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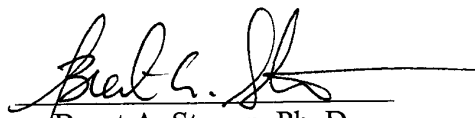
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GOD AND LEVIATHAN:
A CANONICAL AND ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN DIALOGUE

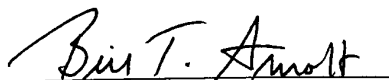
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I. INTRODUCTION

There has been a voluminous amount of work done exploring creation theologies in the Old Testament. Usually the debate centers around several cruxes. One such issue is the debate between myth and history: can biblical texts be described as mythical? That discussion has morphed from the question of biblical mythmaking¹ to the deeper questions of what exactly constitutes history. Note, for example, the wide variety of ways that history has been understood and articulated in *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography*.² Even among scholars who belong to one particular confessional stance, consensus upon a neat systematic schema of the concepts of history and historiography, historical consciousness, and the like, is rarely forthcoming.³ Other controversial issues include the debate between literal interpretations (for example, a seven-day creation schema that posits evolution and creation science on vehemently opposing sides) and more nuanced readings.

The present study engages the biblical text on two levels: 1) within itself, and 2) with other ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literature on the same subject. Several times the scriptures recount God's activity in creation: Genesis 1:1-2:3, 2:4-25; many psalms including: Psalms 8, 33, 74, 104, among others; Isaiah 40-43 and 65; and other places in the prophets, just to list a few. What is of interest here is the handling of creation theology within the canon, and especially how differing accounts can be understood together. To take but two of many texts, what is the relationship between Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Psalm

¹ See Bernard Batto's book titled accordingly, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

² V. Phillips Long, ed., *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography* (Winoona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 356.

³ E.g., in the volume cited in the previous note, there is no consensual definition of what constitutes history among scholars such as V. Phillips Long, K. Lawson Younger, Jr., John Goldingay, J. Maxwell Miller, etc. This does not mean that a common understanding of what constitutes history is not operative among them.

74? If, as some scholars argue, the effort of the author of Genesis 1:1-2:3 was to reinterpret ANE (particularly Babylonian) combat myths how would that effort compare to, contrast with, illuminate, or meaningfully interact with Psalm 74, where the language and roles of Baal and Marduk are intermingled with the salvation of Yahweh? Or, still more importantly, which of these biblical texts is authoritative or normative (if either; perhaps even both) for those who wish to allow the whole canon of Scripture to govern their lives? The goal, therefore, is to develop a hermeneutic sophisticated enough to sufficiently engage both scriptures and their ANE setting.

In order to answer these questions, at least preliminarily, I will examine both Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Psalm 74 in their own structure and contexts, then move toward a comparative analysis between each and a relevant piece of ANE literature. The purpose is to demonstrate a hermeneutic that engages the biblical passages comprehensively: in their independent context, in their corporate context, and in the relevant cultural context. Finally, I hope to synthesize the findings and glean theological payoff.

II. METHODOLOGY

It is critical before beginning to establish methodological parameters to guide our inquiry. Therefore, I will begin by highlighting the similarities and contrasts between each passage with relevant ANE myths, with this word of caution from Brevard Childs. “I do not deny that there is a subtle relationship between [early Canaanite religion and Israel] and that historical reconstructions can aid in understanding Israel’s witness, if the

two tasks are not confused or indiscriminately intermingled.”⁴ William Hallo and Shemaryahu Talmon have significantly explored problems inherent in the comparison and contrast of ancient texts, especially concerning biblical texts and other ANE documents. Apparently, due to similarities in details between the creation accounts in Genesis (and other accounts such as the flood), scholars have equated allusion, literary reference, and even borrowing of literary details with parallel meaning. Talmon refers to the close study of “internal literary parallels” as being more “helpful than external ones because the external mirror only fragmentarily the conceptual horizon of ancient Israel. Their identification can be achieved in a more systematic way than the pinpointing of similarities in extra-biblical sources.”⁵ In this case, therefore, it behooves us to make independent assessments of both accounts and thereby make our analyses. Accordingly, we must avoid “parallelomania,”⁶ that is, finding so much similarity between the texts that differences are not taken seriously. Hallo addresses the necessity of contrast in this way. Although “cuneiform sources and biblical texts could fruitfully illuminate each other” we must also “test the evidence for a whole spectrum of relationships ... $A=B$, $A\sim B$, or $A<B$ or $A>B$ and even A does not equal B .”⁷ Let us then examine the *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1-2:3 as two distinct pieces of literature, while analyzing the significant overlap for relevant meaning.⁸

⁴ Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 389.

⁵ Shemaryahu Talmon, “The ‘Comparative Method’ in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems,” in *Congress Volume*, VTSup 29 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 350.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 344.

⁷ William Hallo, “New Moons and Sabbaths,” *HUCA* 48 (1977): 2.

⁸ It is widely agreed that the *Enuma Elish* predates Gen 1:1-2:3; therefore, Genesis follows it thematically.

III. GENESIS 1:1-2:3 AND THE *ENUMA ELISH*

Amid the battle and triumphs of the gods that characterize ANE accounts of origin, the Hebrews present a variation on a common theme. In Genesis 1:1-2:3, the single, unchallenged Elohim speaks order into chaos, initiating creation for existence into a disordered cosmos, and so creates the heavens and the land, and all that live in them. The fact that God is one, and that God creates without dissension has far-reaching theological, anthropological, and ontological implications for Hebrew culture, especially in its ANE context. This section is devoted to a comparison and contrast between Genesis 1:1-2:3 and the *Enuma Elish* for a two-fold purpose: first, to comprehend the impact and import of the first account of creation in Genesis on its own terms; and second, to understand it in its cultural context.

The Enuma Elish

It is generally agreed that although Marduk creates the cosmos and humankind, the purpose of the *Enuma Elish* is not exclusively to answer questions of origin or creation, but rather to function primarily as a theogony.⁹ Bernard Batto writes that the text “is more concerned with the establishment of the divine order (the origins of the gods and the hierarchy among them) than with the establishment of the world and the origins of humankind.”¹⁰ Thorkild Jacobsen’s work agrees with this thought. “Instead of dealing with the major elements of the cosmos—the underground water table, the sea, the horizon, silt, heaven and earth, etc.—as one with the powers in them, the epic tells only of the

⁹ Following the terminology of Frank Moore Cross, “The ‘Olden Gods’ in Ancient Near Eastern Creation Myths and in Israel,” in idem, *From Epic to Canon* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1998), 73.

¹⁰ Batto, *Slaying*, 33.

‘gods’ of these things. It presents *theogony*, moving as it were, in an inchoate world of potentialities only. The creation of the corresponding actualities, the *cosmogony*, we are told about at a much later point in the story.”¹¹ The origin and interactions of the gods subordinates the creation of the world and humankind. The gods are the focal point, not creation. Interestingly, even the divine family was “essentially accidental: gods were born out of a mingling of the primeval waters and they engendered other gods. World ordering is essentially the outcome of the youthful leadership: conscious, creative intelligence in a born ruler, Marduk.”¹²

In form, the story flows climactically from chaos (embodied by the goddess Ti’amat), to battle, to sovereignty. From the plan of Apsu and Ti’amat to destroy the lower gods, and then Ti’amat’s attempt to avenge her husband’s death, Marduk rises to the challenge and slays Ti’amat. He thus brings order by creating the heavens and the earth and by establishing lights and seasons. Finally, he creates humankind for the purpose of feeding and serving the gods, an act that guarantees rest for the pantheon (and hopefully prevents further uprising). Another attribute of the *Enuma Elish* that is typical of ANE ideology is the correspondence of natural phenomenon such as the sun, moon, sea, storm, to deities who merit worship.

Jacobsen finds embedded in the epic a social commentary. It moves from “anarchy to primitive democracy to monarchy,”¹³ and therein one finds political order and unity. Furthermore, it satisfies its human audience because power is not estranged from them entirely, but it resides in gods in human form who act understandably. “The universe is now moral and meaningful and [the] expression of a creative intelligence with

¹¹ Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 169.

¹² *Ibid.*, 191.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 184.

valid purpose: order and peace and prosperity.”¹⁴ Furthermore, Jacobsen comments that this worldview is “in many ways impressive. It sees the universe as grounded in divine power and divine will: even those wills traditionally felt as older, more authoritative, or hostile, are unified under the leadership of a single ruler who governs through consultation, persuasion and conviction.”¹⁵

From this evidence, we may conclude that the *Enuma Elish* is as much an answer to questions of origin as it is a reflection of culture, particularly religious culture. Because of our own distance from the text both temporally and geographically, caution must be exercised in defining its precise function within the society. However, after serious scrutiny of the poetic form and meter, Alexander Heidel points out that very likely the “epic was intended for recitation. Hence it was cast into poetry, since this is the most appealing and most effective method of expression for that purpose.”¹⁶ He continues, “the recitation of *Enuma Elish* presumably reflects the annual battle between Marduk and the watery chaos produced by the spring inundations.”¹⁷ Indeed, others more confidently connect the *Enuma Elish* to the Babylonian New Year festival called the *akitu*. We will address the implications of ritual and ANE myths later on.

Genesis

Gordon Wenham eloquently opens the discussion of Genesis 1:1-2:3: “Simple and majestic, dignified yet unaffected, profound and yet perfectly clear, Genesis makes a superb introduction not only to the Book of Genesis itself but to the whole of Scripture.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid., 191.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 10.

¹⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 36.

In form, Genesis 1 is not typical Hebrew poetry.¹⁹ It “is characterized by a number of recurrent formulae: (1) announcement of the commandment, ‘And God said’; (2) order, ‘Let there be...’; (3) fulfillment formula, ‘And it was so’; (4) execution formula, ‘And God made’; (5) approval formula; (6) subsequent divine word, either of naming or blessing; (7) mention of the days.”²⁰ What is immediately clear to the reader is the absence of other gods. Instead, the single God brings order from chaos by his word, creates in an orderly fashion (sky before birds, land before creatures), and by the internal structure we find an emphasis upon the Sabbath rest.

To set the stage for understanding Genesis 1-11 (our focus is narrowed to 1:1-2:3, Wenham introduces the book as follows.

Genesis 1-11...is a commentary, often highly critical, on ideas current in the ancient world about the natural and supernatural world. Both individual stories as well as the final completed work seem to be a polemic against many of the commonly received notions about the gods and man. But the clear polemic thrust of Gen 1-11 must not obscure the fact that at certain points biblical and extrabiblical thought are *in clear agreement*. Indeed Genesis and the ANE probably have more in common with each other than either has with modern secular thought.²¹

Wenham well diagrams this section of Genesis in two ways, first with the correspondence of the days of creation and the life created to rule them (order, purpose), and, second, with a pattern that underscores the way in which Genesis 1 subtly yet directly engages ANE cultural and religious ideology.²²

chart 1		chart 2	
Day 1: Light	Day 4: Luminaries	Day 1: heaven	Day 3: earth
Day 2: Sky	Day 5: Birds and Fish	Day 2: heaven	Day 5: earth
Day 3: Land (plants)	Day 6: Animals/man (plants for food)	Day 4: heaven	Day 6: earth
Day 7: Sabbath		Day 7: heaven <i>and</i> earth	

¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

²⁰ Ibid., 6.

²¹ Ibid., xlvii.

²² Ibid., 7.

The first chart demonstrates the symmetry and order of creation, the second a cross-over pattern showing the two poles of orientation, heaven and earth. Both are arranged to focus on the relationship between God and creation (rest and order, the dwelling of God and the dwelling of humankind). The presence of this crossover pattern “suggests the author was particularly interested in the work of the fourth day of creation. The sun, moon, and stars dictate the seasons, days, and years, and the narrative’s focus on their function is appropriate in an account of creation that allocates the work of creation and God’s rest on the Sabbath to the days of the week.”²³ Furthermore, this specific focus of attention in Genesis upon the fourth day directly correlates, as a polemic, with Mesopotamian religious worship of various astral bodies.²⁴ Hence the polemic against ANE religious practices emerge in the midst of a remarkable religious distinction. Neither the sun god, nor the moon god, nor the sky good, nor the star gods merit worship and fear. These objects merely point to the One God who created them and who alone is to be worshipped.

To focus momentarily on the underlying bite of a six-days-work-then-rest cycle we find William Hallo’s work insightful:

There is little in the ritual calendar of the Bible to compare with the persistent importance of moon-worship and the celebration of various lunar phases that we encounter in Mesopotamia...Now contrast, if you will, the case for the sabbatical conception in the Bible. Nothing could be more persistent. The double injunction to work for six days and to rest every seventh is the most *fundamental piece of social legislation written in the Decalogue*...We may sum up the contrast as follows: the ancient Mesopotamian year was based on the month, and the worship of the moon went hand in hand with it. The Israelite year was based on the week, and remained independent of the month even when the luni-solar calendar was adopted from Babylonia...Here, then, two of the great contrasts between

²³ Ibid., 21.

²⁴ Ibid.

biblical Israel and its Near Eastern matrix meet: *sabbatical cycles versus lunar calendars, and divine versus royal authority*.²⁵

Comparative Analysis

The following themes emerge as points of contact with and distinction from the *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1:1-2:3. The differences regarding ritual and seasons will be discussed below.

- watery chaos that was separated into heaven and earth (there is a plausible etymological relationship between the names denoting this chaos: *tehom* and *ti'amat*)²⁶ [similar]
- reference to the existence of light before the creation of the luminous bodies²⁷ [similar]
- the spoken word and its power (the spell used to slay Apsu, also Marduk creates by words) [similar]
- the description of the gods in the *Enuma Elish* in highly anthropomorphic terms (they are outwitted and respond in mannerisms familiar to humankind – biting their lips, looking down, they experience terror and confusion, they eat, they consult one another, they betray one another, they war) [different]
- the victor established as sovereign over all gods; the one who creates the cosmos creates humankind as an afterthought for the purpose of service to the gods; the co-dependent relationship between humans and gods (gods need humans in order to eat, humans access the gods for life security) [different]

Why are these points germane to a comparative study of Genesis 1:1-2:3 and the *Enuma Elish*? It is precisely in the parallels and distinctions that we understand the meaning and purposes of these texts more clearly. One distinction mentioned is the contrast and polemic stance of a seven day emphasis versus a lunar month emphasis.

However, the first three points above are found in both texts. For now we will explore the last two points in their differences. In Genesis, what is known about God (besides the fact that he created all things) must be *inferred* from his activity of creating. God in

²⁵ Hallo, "New Moons and Sabbaths," 10, 16-17 (emphasis added).

²⁶ Michael A. Grisanti, "Leviathan," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:275-7.

²⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 82; both the first and second points originate from Heidel.

Genesis is the main character (indeed the only character), whereas in the *Enuma Elish* Marduk, Ti'amat, the Igigi, and a whole host of other gods and goddesses take the stage. In contrast, God is an unchallenged sovereign who reigns unrivaled; the elements are not recalcitrant because they are not gods. God's rest at the conclusion of the seven day period of creation is not a result of the taxing work of defending the cosmos or his throne. He ceases from work not because he is tired or old; he spent his six days of work in "faithful invitation. God does not spend the seventh day in exhaustion but in serenity and peace."²⁸ Furthermore, as we have seen in the discussion of New Moons and Sabbaths, "it seems like the Israelite Sabbath was introduced as a deliberate counter-blast to [the] lunar-regulated cycle" of ancient Mesopotamia.²⁹

Inasmuch as those broader themes emerge, there is further evidence of connection. Speiser states that "it is clear that the biblical approach to creation...is closely related to traditional Mesopotamian beliefs."³⁰ Drawing on Heidel's work, he concurs that the literary points of connection are not to be ignored. They follow:³¹

<i>Enuma Elish</i>	<i>Genesis</i>
Divine spirit and cosmic matter are coexistent and coeternal	Divine spirit creates cosmic matter and exists independently of it
Primeval chaos: Ti'amat enveloped in darkness	The earth a desolate waste, with darkness covering the deep (<i>tehom</i>)
Light emanating from the gods	Light created
The creation of the firmament	The creation of the firmament
The creation of dry land	The creation of dry land
The creation of luminaries	The creation of luminaries
The creation of humankind	The creation of humankind
The gods rest and celebrate	God rests and sanctifies the seventh day

These literary parallels demonstrate the outstanding polemical abilities of the author of Genesis 1:1-2:3 in two ways. First, the biblical author addresses the reader in

²⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 35.

²⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 35.

³⁰ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Anchor Bible 1 (Doubleday: New York, 1964), 10.

³¹ Heidel, *Genesis*, 129.

terms culturally familiar as seen in the apparent borrowing of themes. Second, the biblical writer reinterprets those literary building blocks in ways that inevitably transform their import. This reinterpretation is discussed below. I find Speiser's comments on the similarities and differences especially germane.

Derivation from Mesopotamia in this instance means no more and no less than that on the subject of creation biblical tradition aligned itself with the traditional tenets of Babylonian 'science'...While we have before us incontestable similarities in detail, the difference in over-all approach is no less prominent. The Babylonian creation story features a succession of various rival deities. The biblical version on the other hand, is dominated by the monotheistic concept in the absolute sense of the term. *Thus the two are both genetically related and yet poles apart.*³²

To return to the process of contrasting the *Enuma Elish* with Genesis 1:1-2:3 in their literary overlap, let us focus now on humankind. If the *Enuma Elish* presents a theogony, the orientation of the human to the hierarchy and natural/supernatural correspondence of deities, what is the theological thrust for humankind in Genesis? That question will be addressed further at the end of this study, but let us say preliminarily that it is a statement about the cosmos, about God (even indirectly), and about humankind. The importance of the high view of the creation of humankind as an end and not an afterthought also should not be underestimated. In Wenham's words, "man was not created as the lackey of the gods to keep them supplied with food; he was God's representative and ruler on earth, endowed by his creator with an abundant supply of food and expected to rest every seventh day from his labors."³³ As much as the skies were prepared for the birds, and the seas for the sea-creatures, the whole of creation from day one to day five

³² Speiser, *Genesis*, 11 (emphasis added).

³³ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 37.

centers around a preparation for the creation of humankind on day six. *Ha-'adam* is the only part of creation that was crafted in the *image* of God.³⁴

In light of all this, perhaps it is safe to say that Genesis 1 is both a polemic against Mesopotamian paganism *and* a kerygmatic proclamation about God. This is plausible both in terms of its possible origin in the Exile, and that it was used liturgically.

Some scholars (Wenham, Westermann, Batto) are convinced that Genesis 1 was created in the exile by the Priestly redactor, as hope in the midst of the horror of Babylonian rule. If this is true, some other inherent and poignant statements are leveled directly at Babylonian culture and religion. As we have seen in this brief comparative study, the implications for theology, anthropology, and ontology are indeed radically different.

Others argue for an earlier date of the penning of this text, but for the sake of this discussion I will posit my argument on the side of a later date as it yields a somewhat more fruitful argument in comparison with Psalm 74. Genesis 1 takes on the language and structural forms of myth with a radical twist in meaning at the level of substance. It is polemic in its sheer refutation of polytheism, and kerygmatic in its proclamation about God and humankind, and God's relentless interest in them. The very fact that this statement of origin is dissimilar to the *Enuma Elish* (and likewise other Mesopotamian and ANE creation myths) leads one to conclude that its uniqueness is essential.

There are several insightful ways of understanding the relationship between the *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1:1-2:3. One example of the type of parallel comes from anthropological observation about the distinction between substantial and structural (that is, formal) difference. Darrell Whiteman notes that "cultural forms [structure] are the

³⁴ Brueggemann makes a profound connection between the image of God in humankind and the prohibition of idolatry (*Genesis*, 32).

obvious, observable or audible parts of culture such as material artifacts, behaviors, ceremonies, words, etc. They are always culture specific. That is, they...are related to a specific meaning [substance] which is determined by the cultural context in which they are employed.”³⁵ This example of culture and culture change is pertinent to our discussion of Genesis 1 as we ponder its effect on the culture of Israel (and subsequently our own). Whiteman outlines Homer Barnett’s theory of cultural change as follows, “All cultural change, whether developed from within the society or advocated from without, involves the fundamental socio-psychological process of *individual innovation*.” He defines an innovation as, “any thought, behavior, or thing that is new because it is qualitatively different from existing forms....An innovation is something that is *qualitatively* new, and thus the emphasis is placed on the *reorganization* of ideas rather than upon quantitative variation.”³⁶ Genesis 1 far exceeds innovation because it has implications well beyond socio-psychological process—it speaks to the ontological category of what it means to be human. The myth has become the form wherein the author of Genesis 1:1-2:3 redefines all the categories: God (as opposed to gods), the elements stripped of divinity, humankind created in the image of God. As mentioned earlier, Genesis 1 does not only reorganize ideas, it has essentially transformed them.

We can detect the presence of this myth (*Enuma Elish*) in the background of the creation story of Genesis 1, but it is present in a singularly etiolated form. Ti’amat is still recognisable in *T^ehom* (the great deep), and the two parts of her body account for the waters above the firmament and the waters below the earth; but everything else has been transformed by the monotheistic faith of the priestly author. The imposition of order upon chaos is achieved by fiat, not by battle.³⁷

³⁵ Darrell Whiteman, “Some Relevant Anthropological Concepts for Effective Cross-Cultural Ministry,” *Missiology: An International Review* 9:2 (1981): 232.

³⁶ Whiteman, “Relevant Anthropological Concepts,” 232; citing Homer Barnett, *Innovation: The Basis of Cultural Change* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953), 7.

³⁷ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 226.

Another way of addressing this transformation is through the work of N. T. Wright in his observations and theories about the relevance of understanding history more broadly than factual recounting of events. His position is to see the biblical texts as narratives. The brilliance of his theory plays out well in our discussion.

Stories are, actually, peculiarly good at modifying or subverting other stories and their worldviews. Where head-on attack would certainly fail, the parable hides the wisdom of the serpent behind the innocence of the dove, gaining entrance and favour which can then be used to change assumptions which the hearer would otherwise keep hidden away for safety....The subversive story comes close enough to the story already believed by the hearer for a spark to jump between them; and nothing will ever be quite the same again.³⁸

It follows that Genesis 1:1-2:3 is a retelling of the salient points of Babylonian theology and ideology. Here, God is presented as speaking—commanding order from chaos. The result is the undoing of pagan astral deities, and the simultaneous exaltation of humankind into the unparalleled role of image-bearers of God. For humanity’s enjoyment and loving dominion all creation was crafted. “There are however other parts of the Old Testament which make use of the myth in the full robustness of its original imagery.”³⁹ To Psalm 74 we now turn.

IV. PSALM 74 AND THE COMBAT MYTH

This psalm was chosen because it treats creation and creation theology differently from Genesis 1:1-2:3, especially in its midsection (vv. 12-17). It discusses Yahweh as the God who defeated Leviathan and the dragon at the time of God’s creating. The mythic references to God battling Leviathan and the dragons pique our interest, espe-

³⁸ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 40.

³⁹ Caird, *Language and Imagery*, 226.

cially in contrast to the subtle referencing and reinterpretation of the combat myth in Genesis 1:1-2:3. As much as the Genesis 1 author distanced creation from cosmogony, here in Psalm 74 we find precisely Cross's definition of cosmogony: cosmic conflict.⁴⁰ We will first briefly examine the bookends of the psalm in order to understand the context of the psalm itself. Then we will examine the midsection in terms of the psalm and other ANE references, and conclude with a brief contrast with Genesis 1:1-2:3 (to be developed more fully in the final section of the paper).

In form the psalm is structured in an A-B-A pattern, one that emphasizes the middle section. An outline follows:

- A. Lament (vv. 1-11)
 - 1. 1-2 (Why, God?)
 - 2. 3-8 (Look at what the enemy has done to your sanctuary!)
 - 3. 9-11 (What are you going to do about this?)
- B. Hymn of remembrance (vs. 12-17)
 - 1. 13-15 (God's mighty salvation/deliverance)
 - 2. 16-17 (creation)
- A. Lament with a plea (vs. 18-23)
 - 1. 18 (Remember us)
 - 2. 19-23 (Please, do these things)⁴¹

In Kraus' words, "laments introduced by לִמָּוֶה (interrogative pronoun) in most cases presuppose an especially extreme and painful situation of the petitioner or petitioners."⁴² The imagery is vivid, and although vv. 5-6 are notoriously difficult (they are, in Dahood's words, "the most obscure and difficult of the entire Psalter"⁴³) this section points to the horrific events of the destruction of the temple. Kraus highlights the

⁴⁰ Cross, "Olden Gods," 74.

⁴¹ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 97; Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 265; and James Luther Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 243, divide this psalm in similar fashion.

⁴² Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 97.

⁴³ Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-150*, Anchor Bible 17 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 202.

painfulness with which the psalmist describes the vigorous destruction.⁴⁴ It is no stretch to conclude that the horror of watching the temple being hacked to pieces is permanently etched into the psalmist's, and the people's, collective memory. Watching their polytheistic enemies desecrate and burn the sanctuary of God to the ground is a wound that will not be quickly healed. Verse 9 haunts the smoldering ruins with an even more troubling commentary, "we do not see our emblems; there is no longer any prophet, and there is no one among us who knows how long."

It is generally agreed that this psalm belongs "among the community prayer songs,"⁴⁵ which makes a functional parallel with Genesis 1:1-2:3 and the *Enuma Elish* although the genre differs. As a community prayer song, the psalmist's words are more than one individual's cries; they are also the words of hope for the community in exile, a personal and public statement of lament and faith.⁴⁶ As we can see from vv. 3-8 in particular, this psalm is exilic or post-exilic in date, although there is some disagreement as to which destruction of the temple the psalmist refers.⁴⁷

As the first section recounts the devastation endured, the last section appeals to Yahweh on the basis of the peoples' relationship with him. Language such as "your dove" and "your poor" points to their relationship; "the downtrodden" and "the poor and needy" now characterize the people of God in sharp contrast to who they once were (cf. Deut. 7:6). The implication of this language is significant: the people who once scoffed at their enemies and believed that Jerusalem would never be destroyed have now witnessed that destruction. Now from the vantage point of that humiliation, the people

⁴⁴ Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 98.

⁴⁵ Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 96; Dahood, *Psalms II*, 201; Mays, *Psalms*, 244.

⁴⁶ Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 265-7; Mays, *Psalms*, 244; Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library, trans. Herbert Hartwell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 518.

⁴⁷ Cf. Kraus' discussion, *Psalms 60-150*, 97.

have no other recourse but to literally throw themselves on the mercy of God. Perhaps God will yet have compassion on them. Mays eloquently describes the experience in this way:

The petitions show that the congregation does not yield its faith to experience but instead shapes its bitter experience by faith into poignant urgent prayer. In the petitions the congregation admits and recognizes that they are truly and only the lowly, the downtrodden, the poor and needy. They find themselves as a group in the place of those in the social order who have a special claim on the justice and help of the king...so they appeal to “the covenant” under whose terms the poor and needy are to be protected from violence.⁴⁸

Finally, the psalm closes with a list of appeals for justice (vv. 18-21). Here we observe two facets of the psalmist’s thought, first, that he identifies with the lowly, the poor, the downtrodden. He does not demand his appeals; instead his posture is of one defeated. He remembers the relationship with God and appeals to God accordingly. Second, the psalmist bids God to never forget the evil done by those pagans. They defiled the temple, ravished God’s people, and insulted God’s name. Ironically, his appeals preclude the possibility for mercy on the people who did this. “May you never forgive *their* wickedness, but O God, please overlook *our own* and *deliver us* from this punishment.”

The grounds on which the people appeal to God’s mercy lie in vv. 12-17. Here, the psalmist turns to a declaration about God: his saving and triumphant power to deliver, and his unchallenged authority in creation. From this hope he pleads. To begin with, the psalmist speaks of “God *my King*” (v. 12). The true king of the people is God himself. He is known by his handiwork in defeating the dragons of the waters and crushing the heads of Leviathan. In Mays’ words, “The prayer does not...seem to protest the anger of

⁴⁸ Mays, *Psalms*, 246-7.

God as unjust. Rather, its focus is on the question of God's kingship. Will God's mastery of chaos, begun in creation and initiated in history through the creation of his own people and the election of Zion be frustrated?"⁴⁹ At this point, the imagery used is familiar from other ANE creation accounts, here used to both define and frame God's delivering and saving activity.⁵⁰ It also echoes the order of creation established in Genesis 1:1-2:3, but with an unabashed appropriation of the combat myth: "Psalm 74...explicitly associates the *Chaoskampf* (triumph over chaos) with Yahweh's kingship, just as the Ugaritic Baal myth connects Baal's victory over Yamm with his enthronement and the *Enuma Elish* links Marduk's kingship with his overcoming of Ti'amat."⁵¹ The problem of chaos must not be underestimated. How the peoples of the ANE explained and engaged chaos undergirds their theology and their cosmogony, indeed almost every facet of their lives.⁵²

The literary points of connection between this psalm and other ANE literature lie in the verbs used in vv. 13-15. It may be argued that the particular verbs draw clear lines of connection between the combat myth and God's activities described in this psalm. We find the same problem of chaos encroaching, as in the dark and formless earth. Instead of the downplaying of the combat myth, as in the Genesis text, the psalmist firmly plants Yahweh in the midst of the battle. The verbs include Yahweh's a) splitting (פָּרַר) the sea; b) breaking (שָׁבַר) the heads of the dragons; c) crushing (רָצַץ) the heads of Levia-

⁴⁹ Ibid., 247.

⁵⁰ Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 99.

⁵¹ John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 19.

⁵² Cross demonstrates the problem of chaos throughout cosmogonies in Syria-Palestine outside Ugarit (see "Olden Gods").

than; and d) cutting (כָּרַע) openings for springs and torrents.⁵³ Even the “from *of old*” is translated by some to be “from *primeval times*,”⁵⁴ connoting a primordial view of creation or events that occurred before time as humans experience it.⁵⁵

The verbs mentioned above signal particular actions attributed to Yahweh, and correspond to other ANE gods. With regards to the splitting of the sea, the language echoes the act of Marduk splitting Ti’amat’s body for the ultimate defeat of chaos. Splitting her body both insured her defeat and was an act of creating the heavens and the waters on the earth. The action of cutting openings for springs and torrents connotes more than victory over a chaos monster, “the monster has been defeated [and therefore] the waters belong to God to dispense as he will.”⁵⁶ Crushing Leviathan’s heads is a clear reference to the Ugaritic myth of Baal and Yamm.⁵⁷ Also, Day and others see the dragons as Leviathan’s sidekicks.⁵⁸

Chaos, especially in the ANE (including the biblical text), is metaphorically or directly referred to as the waters. No matter whether the water threatens by means of flooding, the violent sea, or unpredictable storms, consistently the triumphant gods are those who defeat watery chaos. McCurley cites these specific parallels between ANE myths, the chaos, addressed in them, and Psalm 74:

⁵³ Day, *God’s Conflict*, 24.

⁵⁴ Batto, *Slaying*, 83; Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 95.

⁵⁵ I am not convinced that the phrase מִקַּדְמֹנִים is fittingly translated or understood in those terms, however. It is translated “east,” in Gen 2:8, 3:24; 11:2; 12:8; 13:11; Num 34:1; Jos 7:2; Judg 8:11; Isa 2:6; 9:11; Ezek 11:23; Jonah 4:5; Zech 14:4; a move that clearly does not fit here. The references to ages long ago (with contextual meaning of a particular time either in memory or in history) include: Neh 12:46; Pss 77:6, 12; 143:5. Finally these three refer to God as from “of old”: Isa 45:21; Micah 5:1; Hab 1:12, but the context is not with primordial creation, but instead the timelessness of God.

⁵⁶ John Oswalt, “The Dragon and Old Testament Faith,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 49 (1997): 171.

⁵⁷ See *KTU* 1.3 III. 35-39; 1.5 I. 1-3 (but different verbs are utilized). For a translation of the Baal-Yamm epic, see William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, ed., *Context of Scripture I: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 241-252.

⁵⁸ Day, *God’s Conflict*, 24.

It is possible that Yamm, Flood Rabbim, and Dragon are names of the same chaos deity who is further described as the crooked serpent Shalyat/Lotan. The possibility would identify Yamm as a serpent and thus mean that Baal's opponent Lotan...might be one and the same as Yamm. In any case, the victor against the raging Sea is Baal (or his sister), and as a result of that victory Baal is enthroned in his own palace as king. Like Marduk, god of the storm in the Babylonian story, Baal, the god of the storm in Ugarit, rises to the position of supremacy and rules from his temple. Unlike Marduk and the entire creation emphasis in Babylon, neither Baal nor anyone else in Ugarit is a universal creator. Even El, "creator of creatures," is more of a progenitor than a creator of the world.⁵⁹

What is the psalmist implying by juxtaposing Yahweh and Baal, Yahweh and Leviathan? In Genesis 1:1-2:3, I argued that the author intended to depart from the combat myth especially by setting creation and the inherent and implied theology thereof polemically against other ANE creation accounts, thereby establishing a point of identity and praise for the people to God. Yet, in Psalm 74, the psalmist fluently travels from the language of Marduk to describe Yahweh, from Baal to God. In Genesis, God shows sovereignty in utterly serene dominion: here sovereignty is expressed by vigorous engagement. "Yahweh's defeat of the chaos monster in the past is appealed to as a ground of confidence for him to act to deliver his people in the present when the powers of chaos seem to have triumphed."⁶⁰

The content of vv. 12-17 substantiates the psalmist's confidence in his petitions: God has divided the sea in creation, an action of salvation and sovereignty over chaos. Kraus demonstrates that "even though the mythical elements unquestionably predominate, undoubtedly also conceptions of ancient Israelite salvation history are present in vv. 13ff. Both complexes have mutually impinged on each other."⁶¹ In Mays'

⁵⁹ Foster R. McCurley, *Ancient Myths and Biblical Faith: Scriptural Transformations* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 20-21.

⁶⁰ Grisanti, "Leviathan," 276.

⁶¹ Kraus, *Psalms 60-150*, 99.

words, “Salvation history and creation process are not thought of separately. All these actions are ‘saving deeds.’”⁶² What remains clear for our discussion is that Yahweh created all things (as opposed to Baal or Marduk), and that in so doing, God triumphed over chaos.

The term “myth” has permeated this comparative study thus far. Although the purpose here is not primarily to determine whether or not the biblical texts are myth, or history, or some combination of the two,⁶³ we must understand what the connotations and dynamics of myth are to appropriately understand the comparisons.

Myth, Ritual, and Psalm 74

The aspect of myth that moves beyond literary device into religious practice is the ritual. This ritual reenactment connects the relationship of the physical world with the non-physical. These implications and corresponding relationships seem to differ in Israel when compared with the myths and rituals in other ANE religions. Not only is the content of religion different (monotheism vs. polytheism, Yahweh vs. Baal or Marduk), but the according relationship of the ritual also differs. Hence, unpacking the use of ritual in the ANE is an appropriate task for this comparative exercise. The notion of continuity—a title for the practice of seeing a direct linkage of this physical world with the cosmic realm, especially for the purpose of manipulation of natural or supernatural powers—fundamentally guarantees the efficacy of ritual.

McCurley asserts that, “the question of Israel’s uniqueness ultimately leads to a consideration of ritual....If mythology is the system of understanding the universe in

⁶² Mays, *Psalms*, 245.

⁶³ As Mays stated above. McCurley concurs: “Mythology must be historicized lest theology degenerate into the ceaseless rhythms of the universe, but history must be mythicized lest it become devoid of meaning” (*Ancient Myths*, 5).

terms of structural correspondences—temporal, spatial, and personal—then ritual is the dramatic activity carried out systematically by the cultic community in order to ensure the continuation of the cosmic order and to guarantee the community’s participation in that order.”⁶⁴ In other words, the relationship between myth and the rituals that often accompany them imply that the relationship between humans and the non-physical nature of the world can be manipulated by the reenactment of the myth, especially seasonal reenactments, and all are for the purpose of guarding against chaos. This relationship between the correspondence of powers and gods with the physical world differs strikingly from Israel. It is helpful to examine at least one dimension of the myth/ritual connection that elucidates the necessity of Israel’s religious distance from other ANE mythical religions.

The myth/ritual connection that seems both most common, and that directly addresses the issue of human-to-cosmos relationship, is that which encompasses seasons. It is commonly accepted among scholars that the *Enuma Elish* is ritually connected to the Babylonian New Year festival called the *akitu*. “Many scholars feel that in the *akitu* house the story of the *Enuma Elish* was acted out in ritual and that the entire cult drama of Marduk’s battle with the chaos monster was intended to recreate the cosmos annually, to repeat the action of *illo tempore* in such a way as to ensure the continuation of life for another year.”⁶⁵ In a similar fashion, the Canaanite myth of Baal and Yamm was enacted annually for the insurance of the defeat of chaotic waters. Furthermore,

In Egypt the Pharaoh in his divine capacity was charged with the daily responsibility of repeating the coronation rites in the Toilet Ceremonies he performed every morning to ensure the course of the sun across the horizon, as well as taking part in the Harvest Festival. Each sunrise and each New Year’s Day was a repetition of the initial creation when the current

⁶⁴ McCurley, *Ancient Myths*, 5.

⁶⁵ McCurley, *Ancient Myths*, 17.

sequence of events began by divine initiative. Similarly, in Babylonia the king commenced his reign on New Year's Day, and ever after played a significant part in its annual celebration when the story of creation was recited as an integral part of the ritual renewal in the autumn after the devastating heat of summer had spent its force.⁶⁶

Immediately the distinctives of Israel's creation account and the theological implications thereof surface. The world was created once, at the beginning of time,⁶⁷ the conclusion of which was signaled by God's sabbath rest. Nowhere is Israel invited to participate in a reenactment of that cosmological event as if to perpetuate its stability; on the contrary, other biblical authors refer to the creation event (albeit differently) historically as a beginning point for their own national history, and theologically with confidence in God's maintenance of his cosmos.⁶⁸ God is worshipped as Creator (and by implication of his own rest, as Sustainer) weekly. The importance of this demarcation from the monthly and seasonal rituals was discussed above in Genesis 1:1-2:3.

Caird summarizes the point exactly in this statement:

The thought world of myth was not a world of shadow and fantasy in which the ancient Israelite sat enchained, like the prisoners in Plato's cave, unable to escape into the world of reality. It was rather a fund of powerfully emotive language on which creative thinkers could draw 'along morally persuasive lines', to lead their people into ever deepening appreciation of the significance of their national history.⁶⁹

From this we may conclude that the heart of the difference between myth in the ANE and myth in biblical texts is in the corresponding relationship between humans and the Divine. Not only is there a sharp distinction in monotheism versus polytheism, but more significant is the difference of the character of the One God of Israel and the many gods

⁶⁶ E. O. James, *Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East: An Archeological and Documentary Study* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1958), 54.

⁶⁷ I would argue that the use of *yôm*, for "day," is an attempt on the biblical author's part to tether creation temporally as he, and we, experience it.

⁶⁸ Other specific references that tether "create," *bāra*, to an historical event include: Deut 4:32; Isa 40:26, 42:5; Ezek 28:13; Mal 2:10.

⁶⁹ Caird, *Language and Imagery*, 232.

of the ANE. Israel's God is not inextricably connected to the world or to the seasons, nor can manipulation of him secure bountiful harvest, rest, or succor from chaos. On the contrary, the author of Genesis 1:1-2:3 offers the reader an opportunity to see that God is good, that he created a good cosmos, and that he can be trusted to bring order from chaos without challenge and without threat. In Psalm 74, this same God can be trusted (even in the midst of the chaos of exile) because in the beginning he utterly triumphed over all that embodies chaos: Leviathan, the sea, Babylon.

Scholars are also divided when it comes to the reasons why this psalmist chose to use combat-myth terms to describe God's saving and creating activity. On the one hand, Batto, Childs, Kraus, and others conclude that because Israel's God had evolved from ANE myth, therefore it would be incongruous to posit God nonmythologically. Consequently, the psalmist portrays God "in his element" as it were, smashing dragons' heads, dividing up the sea, and defeating Leviathan. Israel's God is a participant, although sovereign, in ANE mythology. Kidner states "the point here is that what Baal had claimed in the realm of myth, God had done in the realm of history—and done for his people, *working salvation*."⁷⁰ Mays nuances Kidner's position of the psalmist's historicization of the combat myth by demonstrating that two-fold interplay of myth and history. "It is not correct to say that myth has been historicized or that history has been turned into myth. Both dimensions are necessary. Myth elicits the cosmic dimensions of certain events. Historical reference furnishes concretions and revelations of universal and eternal depth."

On the other hand, Oswalt, Day, Heidel, and others find these references to be polemical—a direct attack on the religious beliefs of those who defeated Israel and gave credit to their gods for that triumph. Israel's distinction from myth did not grow organi-

⁷⁰ Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 268.

cally, but was the initial and primary differentiating point of Israel's identity and uniqueness from other nations of the ANE. Oswalt makes the case for the absence of myth in biblical texts in this way:

There seems...to be a *double entendre* in the writer's mind. He wants to make use of all the emotional connotations of the name Leviathan. He specifically uses it in order to convey on a feeling level all the overtones of God's superiority over nature...the Psalmist knows that God is able to redeem and deliver. He expresses this confidence in an allusion to the myth...[all the while knowing that] the real conquest of disorder and evil takes place in the lives and hearts of humankind as God redeems them.⁷¹

Oswalt's point that the writer uses a *double entendre* aptly describes the psalmist's commentary against the enemies of God who have sacked Jerusalem; however, vv. 13-17 do more than simply *allude* to the combat myth. The psalmist posits God in the heart of mythology. The conquest of disorder and evil in Psalm 74 has happened in creating the world (not clearly in the hearts and lives of humankind), and that is the basis for appeal for mercy in the midst of destruction.

It seems more likely, then, that the freshness of the memory of vigorous destruction of the temple catapults the psalmist into a description of Yahweh vigorously defeating the powers of chaos, particularly identified with their enemies. "Just as this verb ['destroy'] describes the destruction of cosmic foes in mythical contexts, so may God destroy his historical adversaries who have sacked Jerusalem."⁷²

We may understand from the strong statements in Psalm 74 that Israel's enemies have defeated her and glorified their own gods for their help. Israel's response engages them directly in the context of their mythical religion. "My King" has worked salvation, not Marduk or Baal. Though the psalmist depicts Yahweh creating in the same way that

⁷¹ Oswalt, "The Dragon," 169.

⁷² Dahood, *Psalms II*, 204.

Marduk or Baal does, *Yahweh* is victor. Furthermore, there is no acknowledgement of the objects of creation as gods. This refusal to grant the objects of creation divine status as the other ANE myths clearly do is a profound statement against Israel's enemies. As much as the psalmist reinterprets their myths by undermining the existence of their gods, he also manipulates it by positing God as the supreme conqueror in the beginning. Whereas Genesis 1:1-2:3 reinterprets and seriously down-plays the combat myth's treatment of creation, here the psalmist subsumes it.

V. SYNTHESIS

In order to competently engage in the canonical dialogue between the creation accounts in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Psalm 74, we have examined both in their own inherent structure and compared each to relevant ANE texts. A brief review follows.

To begin with Genesis 1:1-2:3, we find, in the words of Walter Brueggemann, that "this text is something of a liturgical narrative, which tells the tale of creation in a highly stylized way. It is conventional to understand this text as a liturgical assertion against the temptations of the Babylonian gods in the exile."⁷³ He continues, "the mood of this rhetoric is to evidence that God is serenely and supremely in charge. There is no struggle here, no anxiety, no risk. If it is correct, as critical consensus holds, that this is an exilic text, then the intent and the effect of this liturgical narrative is to enact by its very utterance a well-ordered, fully reliable, generative world for Israelites who are exiles in Babylon."⁷⁴ At its heart is a proclamation about God the Creator in sophisticated and

⁷³ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 153.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

almost poetic language, a proclamation of praise, of purpose, of the goodness of creation, and the relationship between Creator and creature.⁷⁵ The point of Genesis 1:1-2:3 is the establishment of order in the midst of chaos, where the single point of contention is chaos' presence. "Although the Priestly writer lays the greatest stress on the creative act of God in bringing into being the world from his power alone, there emerges already in Genesis 1:2 the tension between creation and chaos. There is no question of a primordial dualism, but there remains the threat of non-being which resists the world pronounced good by God."⁷⁶ God speaks and so creates-orders. As stated above, there is no challenge to his authority, no threat to his power, no recalcitrance or division in God. In our comparison of Genesis 1:1-2:3 and *Enuma Elish*, we concluded that Genesis served as both a profound polemic against the Babylonian theogony and world-view, and as a rallying point for the people of Israel in terms of praise and identity.

Psalm 74, on the other hand, is no subtle polemic. It clearly employs the combat myth language in its proclamation about God's creating. The psalmist links the carousing of chaos (in the creature of Leviathan) with the Babylonian triumph, specifically their destruction of the sanctuary and defeat of the people of God (74:3-8). The expression of faith and hope in the ultimate triumph of God over this enormous religious and political tragedy lies in the description of Yahweh's might in the beginning. It was then that Yahweh both ordered chaos and utterly defeated it. Now in the same way may he arise

⁷⁵ Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 385. He states there that "another fundamental feature of the dominant Priestly witness emerges in the terminology and structure of Genesis 1. The chapter is not primarily a testimony to creation, but rather praise to God, the creator. Through the power of his word God brought forth the heavens and the earth in an act commensurate only to himself according to his own will and purpose.... The biblical author set the act 'in the beginning' to establish that God's creation was not to be understood merely as a 'constitutive relationship', or an expression of 'a mode of being' characterizing creator and creature. Rather, creation marked the beginning of time, the start of an ongoing history, and the moment of origin before which there was no such reality apart from God. Moreover, God pronounced his workmanship good and blessed it. The creation rested in its perfection; no further work was needed."

⁷⁶ Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 387.

and vindicate his people (74:22).⁷⁷ By establishing Yahweh as both Creator and Savior who vigorously engages Leviathan in the process of subduing chaos, the reference to Yahweh's sovereignty over Babylon and the impotence of their gods is clear and pointed. Here the psalmist proclaims the triumph of Yahweh over Leviathan in the midst of Babylonian exile. All this is in response to what appears by all reasonable accounts to be the defeat of Yahweh by Marduk. Just as Marduk defeated Ti'amat, so fell Jerusalem, the temple, and the people of God to Babylonian servitude. But Israel refuses to acknowledge defeat: in the beginning, *Yahweh* defeated Leviathan.

The world given in these liturgical utterances is a 'contrast-world,' compared to the world of exile that holds threat, anxiety, and insecurity. On this reading, the chaos already extant in v. 2 represents the reality of exile—life at risk and in disorder. The effect of the liturgy is to create an alternative world of ordered life, made possible by Yahweh's powerful word and will. Exilic Israelites can live in this world and, if they choose, withdraw (emotionally, liturgically, politically, geographically) from the disordered world of Babylon, which in this recital is powerfully deligitimated.⁷⁸

In Psalm 74, God does not battle other gods for the right to reign, a point of departure from other ANE myths; yet he battles, a point of departure from Genesis. Instead of reinterpreting and reframing the combat myth ideology as the author of Genesis 1:1-2:3 did, Psalm 74 embraces it. Furthermore, the psalm briefly reflects creation order yet connects it with *salvation* as opposed to an independent statement. "Yet God my King is from of old, working *salvation* in the earth. You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters" (74:12-13 NRSV). Childs writes, "The terminology is clearly related to the creation theology of Genesis 1, but makes a more

⁷⁷ Day, *God's Conflict*, 22. He writes, "Yahweh's defeat of the chaos monster(s) in the past is appealed to as a ground of confidence for him to act to deliver his people in the present when the powers of chaos seem to have triumphed."

⁷⁸ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 153.

explicit extension of creation as a continuing exercise of divine power.”⁷⁹ The exercise of divine power is precisely in the act of salvation, to which the psalmist clings in the enigmatic desperation of exile.

It behooves us to mention now the work of Frank Moore Cross in distinguishing cosmogony from theogony. As he defines the terms, *theogony* is “the birth and succession of the gods, especially the old gods;” *cosmogony* is “characterized by a conflict between the old and the young gods out of which order, especially kingship, is established in the cosmos.”⁸⁰ We have seen both cosmogony and theogony in the *Enuma Elish*. The long list of originating Gods (Apsu and Ti’amat, etc.) give the reader the theogony, while the battle between Marduk and Ti’amat provide the cosmogony. Interestingly, there is no theogony in Israel’s literature (monotheism largely implies that), and cosmogony is utterly avoided in Genesis 1:1-2:3. Psalm 74, however, employs it explicitly.

Insofar as scholars have tied God’s creating to the history of Israel, Cross sees definitive national interests operating in the myths of the gods. Specifically he asserts that “the establishment of Babylonian rule becomes identical with the establishment of cosmic order. Kingship, divine and human is fixed in the orders of creation, properly eternal...the political and propagandistic features of the cosmogonic myth emerge clearly.”⁸¹ This is a striking point of departure from Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Psalm 74—the only king apparent in these texts is God, the Creator; and yet his role as king is not explicitly stated. He is king because he is sovereign—but no human reigns in his stead.

On the other hand, the emergence of Yahweh as victor over the dragons and Leviathan parallels Baal as victor among the gods.⁸² Yet the point of distinction here is that

⁷⁹ Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 387.

⁸⁰ Cross, “Olden Gods,” 73.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 80.

in the biblical texts the elements are not gods (not even young gods) whom Yahweh must conquer; there are only the enigmatic dragons and the sea (still not acknowledged as divine).

Is it possible to find harmony in these two accounts? We noticed above that there is some overlap in the order of creation mentioned in Psalm 74. Childs highlights the connection between the creation order in this way. “In the initial act of creation God not only overcame the powers of chaos—he broke the heads of Leviathan (Ps. 74:13)—he also established an ongoing order.”⁸³ Although both references differ in their use of mythical imagery, both the underlying problem of chaos and the God who conquers it unite the differing biblical responses. In Psalm 74, the chaos is more than just the intrusion of the sea, it is the invasion of Babylon that immediately troubles Israel. Bernhard Anderson convincingly argues this point, that chaos was not only a constant threat in the ANE (in terms of natural disasters or invading peoples), but a significant feature of their theologies, for both Israelites and others.⁸⁴ The relevance of God the Creator is not merely a doctrinal point about creation: God is the *orderer* of chaos and therefore *Savior*. In the battle against chaos, embodied as Babylon’s army or the nebulous stuff in existence before creation, God prevails and will prevail again. Furthermore, the very character of the one God (as opposed to the many deities) stands in contrast with Marduk, or Baal, or whomever.

How does Genesis 1:1-2:3 offer this salvific hope, if it does at all? Childs avers that Genesis 1:1-2:3 in context with Genesis 2:4ff moves explicitly into salvation and redemption history. “What is clear in Genesis 1 is that creation is understood, not as a self-

⁸³ Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 386.

⁸⁴ Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 11-15, 17, 22.

contained autonomous act, but in closest connection with redemption.”⁸⁵ In other words, the history of Israel begins in Genesis 1. Anderson likewise argues that creation is not an abstract doctrine, but intimately joined with the identity and history of Israel. Understanding creation apart from that history “violates the intention of the creation stories. They want to speak to us primarily about history. Accordingly, the greatest weight must be given to the form of these stories: they are ‘historical accounts’ and, as such, are part of the historical narration which moves from the beginning toward the consummation of God’s historical purpose.”⁸⁶ In a similar fashion, Childs points to the linking of God’s triumph over chaos to a physical place—Zion—and a person—David—and the promises of God to him. “The founding of Zion is the chosen place of God’s presence which continues to hold in check the forces of chaos (Ps. 74:12).”⁸⁷ Because the history of Israel is set in the framework of Genesis 1, salvation emerges as a strong theme even if not explicitly in 1:1-2:3.

We may trace (briefly) the triumph of God over chaos through the Old and New Testaments, as fulfilled specifically in the person of Jesus Christ. Childs presses this salvation history from Genesis to Revelation, as follows. “Creation was never a neutral condition even in Genesis, but its redemptive purpose was revealed in fullest clarity with the raising of Christ from the dead. God’s creative activity encompassed the first and the last. The beginning cannot be understood apart from the end, nor can the end be grasped apart from the beginning.”⁸⁸ The theme of chaos, especially identified as water, is taken

⁸⁵ Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 386.

⁸⁶ Anderson, *Creation*, 33.

⁸⁷ Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 114.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 389.

up again in the language of apocalyptic. Anderson has documented the eschatological dimensions of this development.⁸⁹

The connection of salvation and creation is recorded frequently in the psalms (as we have seen in Psalm 74). Brueggemann demonstrates that the psalms reflect this connection between the Creator and salvation: “Creation itself is said to point to—that is, to witness directly to—the Creator. This witness to Yahweh is prior to and more majestic than Israel’s own utterance.”⁹⁰ Those psalms that similarly praise the Creator include Psalms 8, 33, 104, 146, and (the cornerstone of Brueggemann’s assertion) 19, to list a few. Anderson continues this observation in this way: “It is clear from these psalms that the creation-faith is not just the awareness of the creature’s radical dependence upon the Creator; it is also an expression of confidence in the Creator’s power to save, of his rulership over the tumultuous forces of history.”⁹¹

The response of the Israelites to the problem of chaos varies within the Biblical canon, as we have seen in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Psalm 74. In some places it even employs mythical language and figures, whereas in others, the clear intent is to reinterpret then-contemporary perspectives. Israel understood that the problem of chaos was itself under the sovereignty of the God who created all things, thereby ordering chaos. Her relationship with God defined and distinguished her in the midst of political and religious chaos—namely, exile. Although differing voices proclaim Yahweh’s victory over chaos

⁸⁹ Anderson, *Creation*, 109: “Men may put their trust in life’s meaning in spite of the chaotic threats of history because the whole historical drama, from beginning to end, is enfolded within the purpose of the God who is worshiped as creator and redeemer. The full implications of this became increasingly apparent when the theme of Yahweh’s kingship over the rebellious waters of chaos was transposed out of the cult into the language of prophecy and apocalyptic.” The theme of chaos is ultimately and finally eliminated in Revelation 21:1: “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” (NRSV; emphasis mine).

⁹⁰ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 156.

⁹¹ Anderson, *Creation*, 99.

in different ways, the sovereignty and purpose of God remains the same: salvation from chaos. As we have explored the *Enuma Elish* we find that chaos is deified, explained in the whims and adventures of gods and goddesses. Israel's response to chaos excludes it from the realm of the divine, as though it could challenge God. She appeals to One more powerful than even chaos, her Creator, the one who serenely spoke chaos into order in the beginning—her Creator, the one who smote the heads of Leviathan. He created her and has redeemed her. Will he now continue to be her God even in spite of the conquered status of exile?

VI. CONCLUSION

The process of interpretation can be difficult. From one standpoint, the two different accounts of God creating in the beginning cannot be reconciled: God cannot both order chaos by spoken word *and* smash Leviathan's heads. Yet that standpoint belies our own persuasion about what is true and what is historical. It appears from the inclusion of Genesis 2:4ff. after Genesis 1:1-2:3, Psalm 74, Psalm 104, and many other accounts of creation that the Israelites were comfortable with more than just one, singular commentary on creation. At this point our response must be carefully stated. We cannot expect of Genesis 1:1-2:3 certain scientific answers that preclude or disregard the rest of the Biblical testimony to God's creative activity.⁹² In so doing, we risk undermining the whole canonical dialogue on the subject. However, we should not throw up our hands in defeat at the enormity of the task. From the two texts we have examined above, the following may be concluded:

⁹² I share the opinion of Brueggemann and Speiser; cf. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 25; and Speiser, *Genesis*, 9.

In the first place, the two voices directly engage their cultural *milieu*: one borrows the Baal and Yamm myth placing God in the victor's seat while the other rejects the full import of the *Enuma Elish* combat myth. Second, in neither biblical text is creation deified, nor are magical rites endorsed to keep the powers of chaos at bay. Third, both texts testify to the sovereignty and triumph of God in creation, and both link that creating activity with salvation. The basis of Psalm 74 is in God's creative—that is ordering and defeating chaos—power. Genesis 1:1-2:3 opens the whole story of humanity's and Israel's origin. Finally, we may confidently proclaim God as Creator and Savior. He who orders chaos does so not only for the exaltation of his power, but for the creative diversity that we see and experience even now.

That Yahweh created all things ultimately demonstrates his rightful ownership of all things. That God does not provide a means whereby humankind may manipulate him for their own sakes demonstrates his unique person and his desire for relationship with humankind. In the midst of exile, Israel is invited to “confidence in Yahweh, and therefore to derivative confidence in its own capacity to act in freedom, apart from the threat of Babylonian intimidation and coercion.”⁹³ Anderson eloquently expounds this point:

The announcement that God is the creator primarily concerns the source and basis of life's meaning. Negatively, it rebukes the notion that the world is at man's disposal—susceptible to the meaning he imposes and subject to the purposes he devises. The earth is not man's, it is the Lord's; hence the meaning of man's life is not derived from the world. And, positively, the doctrine evokes in man an understanding of who he really is: a transient and contingent being who, together with all that exists, is dependent upon the God who alone is Lord. Man's life on earth derives its meaning from relationship to the God whose creative purpose has initiated the whole historical drama.⁹⁴

⁹³ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 151.

⁹⁴ Anderson, *Creation*, 81.

What we have, in sum, is an innovation—a profound reinterpretation of the cosmogony and theogony on the ground and in the air of the ANE. Israel has brilliantly taken the stories that gave meaning to a chaotic world and placed Yahweh at the center, enthroning his absolute power over chaos, his goodness and order in creation, and his triumph over the elements that Babylon and others worshiped. Israel has in a sense stolen worship from the sea, sky, storm, and the like, and laid it exclusively at the feet of Yahweh, her God. Brueggemann fittingly has the last word. “Creation faith is the summons and invitation to trust the Subject of these verbs, even in the face of day-to-day, palpable incursions of chaos. The testimony of Israel pushes toward a verdict that the One embedded in these doxological statements can be trusted in the midst of any chaos, even that of exile and finally that of death.”⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 159.

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