1–18)[59]

The sovereign Lord used the deadly waters to save his people Israel from the chaos of slavery in Egypt and to defeat their enemy. The cosmos of the Promised Land lay before them.

The Lord Dries Up the Jordan for Israel (Joshua 3)

One more water obstacle remained before Israel could enter the Promised Land: the Jordan had flooded its banks and Israel could not pass over.

At the Lord's instruction, Joshua told Israel,

> "Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan. . . . And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap." . . .
>
> As soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away,

---

58. "The poetry here moves well beyond the specific enactment of the Exodus and appeals to the language of the creator's victory over and administration of chaos." Brueggemann, "The Book of Exodus," 800.

59. "The 'Song of the Sea' (Ex. 15:1–18) praises Yahweh's victory in language which at times sounds like the myth of the battle with the waters of chaos. But it is quite clear that in this old hymn the enemy is Pharaoh's host, not the 'deeps' (*tĕhômôt*, vv. 5, 8), 'sea' (vv. 8, 10), or 'mighty waters' (v. 10)." Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos*, 50. Day writes, "There is here no divine conflict with the waters, nor do the waters symbolize a foreign nation or nations; rather, Yahweh's victory at Yam Suph is over Pharaoh and his armies, and the waters, which are in no way personified, are merely the passive instrument used by Yahweh in accomplishing his purpose." *God's Conflict*, 98.

at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan. (Josh. 3:11–17)

"The Lord of all the earth" controlled the waters of the Jordan, probably by causing a rockslide at Adam, where the Jordan passes through a narrow gorge. This would have caused the waters to rise "up in a heap very far away, at Adam," while the waters downstream would continue their way to the Dead Sea, leaving a dry river bed for Israel to cross over. "As recently as 1927 a blockage of the water in this area was recorded that lasted over 20 hours."[60] As God, at the Red Sea, could use "a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land" (Ex. 14:21), so the Lord of all the earth could use a rockslide to control the waters. In any event, the Lord controlled the chaotic waters and brought his people safely into the Promised Land, another Paradise: "The Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD" (Gen. 13:10).

―――――

Summarizing the chaos–cosmos theme we have covered thus far, we have seen pure chaos, pure cosmos, and a mix of the two. At its original level, chaos refers to the primeval chaotic waters that kept life from taking a foothold on earth. Although this was 100 percent chaos without any cosmos, it was *not evil* as in the pagan myths. It

---

60. *NIV Study Bible*, n. Joshua 3:13. This note also observes the connection between the Red Sea crossing and the Jordan crossing: "The Hebrew for 'heap' is found here, [v. 13 as well as] in v 16 and also in the poetic accounts of the 'Red Sea' crossing (Ex. 15:8; Ps. 78:13)."

was God who had created these waters and God who subsequently turned this chaos into cosmos through his creative words. But God did not eliminate the waters entirely; rather, he tamed them by confining them to the "Seas" which he called "good" (Gen. 1:10). Next God placed Adam and Eve in a fruitful garden watered by quiet rivers. The garden of Eden, Paradise, was truly a harmonious, 100 percent orderly cosmos.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command, however, God banished them from Paradise. Living east of Eden, as we do today, involves chaos, disorder. This chaos is *evil* in that, as a result of sin, it involves pain, suffering, and death. But because of God's grace and faithfulness to his creation, there is still some order east of Eden: the succession of seasons and of day and night; the earth bringing forth vegetation; creatures thriving in the waters, the sky, and the earth; and human beings bearing children and finding food. Struggling for a living east of Eden is a mix of evil chaos and cosmos.

Subsequently, human sin ushered in other forms of evil chaos: Cain murdered his brother Abel; Lamech boasted of killing people for little or no reason (the chaos of anarchy). When the violence increased to the point of threatening God's orderly creation, God unleashed a worldwide flood. The chaotic waters cleansed the earth so that God could make a new start with those safe in the ark.

Later, at Babel, when people threatened God's design for his creation by disobeying God's mandate to fill the earth, God confused their language—another form of chaos. This confusion forced people to spread across the earth so that God could make a new start with Abram and his descendants, Israel.

Israel's enslavement in Egypt was another form of evil chaos. But God made a new start with Israel by controlling the wind and the Red Sea to send his people on their way to freedom in the Promised

Land.[61] When Israel approached the Promised Land, they could not enter because the waters of the Jordan were overflowing. Again God demonstrated his sovereignty over the turbulent waters by stopping the waters at Adam so that his people could pass safely on dry ground into the Promised Land.

Thus the overall message of the chaos–cosmos theme from Genesis to Joshua is that God is sovereign over both cosmos and chaos. He is able to turn chaos into cosmos, to control the chaotic waters, and to use the waters for good or ill as he makes new beginnings in seeking to fulfill his plan for a world that is truly a harmonious, orderly cosmos.

---

61. See Psalm 77:19–20: "Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron," and Isaiah 51:10: "Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?"

Questions for Reflection

1. Exodus 7:8–13 tells the account of Aaron's "dragon" swallowing the Egyptian "dragons." What did this demonstration mean?

2. How is the account of Exodus 7:8–13 connected to the Egyptians later drowning in the Red Sea?

3. Name some similarities between the Lord saving Israel from the sea (Exodus 14) and the flood narrative (Genesis 6–7).

4. What do these narratives tell us about God and chaos?

5. Exodus 14:21 says that "the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land." Does the Lord's use of an east wind detract from the miracle? How is it still a miracle?

6. Can you think of other instances where the Lord used nature to perform his miracles? What does this say about the Lord?

7. How would you define a miracle?

8. At the drowning of the Egyptians, Moses, Israel, and Miriam sang, "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea" (Ex. 15:1, 21, the bookends of this song).[62] We still sing, "I will sing unto the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously, horse and rider thrown into the sea." Do you think it appropriate to sing to the Lord when our enemies die? How would you justify this praise? Who gets the credit for Israel's salvation?

9. Would Jesus sing at the destruction of his enemies? (See Matt. 5:43–48; Luke 6:35; 23:34.)

10. How do you explain the different attitude toward enemies as you progress from the Old Testament to the New Testament? (But see already in the Old Testament Ex. 23:4–5; Lev. 19:18, and Job 31:29–30.)

---

62. In several Psalms Israel also celebrated this victory. See, for example, Pss. 74:13–14; 77:19–20; 78:13, 53; 106:9–12; and 114:1–5.

*"I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and
create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things."*

ISAIAH 45:7

When God created the world, he brought perfect order out of what was "without form and void." But with human rebellion against God leading to God's curse, disorder was introduced into creation—disorder that we still see all around us today. Tracing the *chaos to cosmos* theme from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, pastor-scholar Sidney Greidanus reveals how God is restoring his creation through Jesus Christ, who has already begun to shine light into the darkness and will one day return to bring peace, order, and restoration once and for all. With discussion questions at the end of each chapter and a fourteen-session reading plan, this book is ideal for small groups as well as individual study.

"Greidanus poured a lifetime of preaching Christ from the entire Bible into this guided tour of Scripture's unfolding history of creation, redemption, and consummation. This study is full of God's Word, set into context by Greidanus's insightful comment. It offers fresh and ancient perspectives on Scripture's unity and its central focus: Christ the Redeemer."

DENNIS E. JOHNSON, Professor Emeritus of Practical Theology, Westminster Seminary California; author, *Him We Proclaim* and *Journeys with Jesus*

SIDNEY GREIDANUS (ThD, Free University of Amsterdam) has been a pastor of two churches and taught at Calvin College, the King's College, and Calvin Theological Seminary. Since his retirement from full-time teaching in 2004, he has devoted his time to writing commentaries specifically for preachers. He is the author of many books, including *Sola Scriptura*; *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*; and *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*.

The Short Studies in Biblical Theology series is designed to help readers see the whole Bible as a unified story culminating in Jesus Christ. Written by trusted scholars, each volume traces an important topic through God's Word and explores its significance for the Christian life.