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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

**“Function, Fulfillment, and Chaos in the Meta-Narrative of
Scripture: A Biblical Theology”**

written by

Kimberly Carlton

and submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for completion of
the Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

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April 16, 2012

Function, Fulfillment, and Chaos in the Meta-Narrative of Scripture: A Biblical Theology

Kimberly Carlton

Ouachita Baptist University

Honors Thesis

16 April 2012

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer
 Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand."

Excerpt from The Second Coming by William Butler Yeats

καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν
 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:17

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Introduction

The Bible is a mosaic, one large meta-narrative made up of a plethora of smaller stories, instances, and encounters. Each of these smaller stories is integral to the larger story. Both minutiae and an ability to grasp the big picture are important when one comes to read the Bible. This paper attempts to address the small details of Scripture, and from those small details endeavors to gain an image of the mosaic in a way that may not be commonly considered.

The mosaic of the Bible has many common threads and themes. These threads run throughout the story, giving it structure and purpose. One such theme is the tension between order and chaos, between function and anti-function, and fulfillment and disobedience. This paper attempts to analyze and define this thread and then trace it throughout the whole of Scripture.

However, before beginning that venture, some terms and concepts must be defined.

Shalom is the way that things are supposed to be. Shalom would describe the state of the world that was functioning just as God intended it to. This concept shall be more fully developed in the chapter on Genesis, but what suffices for now is that Shalom is the perfect relationship between God and man and the perfect flourishing and functioning of man on earth.¹

Order is the “good” arrangement of things in the world in relation to each other. It is the opposite of chaos. It is the way that things are arranged in Shalom.

Function describes the way that one should live. This involves the activities and works that one does, but it also entails all facets of one’s life. To fulfill one’s function means to have

¹ Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 10.

one's inner and outer life be lived in accordance with the way God wishes it. For humans, it involves acting as one should on earth, living in community with one another, and living in community with God. It involves action, relationship, and rest. For each facet of creation, God creates a sphere in which they should live and function.

Sin is the culpable breaking of Shalom.² It is the breaking and twisting of the way that the world is supposed to be. It is failing to fulfill one's function and attempting to live outside of the sphere in which something has been placed by God. Sin is anti-function.

Chaos is a state of disorder. It is not evil in and of itself, but it is a neutral force that can be twisted by evil to bring about havoc in the world. Chaos is not inherently evil. It was the state of the creation before God brought order to it.

For the purpose of this work, the act of creation is not the process of bringing something out of nothing but rather the process of giving something a function and a purpose and a sphere in which to live and fulfill that function. Even things that already exist can be created. By being created, they are called out of chaos and into a life of order in which they live as they were meant to live. It is a step toward the restoration of Shalom.

In this work, I seek to show how the tension between order and disorder plays out throughout the meta-narrative of Scripture. I begin with Genesis, focusing primarily on Genesis 1, then Genesis 2-11, and painting a broader picture of Genesis 12-50. God establishes function in the beginning and creates a world of perfect order. I examine the functions that God sets in place and the functionaries that he installs. God establishes a temple for himself, and he rests in that temple. He creates humanity to bear his image and play an integral role in his creation.

² Ibid., 18.

However, humanity fails to fulfill their function and chooses to sin. With this sin comes chaos and disorder. Sin works against the order that God has installed in the world, and from that first moment the world begins to spin out of control. This is seen clearly throughout the rest of the story. However, also seen clearly is God's attempt to restore order to a creation that he prizes. This begins in Genesis and is evident throughout the rest of Scripture.

I then examine the story of Exodus in some detail. God uses chaos to rescue his people out of the chaos of slavery. The plagues parallel the creation account as all the functions that God installed in creation descend into disorder. The Exodus narrative shows that God is the master of the chaos and he is faithful to redeem his people. He calls his people out and gives them a function. He provides the Law so that this function can be fulfilled and he can dwell among his people.

I then trace the thread of order and disorder throughout the rest of the Old Testament. The nation of Israel constantly chooses to abandon their function, and chaos and disorder are the consequences for the nation. Throughout the period of judges, kings, the divided kingdom, and the people in exile, there is a constant longing for things to be the way that they should but a consistent disobedience among the people of God. The people abandon function and refuse to repent. God sends messages to warn his people, but they do not listen. Thus, judgment occurs. This often happens through other agents of chaos. Neighboring nations wage war on Israel, people are taken captive, or sometimes society plummets into debasement. God uses this chaos to rid his people of the evil in which they are living. However, the evil is never fully eradicated, and throughout this saga God constantly reminds his people that although they are unfaithful he remains true to his function. One day he will restore his people and things will once again be the way that they are supposed to be.

I then examine Jesus in light of this order – disorder paradigm. Jesus is the one who holds everything together, and he ushers in the kingdom of God. His coming represents the beginning of the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant promises of God. By his death and resurrection he makes it possible for full function to be restored to the people of God. He re-creates his people and gives them a function and a commission.

I then study the writings of Paul through the function – anti-function lens. Paul talks to the people who have been called out of chaos and into a new way of life as God’s people. He consistently exhorts Christians to fulfill their function, and his function in the body of Christ is to enable Christians to better understand their role in the kingdom of God.

Finally, I closely examine Revelation. I note that the plagues of Revelation parallel the days of creation and the functions that God installed. The order that God created is falling apart, and chaos is allowed to work itself out. Evil is allowed to have its way. In doing so, the ultimately self-destructing forces come to dissolution, and it is in this end of creation that God returns. He eradicates evil once and for all and restores function to the cosmos. He creates a perfect world of order in which humanity can dwell and fulfill their function in community with God and with one another.

Genesis

In Genesis, one can see the beginning of the Biblical narrative. It is here that one can gain a picture of what the world is supposed to be like. It is here that the story of humanity and creation begins. God creates a perfect world, and this world is marred by sin and human choice. When sin is introduced into this perfect world, the sin warps creation and causes chaos to wreak havoc upon the world. In order to understand the meta-narrative of Scripture, one must begin at the beginning. However, to better understand the beginning, one must understand the context of that commencement.

A Reexamination of Context

Walton has written extensively on the topic of Genesis 1 as an account of God giving function. The creation out of nothing by God is not questioned, but it is suggested that the support of this is not the primary reason for the Genesis 1 account. Rather, the beginning of Genesis addresses different concerns for the original Hebrew audience.³

Walton proposes a reexamination of the context in which the book of Genesis was written and the audience to whom it was written. Genesis was written in the midst of the culture of the Ancient Near East. In this era, the mythologies of the people provide a window into their culture and situation. Their mythologies were their explanations of how the world came into being and how it worked.⁴

³ John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 67-68.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

The cosmology of the ancient world is described by Walton as being “function oriented”⁵. The people of the ancient Near East understood something to exist if it served the function that it was designed to serve in an ordered system. Thus, an act of creation was to give something a role or function within that ordered system. This cosmology is not merely seen in Genesis, but in other ancient Near Eastern texts as well. Sumerian, Egyptian, and Babylonian texts reveal the same mindset. The tale of Adapa, the Atrahasis Epic, the Gilgamesh Epic, and Enuma Elish all play a large role in determining the cosmology of the ancient Near East creation accounts.

The tale of Adapa tells the story of the human Adapa being called before the god of the heavens because he has “broken the wing” of the South Wind. The patron god Ea advises Adapa not to eat the bread and drink the water offered to him because it will kill him. Adapa does as he says, but later realizes that the bread could have made him immortal.⁶ Here one sees a god deceiving humanity and attempting to stop a human from gaining immortality.

The Atrahasis Epic describes the events that result in the creation of humanity. The lower gods rebel against their work load and humans are created to do the work for them. However, the humans soon create too much noise, and so the gods send a flood to solve the problem. Atrahasis is the king of Shuruppak and he is warned of the impending disaster. He therefore builds a boat and saves other animals, birds, and assumedly people.⁷ Parallels here are easily drawn between the creation of humans in this account and Genesis. In addition to this, a parallel to the Flood in Genesis 7 can be seen.

⁵ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, (InterVarsity Press, 2009), 23.

⁶ Walton, *Genesis*, 28.

⁷ *Ibid.*

The Gilgamesh Epic describes the search of Gilgamesh for immortality. The story also centers on the relationship between Gilgamesh and his counterpart Enkidu. Enkidu was created by the gods to distract Gilgamesh from oppressing the citizens of Uruk. Together they embark upon multiple adventures, and they eventually incur the wrath of the gods. Enkidu is chosen to die. Gilgamesh then begins to search for immortality. His quest leads him to an immortal that was once mortal, Utnapishtim, whose story is the flood account. He was saved from a flood by building a boat. The god Ea broke his oath and warned Utnapishtim, despite the fact that the flood was designed to wipe out all of humanity. After Utnapishtim's survival, the gods grant him eternal life. Utnapishtim directs Gilgamesh to an underwater plant that has rejuvenating powers. Gilgamesh is bitten by a serpent before he can eat the plant, and so returns to his home resolved to live the best that he can.⁸ Again, one can see here a man's search for immortality.

Enuma Elish is a Babylonian epic of creation. It describes the birth of the head god Marduk, the rebellion against him, and his quash of that rebellion. It then tells of how Marduk organizes the cosmos and is proclaimed the king of the gods. Marduk creates people from the blood of a leader of the rebellion to do the work of the younger gods.⁹

One can learn from these and other texts much about the cosmology of the ancient world. Creation texts were used to describe the structure of the world and how the structures were put into place by deities so that the cosmos could function. The attributes of the deities were reflected in the functioning of the cosmos. It was believed that the cosmos was an extension of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 29

the deities, and the gods functioned within that cosmos. Thus, because of the close connection between the gods and the cosmos, theogony was often linked to cosmogony.¹⁰

The ancient texts also reveal much about what was believed about the features of the cosmos. Nearly all creation accounts begin with the cosmos as nonfunctional and with no operational system. The creation consists of an order and a system being given and the chaotic state being resolved. Creation also often begins with the presence of primeval waters. These waters represent chaos. Order is brought out of this chaos and a system of the cosmos is put into place. The process of naming is revealed to be an important one in the creative act. Naming was considered to be associated with identity, role, and function. The act of separating elements of the cosmos is also generally involved in creation accounts. Heaven is separated from land, and sometimes upper and lower waters are separated. Living creatures are rarely included in creation accounts, although the creation of humans is often included.¹¹

Genesis in Context

As one approaches Genesis, then, one should do so with the cosmology of the ancient Near Eastern world in mind. The creation accounts in other texts show the chaos-order umbrella of the cosmos, and place heavy emphasis on function. Genesis is not an exception to this pattern.

There are, however, several key differences between the Genesis creation account and the other Mesopotamian creation accounts. Boyd notes that Genesis depicts one sovereign God alone, while other texts described a plethora of imperfect gods at odds with one another. Humanity is not formed from the blood of a rebellion or to do the work of the lesser gods in Genesis as it is in other accounts, but rather humanity is created in the image of God. Boyd also

¹⁰ Walton, *Lost World*, 29-30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31-35.

discusses the unprecedented sovereignty of God. He shows that many of the gods in other accounts are described as mere natural phenomena, such as the water and the sun. The “deep” that represents the evil spirits in Enuma Elish is merely water in Genesis 1, depersonified and demythologized because the power of God is so much greater. God’s Spirit does not have to battle it but merely hovers over it, and this is enough.¹²

Walton suggests that Genesis was written to convey that God alone is sovereign and that everything in creation, nature, and history is dependent upon him. The Old Testament did not seek to answer the question of the existence of deity. Rather, it presumed the existence of deity and sought to explain whether there was one god or many. The book of Genesis thus shows that there is only one God. This God created the whole universe without competition from other deities. He did not create other deities, and there were no other gods to whom responsibilities were delegated. There was only one God who was all powerful and without compare.¹³

Exegetical Summary of Genesis 1:2 – 2:3

Walton describes Genesis 1 as a “simple but majestic account of God’s bringing order to the chaos”.¹⁴ There is a balance struck between days 1-3 and days 4-6, with day 7 functioning as the climactic moment in the story. Days 1-3 concern “shape,” and days 4-6 deal with “filling up that shape.”¹⁵ Genesis 1 provides a picture of a sovereign God bringing order out of a world of chaos and then functioning in the ordered world. Everything is given function and the function is carried out.¹⁶

¹² Gregory Boyd, *God At War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 85.

¹³ Walton, *Genesis*, 50-51.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁵ David Wilkinson, *The Message of Creation*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 24.

¹⁶ Walton, *Genesis*, 65.

Genesis 1:2 begins with the world that God created in chaos. It is described as formless and empty. The contrast in Genesis is not as much between something against nothing as it is between order against chaos. The existence of chaos was of central importance in the ancient Near East. Darkness and the sea were the key forces of chaos in the cosmos. God shows his sovereignty by demonstrating power over those forces. He does this by bringing order out of the disorder that is described in verse 2. *Tohu* is used to describe the matter that has been created. Walton states that analysis of the Hebrew shows that the word indicates that the cosmos was “empty of purpose, meaning, and function”.¹⁷ The *tohu* cosmos had no order or functionality but simply existed. In the Egyptian culture at this time, to describe something as “nonexistent” was to say that it did not have function or definition. Walton suggests that the same concept applies here. Creation is an act of giving function, and function is given to the world that so obviously lacks order.¹⁸ Hamilton echoes this when he observes that “in creation there is separation toward order.”¹⁹ Waltke notes that the story of creation is

One must note at this juncture that while darkness and water are elements of chaos that appear in the creation account, they are not inherently evil. They are not personified. They are thus elements of chaos that are powerless in the face of the sovereignty of God. In addition to this, one cannot equate chaos with evil. If all things in chaos are evil, then God has brought an inherently evil world into existence. Rather, chaos is a neutrality that indicates that God has work yet to be accomplished.

Day One (1:3-5)

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 72-74.

¹⁹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis :Chapters 1-17*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 120.

God said “Let there be light,” and there was light. Walton suggests that it is the period of light that God has created. God separated light from darkness. In this instance, “separated” does not mean to pull something apart, but rather to sort things out to their respective places. God assigns “each part to its respective sphere and slot.”²⁰ Thus, by separating light and darkness, God has created time. This is the first function that God instills in the cosmos. The cosmos flows in an ordered and structured manner within the construct of time. He sets up a sequence of alternating light and darkness.²¹ The word “cosmos” itself is derived from the Greek word “κοσμος”, which is the cognate of the verb “κοσμεω.”²² This word means to create or to arrange.²³ This “cosmos” is the word that is translated “heavens and earth”. The very essence of creating is ordering and arranging.

Day Two (1:6-8)

On the second day, God separated “water from water”. The Hebrew word, *raqia*, was understood by the Hebrew people to be a solid dome. Hamilton describes it as “something that is created by being spread out or by stretching.”²⁴ The *raqia* is then named *samayin* (sky) and separates the waters above from the waters below. The Israelites believed that clouds come from the end of the earth. Enuma Elish depicts the sky being formed from half of a cadaver of an evil goddess. Marduk provides restraint to prevent the goddess from releasing chaos onto the earth. Here, one can see that heaven “operates under restraint.”²⁵ Chaos is held back. In ancient Near Eastern culture, the gates of heaven were also at the ends of the earth. The floodgates that open during the Flood are in the *samayin*. The Sumerian god of weather, Ishkur, opens the gates of

²⁰ Ibid., 119

²¹ Walton, *Genesis*, 79.

²² Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 179.

²³ Ibid., 179.

²⁴ Hamilton, 122

²⁵ Hamilton, 123

heaven. It was believed that the sun passed through the gates of heaven as it set. The Bible discusses cosmic storehouses in which meteorological phenomena (such as lightning, hail, and rain) and raw materials (such as grain, barley, and dates) are stored. *Raqia* thus has a close connection to the function of weather. The choice of the concept of *raqia* was an excellent choice to show that God set in place an operational weather system.²⁶

Day Three (1:9-13)

On day three, we can see God establishing agriculture and vegetation. All the soil and land is in one place, and the water is in another localized place. Walton suggests that the description of this day focuses on how the agricultural system is to function. Plants are made to bear seed and new plants will grow from these seeds. Soil and water sources are distinct and clear.²⁷

Thus, in days 1-3, God has set up the functions of time, weather, and agriculture. He has begun to bring order to the chaos of the cosmos. These three functions thus stand as the foundations of the order of creation. One can see this echoed in the words of God after the Flood when he again brings order and declares that “seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.” *Enuma Elish* contains a similar sequence of order being brought to the cosmos. References to day and night are made, followed by Marduk creating rain, clouds, wind, and fig. Subsequent to this, soil is localized and water is placed in one area. The difference between the Bible and other ancient Near East texts is that God declared his functions to be “good.” These functions were given by God to bring order to the world. The contrast is that when something is “not good” it is not operating in accordance with its purpose. By God

²⁶ Walton, *Genesis*, 111-112.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

declaring his functions good, he is showing that the world was not designed to be a war between natural phenomena and people. While people might struggle against time, weather, and agriculture, this is not the way that the world was intended to be.²⁸

This is the last instance of God naming something that he has created. He will leave this function to man after man is created.²⁹ God continues to create, but after bringing order into the world and naming that order, he creates functionaries and lets man name them. God has established these three functions. He goes on in days four through six to put functionaries in place to carry out these functions.

Day Four (1:14-19)

The celestial bodies are described as “signs to mark the seasons and the years.” The word “signs” is independent of the other words. The first function of the celestial bodies is thus to convey knowledge of God and to reveal him. God uses the heavenly bodies as signs to his people. The second function of the celestial bodies is to separate day from night.³⁰ An additional function is to identify and mark seasons. These seasons serve as a way to mark the timing of liturgical events such as festivals or feasts. Finally, the celestial bodies mark days and years. They marked the passage of time and allowed for a calendar to be formed.³¹

These functions of the celestial bodies are echoed elsewhere in biblical and Mesopotamian literature. In a Sumerian treatise, the major gods put celestial bodies in place to

²⁸ Ibid., 115.

²⁹ Hamilton, 125.

³⁰ Hamilton, 127.

³¹ Walton, *Genesis*, 122-123.

regulate days, months, and omens. In a Babylonian hymn, the sun god also regulates the seasons and the calendar.³²

Days one and four correspond to one another. On the first day, God separates the light from the darkness. On the fourth day, he creates luminaries to provide that light.

Day Five (1:20-23)

On day five, God created creatures of the sea and birds. The creatures of the sea in the ancient Near East context usually were creatures like the Leviathan, who were monsters of chaos. However, here the reader learns that these creatures too have their function. God has created them and has dominion over them, and they too serve a purpose in his ordered cosmos. God blessed the creatures and told them to be fruitful and multiply. God desires the proliferation of his creation. One can see this blessing echoed in the blessing that he gives humanity. God orders these creatures to reproduce, but this is not meant to be a burden upon humankind. In fact, the creatures are meant to be subservient to humanity.³³

Day two and day five correspond to one another as well. On day two, God created a separation between the waters. He created the environment in which living creatures could survive.³⁴ He has thus put creatures in a specific sphere that he has created for them, the water or the sky. Here, too, one can see evidence of the order of God's creation.

³² Walton, *Lost World*, 64.

³³ Walton, *Genesis*, 127.

³⁴ Hamilton, 129

Day Six (1:24-31)

On the sixth day, God made animals and humankind. The earth brought forth the animals in the same way that the earth brought forth vegetation, implying a functional relationship.³⁵ The animals and humans are also to procreate. The creator God has created creators.³⁶

Finally, God creates humans. He creates humans in the image of God, and this is integral to their function and purpose. In the ancient Near East, an image was “believed to carry the essence of that which it represented”.³⁷ This does not mean that the image could do what the being that it represented could do or even that it looked exactly the same. However, it did mean that the work of the being was accomplished through the image. In Mesopotamia, a king would place his image in the location in which he wanted to assert his rule. However, apart from this instance, only gods were generally made in the image of other gods. Thus, humanity made in the image of God implies that humans are to carry out the functions of God upon the earth. The image of God not only enables people to serve as God’s emissaries but also to act and to be like him. Walton states that humans were made with the capacity to become more and more like God and to mirror his divine attributes.³⁸

God gives humans specific instructions as to how to act on the earth and how to carry out their function. He tells them to be fruitful, to increase in number, to fill and subdue the earth, and to rule over the other living beings. The term “to rule” means to bring something under control. Humans are the officiators of the God-given functions on the earth. The word “to subdue” carries

³⁵ Walton, *Genesis*, 127.

³⁶ Hamilton, 133.

³⁷ Walton, *Genesis*, 130.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 130-131.

implications of domestication. It is used of kings dominating others, of priests fulfilling their roles, or of shepherds over their sheep. Subduing the earth is associated with filling the earth.³⁹

As God's image bearers, therefore, humanity was to multiply and fill the earth. They were to spread the worship of God and were to be his kingdom on the earth. They were to reign and function in that kingdom.

On days 1-3, God creates functions: time, weather, and agriculture. On days 4-6, God creates functionaries: celestial bodies, plants, living creatures, and humans. The celestial bodies (day 4) are the functionaries of time (day 1), the fish and birds (day 5) live in the sphere of the sky and the waters (day 2), and the humans and animals (day 6) live on dry land, with vegetation as their food (day 3).⁴⁰

It should be noted that the functionaries do not necessarily carry out the function of their sphere. Rather, they populate their sphere and it is within that arena that they carry out their functions.⁴¹ God has thus created an ordered cosmos in which all living things have their sphere in which they carry out their ordained functions. This is the perfect and "good" world that God has created.

Day Seven (2:1-3)

It is in this good and perfect world that God rests on the seventh day of the creation process. God stops the work of the previous six days and begins to settle in to the cosmos that he has put into order. He begins to dwell there and enjoy what has been created. The noise, the

³⁹ Ibid., 132.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 133.

⁴¹ Ibid.

activity, and the speaking cease.⁴² In the Ancient Near Eastern creation accounts, the gods rested after the creation of man.⁴³ They had created a temple for themselves in which they would be worshipped and given allegiance. The cosmos of Genesis 1 is God's temple.⁴⁴ Thus, the ordered cosmos is both an environment for the beings that he has created and is also a sanctuary and temple for himself. On the seventh day more is revealed about the overall function of the whole cosmos. It is evident that God has been working with the ultimate goal of this resting and dwelling in mind. This goal was not unfamiliar in the ancient Near East. One of the main goals of the gods involved in the creative process was to create a place where they could rest. Walton describes the gods as "constantly seeking repose".⁴⁵ It is a goal that is quite evident as one reads Genesis with this context in mind. The cosmos is supposed to function as God's temple. God is enthroned as he inhabits his resting place.⁴⁶

The fact that the garden is a temple means that the human beings are inferentially priests in that temple.⁴⁷ This theme of man as priest continues to be seen until its ultimate fulfillment when Jesus becomes the great high priest.

This is also the only day of creation that is not described as having an evening and a night.⁴⁸ This seems to be indicative of the final state in Revelation where night will be no more because the presence of God will always shine. While there was night in the garden, it is noteworthy that on the seventh day there is no mention of it. Perhaps this is an indication of what is to come.

⁴² Hamilton, 141.

⁴³ Hamilton, 143.

⁴⁴ Walton, 150.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Waltke, 259.

⁴⁸ Waltke, 187.

In the Genesis creation account, therefore, God creates an ordered world over which he has complete sovereignty. He commissions people to carry out their designated functions on the earth. People are thus under obligation to bring order to the world as God has brought order to the cosmos. God is meant to dwell in the temple that he has created for himself in the ordered cosmos.

Order and Chaos After Genesis 1

God has created an ordered cosmos, in which he rests on the seventh day. He creates a garden in which humans can live, and all functions as it should for some time. There was *shalom*. *Shalom* is what the Bible portrays, and what Plantinga describes, as a “universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight”.⁴⁹ Everything is in right relationship with everything else. The functions are being carried out as they should, and the world is working the way that it is designed to work. This is the way that the world is supposed to be. However, the world does not stay this way. Sin enters the world, as one reads in Genesis 3, and nothing is the same again. Plantinga defines sin as the culpable disturbance of shalom.⁵⁰ The relationship between humans themselves, between people and nature, and between people and God is disturbed and marred. The way things are supposed to be has been disrupted. God’s perfectly ordered system has been deliberately shattered by personal human choice. The encasement of order is cracked with sin, and chaos comes rushing in as a result of that destructive act. What is termed the fall is thus in essence an act of anti-creation.⁵¹ Distinctions are blurred and roles become confused. Function becomes lost. Plantinga states that corruption “both explodes and implodes creation” and pushes it back

⁴⁹ Plantinga, 10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

“to the formless void” from which it originated.⁵² The world begins to move back toward the chaos from which it came. The consequence for humanity is ultimately the loss of the purpose of their existence. Their ability to fulfill their function is shaken. Plantinga notes that sin corrupts what is particularly human about humanity.⁵³ In the fall, humanity throws away the order that God orchestrated in the world.

In Genesis 2, man is instructed to serve in the garden. He is to work it and to keep it. One can again see the function of man. As an image bearer of God, he is to have dominion over the earth and to serve by participating in its upkeep. Man also serves a creative function as he names the animals of creation. He was created in the image of God, and now one can see him naming as God named. Man was named and given a function, and now he functions in his sphere by naming and placing order in his sphere of creation.

In Genesis 3, the account is given of the fall of humanity. The serpent tells the man and woman that if they eat the fruit then they will be like God. The woman and man eat the fruit. In doing so, they attempt to rise above the sphere for which they were created. They go outside of their function, and deliberately disobey the will of God. This is the God whose image they bear, and who their lives are meant to glorify. They use their position in the garden exploitatively and instead of overseeing it as they are supposed to they use it for their own gain. They destroy the function that God had put in place for them. One can see the brokenness that has entered the world in their actions after their sin. Instead of being driven to God by guilt, they run and hide.⁵⁴ Their relationship with God is shattered, and they feel the need to hide from him with whom they were created to have a perfect relationship.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁴ Hamilton, 191.

Because of the sin that has entered the world, humanity is cursed. The serpent is cursed as well for his part in the events. In each instance of speaking to a trespasser, God places a curse which involves both a function and a relationship.⁵⁵ Humanity finds it difficult to perform their function. To carry out the directions of God and multiply, it will become painful for the woman to bear children. The ability to carry out her function has been made more demanding and painful. It becomes difficult for the man to have dominion over the earth. It is no longer easy for him to bring forth agriculture. The man will have to struggle to fulfill the function that God has given him. The earth that was supposed to flourish under the dominion of man has become cursed. The functions that God had installed and declared good are now marred. The functions for humanity still exist, but their ability to carry them out has been tainted by their own choice. The climax of the judgment is the death of mankind. They will die. While creation was an act of "separation toward order," the result of sin and trespass is "a separation toward disorder."⁵⁶ The creation of humanity that was designed to live in communion with God is separated from him. Part of humanity's function was to be with God, and their choices have undone their communion with their Creator. Their lives will be forever affected by this loss. Humanity will be separated from life and from God, and the world cannot be the same again. Humanity is also expelled from the garden. Instead of gaining a new position as ones like God, they are separated from him. They have "found nothing, and lost everything."⁵⁷

God cursed humans after the fall, and then God curses the earth. Humanity's sin does not affect just humanity. It affects the earth and all of God's creation.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 196.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 120.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 208.

While this account is told in only a few verses, their effect is seen throughout the whole meta-narrative of Scripture. Sin has entered into the world. With that sin has come disorder, the breaking down of the order and function that God installed in creation. The order that was created by a holy God has been warped by the entrance of sin. Thus, it begins to spiral into disorder. This disorder in and of itself is not sin, but it is a result of sin. God will be seen to intervene in the Bible to stop this spiral from getting too far out of control, but in the end he will simply let go of what he has been holding back and let the disorder happen. Sin will manifest itself and the evil will be vividly present. However, evil is not a cooperative force. Evil can work against evil if God chooses to orchestrate it that way. Evil eats itself and is ultimately self-destructive. The disorder that is in the world causes the dissolution of the world, but in the end God returns to the chaos that is left and once again creates order in the chaos. Throughout the story of Scripture one can see the creation building, or falling, to that point.

In Genesis 4, the account of Cain and Abel continues to show the fallen state of humanity. Both Cain and Abel come before the Lord and offer sacrifices. Already they are attempting to restore the relationship that they had lost. However, Cain became jealous when the Lord accepted Abel's sacrifice and not his own. Instead of fulfilling his function to multiply, he killed an image bearer of God. The blood cries out from the ground at the order that has been broken. Cain loses even more of the ability to carry out his function as God tells him that the ground will not yield its strength to Cain. Cain too is cursed and separated from God.

Genesis 5 shows the genealogy of the humans of the earth since Adam. It is clear that they are fulfilling their function to multiply, despite the brokenness of their ability and the shattered condition of the world. Things are not the way that they are supposed to be, but God is still working. His people are still multiplying. However, these multitudes become very wicked.

Sin has been allowed into the world and continues to wreak havoc in and among the human race. Corruption and violence begin to permeate society, and chaos continues to spread. Brown notes that “the corruption of life threatens to collapse creation itself.”⁵⁸ Even in the fulfilling of their function to multiply, humanity fails to represent God properly and bear his image throughout the world. In light of the wickedness of the humanity that God had created to be good and the corrupt world that had once been in shalom, God begins a process of recreation through the flood.

In Genesis 7, the account of the Flood is given. God sees the wickedness of the people that he has created. Their thoughts and actions are depraved. God chooses to deal with this wickedness by removing the source of the problem: humanity.⁵⁹ God chooses a righteous man from among the wickedness of the world. God gives Noah exact ordered instructions of how to build the ark. Noah obeys the will of God. God then sends the flood. The flood waters are seen as being released from the heavens, as if they were being held back. God releases them and they are free to flood over the earth and spread disorder. Much of the flood is reminiscent of Genesis 3. The inside and outside of the ark are paralleled with the inside and outside of the garden, respectively.⁶⁰ God then begins the process of recreation out of disorder. The recreation process mirrors the creation process in Genesis 1. The distinctions between earth and water and between the waters below and the waters above are blurred as God allows the chaotic water to wash over everything. Chaos seems to rule, but after a period of time God once again removes the water and brings order to the world. God has used chaos to rid the world of disorder. The flood was an act of un-creation so that God could recreate a world of order once again. The flood recreates the

⁵⁸ Plantinga, 54.

⁵⁹ Hamilton, 275.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 295.

watery chaos that is mentioned in Genesis 1:2. The wind of God once again moves over these waters that cover the face of the earth. After the Flood, God eventually separates the water from the land, and brings forth his animals and people.⁶¹ The face of the ground is dry on the first day of the first month – this is a new year, a new creation, a new start, and a new chance. Brown describes chaos as “the natural consequence of corrupt conduct”, with the Flood serving as “the final outcome and remedy”⁶² to that corrupt conduct. In the Flood, God asserts his power over the chaos and corruption of the earth and society. He allows “the earth’s violence [to] bear its own self-destructive reward.”⁶³ Brown suggests that the Flood is a controlled cosmic meltdown. It is dissolution as a result of the chaos of the world that entered because of sin.⁶⁴ When order is once again brought out of the chaos, God again addresses the key functions that were mentioned in Genesis: time, weather, and agriculture. God reasserts order within the world. God promises never again to curse the ground.

In the Flood, as in many other places in Scripture, it is fascinating to note that God uses chaos to defeat chaos. The forces of chaos can be used against other forces of chaos. Evil eats itself, in the end. God is the master over all of the chaos, and one begins to get the sense that the chaos that entered the world at the entrance of sin has been straining against God’s rule ever since. God is still sovereign, and always will be, but chaos tugs and tugs at the order that God has put in place. It tries to move things off the center. Things fall apart and the center cannot hold⁶⁵ as chaos strains against order. There is a widening gyre that one sees throughout history as the earth continues to get more and more chaotic. God is sovereign, but he does not send a flood again, as he promised he would not. In his mercy he does not allow chaos to rule completely.

⁶¹ Walton, *Genesis*, 331.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

⁶⁵ William Butler Yeats, *The Second Coming*, 1919.

However, throughout the rest of the story of Scripture there is the sense that this chaos is straining against the ordered world and attempting to unleash itself. Truly, it is only by God's mercy that humans survive, breath, and live in the chaotic world in which they find themselves. It is only by God's mercy, compassion, and faithfulness that the chaos is held back and does not destroy itself and all of humanity. However, at the end of the Story, one can see that this will not always be the case.

After the Flood, God blesses Noah with an echoing of the command that he gave Adam and Eve. He tells them to be fruitful and multiply. This is a quasi-new earth, and God gives his human creation a function. He gives them command over the earth and makes them stewards, again echoing the first chapters of Genesis. God makes a covenant that he will never again use a flood to destroy the earth. God promises a sense of order, at least in one area of creation.

When God makes a covenant with humanity, he is limiting his ability to do anything he wants. As God, he could do anything that he wanted to do. However, he makes a covenant with humanity and thus commits to a certain course of action. By doing this, he limits himself. He imposes a function on himself. Because God is faithful, he fulfills the covenant and fulfills the function that he imposed on himself.

The parallels between the creation account in Genesis 1 and the recreation in the aftermath of the flood are clear. God separates the waters once again. He brings order to the creation. He sends the animals out into the new land. He then places humanity on the earth and tells them to be fruitful and multiply. They are to be his image bearers on the earth and they are to be sovereign over the earth.

While God cannot dwell fully in this still-marred temple, he does make a covenant with Noah in the aftermath of the chaos and recreation. Noah offers him a sacrifice, and God is pleased. He promises never again to flood the earth. God blesses his people, and prohibits them from certain activities, just as he did in the creation account.

Chapter 9 shows that in the aftermath of the blessing and charge that God gives to his people to bear his image, they do spread out across the world. The people of the whole earth were descended from these three men. Chapter 10 illustrates that humanity is indeed multiplying and spreading. They are bearing God's image throughout creation.

However, even in this new creation, the man who found favor in the eyes of God gets drunk and his son behaves shamefully. Once again, a curse is placed on humanity because of their sinful actions. In this case, a curse is placed on one of Noah's sons. Even in this new creation, after the promise of God and the covenant that he gave, sin is still present. God has given the world a fresh start but sin has not been eradicated. And with that sin comes chaos and inevitable destruction.

After the contrast between the covenant of order and the hint of returning and impending chaos, one reaches the saga of the Tower of Babel. The whole earth speaks the same ordered language, but even this order is corrupted and used for evil. The people desire to make a name for themselves instead of representing God and bearing his image. They are not satisfied with the name and function that God has given them, but want to rise above their sphere and name themselves. This is an echo of Genesis 3, and certainly an act of hubris. God saw this, and so he again directly imposed chaos on the earth. He dispersed the people and confused their language.

God used chaos to impede the sin that the people were planning. The name that the people wanted to make for themselves becomes a name that is synonymous with shame.⁶⁶

God, then, has a chaotic world out of which he calls order. He creates a people for himself through the line of Abram. God gives function through blessing, and thus creates his people. He tells Abram that he will have numerous descendants, thus fulfilling the original blessing and charge given in Genesis 1. He tells Abram to leave his people and his country and go to an unspecified land. In this way God's image will be spread and his dominion over the earth will be made evident. He promises that Abram will be made into a great nation, that this nation will be a blessing, and that the nation would have a land. Abram's name will be famous. This stands in direct contrast to the failed attempt to make a name for humanity at the Tower of Babel.⁶⁷ They will be a blessing to the people around them. They will, thus, be creative agents bearing the image of God on the earth. This is an echo of the blessing/commission in Genesis 1. Everyone bears the image of God, but they will be fulfilling part of the function that God originally intended Adam, Eve, and all humanity to fulfill. (Interestingly, the first place named is Bethel, a house of God, a temple.)

Abram and members of his family obey God, and they leave their homeland. In this, they are faithful to God. However, when they attempt to stray from the order of God's commands, the result is disorder and chaos. Abram attempts to portray Sarai as his half-sister rather than his wife, in order that their lives might be spared. However, Pharaoh and the palace are afflicted with severe plagues. Abram is able to collect a fortune from the experience, but he lost an

⁶⁶ Hamilton, 357.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 372.

opportunity to trust God. He attempts to misrepresent the sphere in which Sarai is located in relation to him, and disorder is the result.

God has promised Abram that he will make him into a nation, and yet it is years before Abram and Sarai have a child. Sarai suggests a plan to Abram to ensure that they have child. She suggests that Abram sleep with her maid and provide a child. When Abram and Sarai try to interfere with God's plan, chaos is the result. The family unit is split and in disorder. The ramifications of this disorder will be seen through multiple generations.

God makes a covenant with Abram through the symbol of circumcision, and in doing so he gives him a new name. The purpose of circumcision is to set God's people apart, to remind them of who they are, and thus remind them of their function. God creates Abraham, naming him, setting him apart, and giving him a function as part of the people of God. God recreates Sarai as well, naming her Sarah and telling Abraham that she will give Abraham a son. Many nations will be born through her. Eventually, Abram has a child, just as God promised that he would. The function given in Exodus still continues.

God once again sees the wickedness of man as he did in the period before the Flood of Genesis 7. He notices this wickedness in Sodom and Gomorrah, and he decides to once again act and destroy the sin of that city. A clear example of the disorder resulting from the sin in that city is seen in Genesis 19 when the men of the city want to rape the two men of God. He destroys the city with fire and sulfur. This begins the motif of divine judgment and destruction by fire and sulfur that will continue until the end of the meta-narrative of Scripture. The daughters of Lot sleep with their father. The children of this relationship become nations of disorder. One is reminded of Noah getting drunk. Even when God rescues his people out of sin and chaos and

gives them a second chance, sin is still inherent in humanity. This sin results in chaos and disorder.

Genesis follows Abraham's descendents, Isaac and Jacob. Isaac gives Jacob a blessing of agricultural triumph and political superiority. These blessings echo the blessing of fruitfulness and dominance that are given to humanity in Genesis 1.

God sends Jacob to Bethel, the temple, to rename and bless him. Here, a stairway reaches down and connects heaven to earth. Ironically, this was the goal of building the tower of Babel. However, there the goal was for humanity to build a name for themselves. This instance is the coming down of God to meet with humanity in Jacob, and God will eventually give Jacob a new name. God creates the man through whom his people will come. He is naming him and calling him out of disorder. He is giving him a function as part of the people of God. God blesses Jacob and repeats part of the blessing that he gave to Jacob's ancestors. Jacob will be fruitful and multiply, and these people will be numerous. These will be the people of God, and they will bear his image. They will prove to be a blessing to the other peoples of the world. The name will come later, but the process begins at Bethel.

Jacob makes a vow that Yahweh shall be his God and the stone with which he erected a pillar shall be God's abode if God protects him on his journey. Jacob promises to give his allegiance to the God of his ancestors. Jacob commits himself to a relationship with God.

Jacob is renamed and he becomes Israel. On his travels, he erects an altar which he calls "El is the God of Israel." Again, Jacob proves the validity of the promise he made to follow God. The God of his ancestors is also his God, and he is fulfilling his function as an image bearer of God who is going to be one of the pillars of God's people.

Disorder continues to be evident throughout society as Jacob's daughter Dinah is defiled and raped by Shechemite men, citizens of a nearby city. Simeon and Levi kill all the people of the city, and are thus cursed later. They have no order and no specific place where they should be. The Levites are later given the function of protecting the tabernacle and guarding it against incursion, mirroring their actions of avenging their sister from the actions of an outside group of people.

Jacob's new identity and function as an image bearer of God and the spreader of his kingdom is made clear in Genesis 35. God repeats the fact that Jacob is no longer Jacob but should be called Israel. God names him, a creative act. He places him in a specific sphere in the cosmos of the people of God and gives him an identity and a function. This is closely tied to his relationship with God. This is reiterated by the very next verse. God describes himself as El Shaddai. He gives his name, and thus reveals his character. He then bids Israel to be abundantly fruitful. Again one sees the function given to humanity in Genesis 1. As God's image bearers, humans are to spread out across God's creation and to reign. A nation will stem from Israel, and the promise given to Abraham will be fulfilled. This nation will be God's chosen people and will bless the nations, causing them to give glory to God. He also once again promises them a land. Jacob named the site Bethel – the house of God. Once again one can see that God has created a man and given him a function, and then his temple is established. This temple is not on par with Eden, of course, but the parallel is still evident.

Judah marries a Canaanite woman, in contrast to the command to Isaac to not marry a Canaanite woman. This disorder that Judah brings into the people of God wreaks havoc on his family. Thus, his sons are evil and they displease Yahweh. His eldest son dies because of this. When this happens, Judah commands his second son to have sex with his older brother's wife to

impregnate her. However, he does not obey this command and he spills his seed on the ground. This is in contrast to the command to be fruitful and multiply. This is the antithesis of what the Lord has instructed his people to do. These sins result in more sin. Judah commits adultery and sleeps with his daughter in law.

The history of broken families is seen again in the story of Joseph. His brothers act against him and sell him into slavery. This disorder seems to threaten the promises of God, but God uses this disorder to carry out some of his promises. God blesses Joseph in Egypt and does indeed bless the nations through him. Joseph builds storehouses as Noah built an ark.⁶⁸ Again God uses chaos to bring about his purposes. With Noah, God used a flood to recreate the world. With Joseph, God uses a famine to bring his people to a position of prominence and to bless the nations. He also places his people in Egypt, where they are blessed and where they begin to multiply. Despite the disorder and sin in the world, God works within the situation to bring about his order and carry out his function. He uses the disorder of Jacob's family to bring his people to Egypt where they need they are safe and blessed. Just as Abraham left the land of his birth and relocated his family and lineage to another land. The familial dissent has dissipated, and the family comes together in a land in which they will be blessed. This is reiterated in the next chapter where the whole of the family that moved to Egypt is listed.

While God has blessed them and will cause them to multiply, the promise of the land has not yet been fulfilled. Pharaoh then allows Joseph and his family to choose a land, yet this land is not completely their own. They have been allowed to stay there, but they are not in the land that God had promised them. Jacob knows that this will not be the final land for God's people. This is evident in his request to be buried elsewhere. Just as the ark was a place of shelter that God

⁶⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995), 513.

provided for a temporary time, so Egypt is a temporary land for the people of God. However, they will eventually leave to the land that God has planned for them.

Before Israel dies, he blesses his sons. In doing so, he describes the sphere in which each son and their offspring will live. This sphere is based both on their past actions and on their character. The fulfillment of these functions can be seen throughout the rest of the Pentateuch.

Reuben is described as the firstborn. However, as follows the precedent that has been set by his ancestors, the law of primogeniture is not followed. Because of Reuben's sin and his failure to please Yahweh, he can no longer excel. He threw away the chance to live up to his function, and so Jacob declares that he will not be blessed as the firstborn. Reuben tried to rise above his sphere and sleep with his father's concubine. Chaos has now been brought on the whole family, and the birth order is not followed in the blessing. Reuben's fate is seen in that the tribe of Reuben is later integrated into the tribe of Gad.⁶⁹

Simeon and Levi are also doomed to be spread across Israel because of their sinful and chaos-causing actions. After their reaction to the situation that involved the Shechemites and their sister Dinah, their blessing too has been forfeited. Eventually, Simeon was integrated into the tribe of Judah. Their tribe was, in effect, dissolved. The Levites never have a land of their own.

Judah is described as the one whom his brothers praise. He is seen as more honorable than the brothers who have preceded him. The tribe of Judah would eventually come to dominate the other tribes of Israel. He is so powerful that he is like a lion that is ready to pounce and

⁶⁹ Ibid., 647.

attack.⁷⁰ Joseph declares that Judah will continue to be in a position of supremacy until he possesses that which belongs to him.

Zebulun is promised that he will settle near the shores of the sea. This is likely a promise of blessing, for the tribe of Zebulun will conquer and spread their territory to the west and to the north.⁷¹

Issachar is described as someone who seeks the best place to settle and the most pleasant land. The result of this is the loss of their independence. The tribe of Issachar became serfs to the Canaanites. The sin described here is that they sought something that was good “just as Eve saw that the apple was good) but that was not within their sphere to take. Thus, they step outside the bounds of the function given to them by God, and disorder results.

Dan is predicted to be a snake by the wayside that bites at horse’s hooves. Perhaps what is suggested here is that though Dan is small, he will be capable of holding his own. He will have greater strength than his size would appear to suggest. Jacob thus gives Dan a function that the tribe will live out.

The tribe of Gad had to constantly deal with invaders from multiple fronts. This is reflected in the words that Jacob speaks over him. Jacob declares that raiders will raid Gad, but he will inflict defeat on them. This remains true throughout their history.⁷²

Asher is described as having rich food and royal delicacies. In fact, the tribe of Asher does occupy a fertile piece of land and is quite prosperous.⁷³ The tribe of Asher has a function

⁷⁰ Ibid., 658.

⁷¹ Ibid., 664.

⁷² Ibid., 673.

⁷³ Ibid., 674.

and responsibility of sharing food to the royal family. However, this function is twisted and they provide the Canaanite royals with food rather than royals from their own people.⁷⁴

Naphtali is described as a doe that bears beautiful fawns. Perhaps this is a reference to Naphtali's independence and their defensive abilities, as Naphtali is one of the few areas that was not occupied by Canaanites.⁷⁵

Joseph is described as beset by enemies intent on his destruction. This could be a reference to the life of Joseph, who certainly had to deal with insidious plots against his life. However, the tribes that result from Joseph were also involved in war. This too could be a possible implication of the blessing over him. It also describes Joseph as being separated and set apart. While Joseph was once separated from his brothers to what appeared to be his detriment, he is now set apart by blessing.⁷⁶

Benjamin is the last to receive the blessing. He is described as a ravenous wolf. The Benjaminites had the reputation of being fierce and capable warriors.⁷⁷

As is evident throughout the blessings that Jacob gives his sons, he speaks over them and determines their function and their place for their future generations. They are called out and named once again, and the portrait of the people of Israel begins to be painted by the blessing of Jacob. These are to be the people of God, and now they know their sphere and how they fit in with the others. It is when they attempt to come out of this sphere or rise above it that chaos and disorder result.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 674.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 677.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 686.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 687.

In Genesis 50:20 one can see God using the forces of chaos to accomplish his will. Joseph states that his brothers have done something malicious against him, and yet God has done something beneficial in order to bring about the blessing of many people. One can see this theme throughout the whole of Genesis, and indeed throughout the meta-narrative of Scripture. Sin happens, and chaos results, and yet God uses that disorder to bring about the blessing of many and the redemption of his people.

The Rest of the Bible (Exodus – Jude)

The book of Genesis ended with God's people in Egypt. God's chosen people multiply in Egypt and their function to bear the image of God and to be fruitful is partially fulfilled. They are becoming a great nation, as he promised them they would. However, the complete function that he has given them is still not being fulfilled. They are in bondage to another nation, and the blessings that God has promised have not all yet come to pass.

Exodus

The people of Israel are in chaos. God has blessed them in that they have flourished and they are now numerous, but they are not free to fulfill the function that he has in mind for his people. The people are in slavery. God calls out Moses and intends to use him to lead his people to the land that he has for them. God delivers Moses from the threat of death as a baby. Moses is put into a small "ark". This is the same Hebrew word used to describe the ark that Noah built. In the case of Noah, God used an ark to deliver one man and his family out of chaos, and from them he blessed humanity. In Exodus, God delivers one baby on an "ark", albeit of a much smaller size. Through this baby, he will bless his people.

Moses grows up and identifies himself with the Hebrew people. God calls him out of the desert back to Egypt to play a role in the deliverance of his people. God delivers his people because of his faithfulness and the fulfilling of the covenant that he made to them.

God reveals his name to Moses and through him to the rest of the Israelite people. He declares his name to be I AM. Previously, in Genesis, the patriarchs had ascribed names to God based on their experiences with him.⁷⁸ This time, it is God who reveals his name and the significance that his name has for the people. Names were very important in the Ancient Near East. They described the “nature, character, prospect, hope, and destiny” of the one bearing the name.⁷⁹ In Genesis, God changed people’s names to call them out, give them a function, and change their destiny and course of life. Here, God reveals his own name. By doing this, and by making a covenant with his people, it is almost as if God is imposing a function on himself. God is limiting himself to promising something, and he will act to fulfill what he has promised. His name reflects this faithfulness and the eternity of his nature.

The Exodus narrative is one in which the faithful God rescues his people just as he had promised that he would. In doing so, he faces Pharaoh. Pharaoh is a god to the Egyptian people. God will show his sovereignty over Pharaoh through the process of the Exodus.

The Exodus event can be placed in parallel with the creation account in Genesis. The redemptive work of God can be regarded as “of the same magnitude as... the creation of the cosmos.”⁸⁰

To bring his people out of the chaos of slavery, God uses chaos against chaos. He uses the plagues of chaos to set his people free from the disorder in which they find themselves. The plagues, seen as a loss of function, parallel the functions given in the Genesis account. These plagues start with the turning of water to blood. One of the agents of chaos becomes even more chaotic. It cannot be used or tamed, and has lost the function that it was given. Instead of

⁷⁸ Waltke, 359.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 378.

remaining mastered by the God of creation, it has gone into disorder. The Egyptians had attempted to master the chaos of the Nile River and use it to the benefit of their agriculture, society, and economy. Now, however, the Nile has turned against them.⁸¹ Only God is the true master of chaos and bringer of order.

Instead of ruling over creation as humans were intended to, the creation begins to work against them. Animals rise up against the ones given dominion over them, and this is seen in the plagues of the frogs, gnats, and flies. God had commissioned humanity to have dominion over creation, and yet the creation that is supposed to be subservient exhibits disorder and roles begin to fall apart.

This dissolution of function continues as man's ability to work the ground is hindered when their livestock die. This working of the ground, too, was part of man's function. He was supposed to be the master over the ground and be in direction over it.

In the creation account, God has given nature roles and spheres. When nature stayed within these spheres, the earth was good and functioned as it should. Here, however, nature begins to work against humanity as hail is sent from the sky. Locusts destroy the agriculture that God had established in creation.

The differentiation/separation of light and dark disappears as the land becomes covered in an incredibly heavy darkness. Night and day become irrelevant and lost in the darkness that shrouds the land. The function of time is gone.

One can see that the functions of time, weather, and agriculture have come undone. The spheres that God imparted on his creation have blurred, and disorder is the result. The Egyptians

⁸¹ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 199.

might imagine their gods to have brought order out of chaos, but the God of the Israelites shows them that he is the only Creator-God, the only one who can bring ultimate order out of disorder and keep the earth from falling apart. The Egyptians had gods to explain how these chaotic forces were ruled, and the plagues served to show that only one God was master over the chaos, and God of all creation. That God was the God of the Israelites, YHWH, the I AM.

Finally, the creation of humanity itself descends into chaos as the firstborn son is killed. The life that humans were given by God is taken away. In many stories in Genesis, the firstborn son was displeasing to God or was not the one who was ultimately blessed (Cain, Esau, etc). The institution of the family is ripped apart. Life itself is lost and Yahweh is revealed to be the only true deity, the only one to control life.

God installs the function of Passover among his people. In doing so, he creates a way for them to remember what they have learned from the Exodus event. He gives specific and detailed instructions for how to carry out the yearly event, and each action has a specific meaning and function.

God further demonstrates order when he brings the Israelites, now free, out of Egypt. He installs feasts to order their year. They consecrate the firstborn. One can see the signs of a step toward order and right relationship with God. God is with his people as a guide for them in the wilderness. He appears as a pillar of cloud and fire. Even these chaotic elements are under his control.

Finally, he brings them across the Red Sea, the body of water. He separates the water from the land and creates order through which the Israelites can cross to freedom into their given function. Just as he separated the waters in Genesis to create an ordered world, so now he

separates the waters of the Red Sea to complete the creation of his new people. In addition to this, the Red Sea account provides a parallel with the first event that God used to begin the exodus – the turning of water into blood. Once again the Egyptians are conquered by the chaos that they believed they had mastered when God uses the Red Sea to drown and destroy their army.⁸²

While they are in the desert, God shows that he is the Lord over creation by sending bread from heaven and evincing water from a rock. God uses the elements of creation to fulfill the function of providing for his people.

The Law

God has called out his people, he has brought them out of chaos, and now he is going to give them a function. He is going to officially create them as his people. He gives them the law, explaining their function and the way that they should live as his people in the world. He names them, makes them distinct from everyone else, and the law is one of the mechanisms by which he does this.

The law begins with the Ten Commandments. The first three commandments describe the function of the Israelites based on who God is. The people are told how to relate to God because of his uniqueness, his character, and his holiness.⁸³ The fourth commandment, which deals with the Sabbath, instructs the people to remember the Creator for the benefit of his creation. This fits in with the people's function to have dominion over the earth and to bear the image of God across the world. They should care for the creation, and they can do this by remembering the Creator. This is indicative of the eternal rest in the temple that God has in mind for his temple. This rest was seen in Eden, but has been lost. However, it is fulfilled in

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Waltke, 411.

Revelation when the people of God can finally rest and reside with God forever. The fourth commandment reminds the people of God that part of their function is to rest as well as to be active. Without rest, the balance inherent in function between action and rest is lost. The result of simply action is thus disorder and ultimate loss of function as well. The last six commandments instruct the Israelites how to function in relation to others. The Ten Commandments places the Israelites in their sphere. It sets them apart from the other nations. They are created as God's people.

As God's people, they will have God dwell among them. God gives them the law so that a holy God can dwell with his people. Part of their function is to be in relationship with God, and the law is designed to facilitate this. The laws cover almost all facets of their existence, and the Israelites are left in no doubt as to whom they belong, what their purpose is, and who they are. Their identity and function are clear. He then has his people create a place for his presence to reside. Just as his ordered creation was his temple, so now his ordered people are creating a place for his presence to stay. This will be his temple, with his people. This temple/tabernacle is extremely ordered and meticulous. There is no room for chaos in God's creation.

God establishes priests and gives them function within the people of God. They are to teach the word of God to the people, and are to act as mediators between the people and God.⁸⁴ For the priests, even the clothes that they wear and all of their daily activities set them apart revolve around their function. On their heads they wear a plate that says "Holy to I AM." One is reminded of the priestly functions of Adam and Eve in the garden.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 460.

However, as has happened in the past, God's order gets marred by sin and chaos. Immediately after sealing the covenant with God, God's people ask for an idol to be constructed for them. This blatant disobedience and unfaithfulness is tantamount to adultery on a wedding night. The covenant has just been entered into, and yet God's people are already throwing away their function. They are attempting to leave their sphere of people made to worship God. Instead, they seek to create a god for themselves that they can see and touch. The people are trying to impose a function and a form on God. They are trying to create God. While God has made them to be creative agents, they are only created this way because of their relationship to the Creator. Just as God has created them, so they can act in a creative sphere on the earth. However, the people try to twist and manipulate this relationship. When the created try to create and master the Creator, only chaos and disorder can result. Once again humanity tries to live outside of their sphere and be more than they have been created to be.

However, in the face of this abandonment of function, one can see God and Moses being true to the function that they have been given. Although God could wipe out humanity once again with a flood as he did in the time of Noah, he remains true and faithful to his covenant function that he has placed on himself. He does not kill his people. Moses shows humility and concern for the reputation of God. His greatest concern is for the covenant Creator-God whose image he bears.

The shattered covenant is vividly portrayed by Moses breaking the Ten Commandments. He burns the Golden Calf and the people are forced to drink it. God's presence leaves them, and they mourn this loss. Community with God is part of their function and what they were created for. However, God in his grace renews the covenant and fashions new commandments for the people. They are given another chance to fulfill their function and their role. They are given

another opportunity at relationship. God continually fulfills the covenant he made to them that they would be his people.

There are also regulations placed on the day of rest. The people of God need to realize how integral rest is to their existence and to their function. Rest comes with dwelling with God in his temple, and although the world in which they live is shattered by sin, they should still seek to rest in a way that is at least a pale copy of the rest that they would have in the temple of God.

However, the presence of God is with his people. The glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle, and the Lord is with Israel throughout all of their journeys.

The Rest of the Pentateuch

In the rest of the Pentateuch, the story is told of Israel's wandering in the wilderness. God is always faithful and always with them. He fulfills his self-imposed function and keeps his promise that they will be his people even when his people are unfaithful and complain. His people fail to fulfill their function and enter the Promised Land, and yet God remains with them. His people fail to remain trusting and begin to complain and desire to go back to Egypt, and yet God does not give up on them. He consistently provides them with food and water, but they do not always find his type of food to their liking despite its origin in heaven. The story of the Pentateuch reaches a climax as the people of Israel stand on the brink of the Promised Land. This is a new generation, and this is a new chance to fulfill their function as God's people. In light of this momentous occasion, Moses addresses the people and reminds them of who they are.

Moses begins his address in Deuteronomy by recounting the history of the people. He describes the redeeming role of their God. He describes the actions of the people. Throughout this narrative is the skeletal structure of covenant and, thus, function. Their God fulfills the

function he placed on himself and remains faithful to the promises that he made. The people, however, renege on their covenant agreement. They fail to fulfill their function as the people of God, and yet God continually chooses to give them another chance. Israel refused to enter the land that was designated for them. They deliberately chose to not receive part of God's blessing and covenant. However, instead of abandoning them, God allowed the next generation another chance to enter the land after the passage of time.

Moses gives this history in an attempt to remind the generation about to enter the land of who they are and thus how they should act. They should follow the law and live in covenant relationship with their God. Their function is to be his people and to spread his kingdom in community with him. The laws cover every aspect of their life, and "all of life is lived under God's rule."⁸⁵

This re-giving of the law reiterates that Yahweh alone is God. It serves to remind the new generation of their function in the land that they have been promised and are about to enter. The Israelites are a chosen people, marked by circumcision and bearing the image of God. Their hearts, too, have been circumcised. They are to serve God from their heart and with all of their lives. Their function is not merely unconnected to their mind and heart. Rather, the function is intrinsically linked to the self. The heart, mind, and body cannot be separated and fenced off. The laws cannot be carried out in just one aspect of life. The people of Israel are to live in complete submission to their God.

God is about to send them into the land. This is their re-creation as a people. The covenant is renewed and their identity and function is reiterated. God tells them that to choose

⁸⁵ Ibid., 488.

the law is to choose life. If they choose this, God will bless them, and again we see a reiteration of the blessings that he gave at creation. They will be fruitful and multiple. In Deuteronomy 30:11-20, one can see that God has given them dominion over the land.

Historical Books

At the beginning of Joshua, the chosen people of Israel seek to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. Just as God parted the waters of the Red Sea, so he parts the waters of the Jordan River. Once again God shows his mastery over the water and, symbolically, chaos. Once again God brings his people out of chaos (wilderness) through chaos (water) into order and a fulfilled promise. God brought his people out of slavery through the Red Sea and into freedom. Here, God brings his people out of the wilderness through the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. Leonard L. Thompson notes "'Land' becomes a cipher for a total social order. The move into the Land is nothing short of that creative change from chaos to ordered cosmos."⁸⁶

After crossing the Jordan, the Israelites erect an altar. There is a new circumcision, symbolizing the renewal of the covenant. They celebrate the first Passover. The people are fulfilling their function and living up to their part of the covenant. They now begin the process of possessing the land that they have been promised. As the people of God enter into battle and defeat the people of the land, they spread the kingdom of God as his chosen people. They fulfill their function of having a land and having dominion over that land so that the nations can give glory to God and ascribe worship to him. When they attempt to add to their own glory or not fulfill this function, disorder is the result. An example of this is seen in the story of the battle at

⁸⁶ Leonard L. Thompson, "The Jordan Crossing: Sidqot Yahweh and World Building," *JBL* 100 (1981), 343-358.

Ai, where Achan attempts to keep some of the spoils of war for himself. By doing this, he brings glory to himself and fails to keep himself and his people separate from the other nations. The consequence is that all of the people of Israel are defeated.

Upon the conclusion of the initial battles, the people can now possess the land. The land is divided in an ordered manner, and each tribe is given an allotted amount of land. Again, people are given their spheres in which to fulfill their function.

In Joshua 23, Joshua gives a charge to the leaders of Israel. He bids them to obey the law that God has given to them. By doing so, they will stay in the land that God has bestowed upon them. They have a function in the land, and they have a sphere in which to fulfill it, but they can fail at fulfilling this function. They are to dispossess the people in the land who are opposed to the God of Israel. When they do they must endure the results of the chaos and disorder that come with that. If they do not succeed, they will be driven out of the land. They are to care for the land as a gift of God rather than as a conquest that they have made. Their relationship to the Promised Land should be similar to that of Adam and Eve in Eden. God has given them this land, and they are responsible for looking after it in a way that is befitting of the people of God.

Thus, Joshua's parting words to his people are calling them to obedience of the covenant that they have entered into with God. He urges them to remain faithful. By doing so, he is encouraging them to fulfill their function as the chosen people of God. The people once again commit to this covenant and renew it. Ironically, however, it is themselves rather than Yahweh that they are trusting to keep faith. This ominous parting thought paves the way for a new covenant to be made.

In Judges, one can see that Israel is unfaithful and went after other gods. So, God “gave them over” to plunderers, and the hand of the Lord was against them. They were in great distress because of the chaos that came as a result of their sin. The Lord installed judges to help bring them out of the chaos that they had made, because he was moved with pity for them. But they did not listen to the judges, and continued to whore after other gods. They fail to dispossess the native people of the land who are antagonistic to the God of the Israelites. Rather, they let these people influence them and pull them away from the worship of their God. They begin to lose their function as they fail to fulfill the covenant of which they have been reminded so many times. So, the Lord let them be tested. He lets them experience warfare and strife. This disorder and chaos is a consequence of the Israelites failing in their role as God’s elect. Throughout Judges, one can see God continually intervening on behalf of his people to restore order, and yet they continue to walk away from him into chaos. The downward spiral simply continues to get worse and chaos reigns over the land.

The book closes with a chilling story of a Levite and his concubine. The episode highlights the depths to which the people of God have fallen, and how they have failed at fulfilling the covenant and performing their function. A Levite, who is supposed to be holy to I AM, has a concubine. She is unfaithful to him and returns to her father. The Levite comes to retrieve her, and on their journey home the Levite is threatened with rape by homosexuals. He offers his concubine instead, whom he finds lying unresponsive at his door the next morning. Uncaring, he merely straps her onto a donkey. He later cuts her up into twelve pieces and sent her throughout Israel. The people unite and fight a battle against the city in which the Levite was threatened with rape. They slay the city without restraint. The anarchy in the land is complete.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Waltke, 617.

A tribe is almost made extinct in the process, the chosen people of God have abandoned their function so completely that they live separately from the native people only in name, and, chillingly, each person does "what is right in their own eyes." The ordered people of God have descended into chaos. Again, God will intervene to establish order.

God provides Samuel as a judge in Israel. Samuel attempts to remind the people of God to be faithful to the covenant to which they have committed themselves. However, even his own sons are disobedient. The Israelites reject the order that God has given them as they choose to demand a king. God describes this as rejecting him from being king over them. God lets them go into this chaos with only a warning of what the results of their choices will be. The family unit will be spilt, and the land that God has given his people will not be theirs but the kings. The best of their fields will be taken, and the fruit of the land will not be theirs to keep. Things will not function as they were intended to. However, God lets the Israelites choose this chaos. Saul is chosen as king, and he fails to lead Israel back to their God.

However, the king that follows Saul is David. In David's reign, one can see a brief period of order. David appears to be a faithful king, and he is described as a man after God's own heart. Order is briefly restored to the kingdom, and Israel begins to serve the true God once again. One can see in 2 Samuel 8.6 and 8.14 that the Lord gave David victories in battle wherever he went. David is bringing the Abrahamic covenant to fruition and conquering land for the people of God.⁸⁸

God once again makes a covenant with one of his people. He imposes a function on himself that he will be faithful to fulfill. He promises David that he will give David a great name

⁸⁸ Ibid., 658.

and that he will give the people of Israel rest from their oppressors. He also promises David that one from his line whose kingdom shall be established. This is a reference to Solomon. Solomon will build a temple for God and God will preserve his kingdom. God also promises that one of David's line will endure forever, his kingdom will endure forever, and his throne will be established. This is a reference to Jesus Christ. God will establish his reign on the earth just as he did in the beginning. And, just as he did in the beginning, God will allow humanity to participate in that.

However, David too falls into sin and chaos finds its place in the land. Rape, murder and dissent among the people abound. His son Solomon succeeds him as king. David's parting words to Solomon are to be strong, wise, and to follow the Law. David clearly lays out the function of Solomon both as a person of God and as a king of the people of God.⁸⁹ Initially, Solomon fulfills his function. He walks according to the Law and he uses his God-given wisdom for the benefit of the people. Solomon builds the temple and God dwells with his people as he wants to. However, Solomon begins to place himself above the sphere that God has given him and bring glory to himself. He uses his gifts, power, and wealth for himself rather than for God. The consequence of the sin in Israel is disorder for the people of God. The nation is thrown into chaos and further anarchy as the kingdom is divided.

Throughout the reign of the kings in the divided nations, the people fail to live according to their God-given function and covenant. They live self-serving lives and devote themselves to other gods. Many of the successive kings in each kingdom only succeed in bringing the Israelites farther from God. There are a few exceptions who attempt to restore order, but the general

⁸⁹ Ibid., 707.

picture that one gets is of a nation in chaos. This chaos extends to the extent that neighboring nations are able to come and conquer Israel and Judah.

Ultimately, the Lord uses the forces of evil to deal with the evil among his people. He sends the Assyrians and the Babylonians against the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the people are taken into exile. The presence of God eventually leaves the temple. God's people are once again in chaos, and God's temple has been destroyed. Disorder pervades all of life for the people of God.

After the exile, the people begin to return to the land. Ezra and Nehemiah show the attempts at restoration and the re-creation of the people to the way that they are supposed to be. As the people return to the land that God had promised them, they attempt to rebuild the temple. In doing so, they are seeking to reestablish God's presence among them. They are seeking to return to the way that it is supposed to be. They hope to return things to their proper sphere, place, and order. However, they become discouraged by opposition and soon lose sight of their God-given function. They seek instead to pander to their own interests. Haggai and Zechariah condemn the people for this tendency, and again they seek to rebuild the house of God.⁹⁰ They establish a community and attempt to rebuild the walls under the direction of Nehemiah. The people begin to move back towards the order for which they were designed – to live in community with God and with one another. The people also renew the covenant that they have made with God. Steps toward order are taken. God's people are seeking to return to him. They were in captivity, but God delivers his people once again and sets them on the path toward order. He uses chaos (opposing countries) to bring his people back to him.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 779.

The Prophets

The prophets of the Old Testament are concerned with the covenant between God and his people. They advise the people to stay within the covenant. They warn the people of the curses that will fall upon them if they stray from the covenant, and they remind them of the blessings that result from staying in it. If the people are living outside of the covenant, they urge them to return to obedience and to relationship with their God. In essence, they recall the people to their function and urge them to fulfill it. They remind the people of the faithfulness of God and the fact that he will continue to fulfill his function and covenant.

Isaiah places a large emphasis on the fact that while the world might seem to be in chaos, God knows the future and still remains sovereign. The people are where they are because of their sin and lack of repentance. They have lived wicked lives and the consequence of that evil is the disorder and chaos in which they find themselves. However, despite this state of affairs, one day God will fulfill his promises and restore his people. The disordered times will not last forever. God will remain faithful and one day the world will function as it should. Isaiah contains many prophecies about restoration that find their fulfillment in the events described in Revelation, as will be examined later. Finally, Isaiah also reminds the people of God how to live. Despite the chaos of their surroundings, the people should live lives that reflect their identities. They should live out who they are and thus fulfill the function that God has given them.⁹¹

Jeremiah also describes the chaos that the world is in.⁹² Jeremiah 4 describes the coming judgment as a result of the evil of the world, and in this description one can see the tendency of evil to drift back into the chaotic state in which the world began, undoing God's order and

⁹¹ J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 100.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 146.

creation. The world is described as “formless and void,” just as it was before God installed order in the cosmos. The whole land is described as a “desolation,” and yet the Lord does not bring an end to things before the appointed time. This situation is seen to be played out in Revelation. Despite this vision of coming judgment, however, Jeremiah also reminds his listeners that there will be redemption and restoration for the people of God. Thus, they should remain true to who they are.

Ezekiel addresses the people of God who are in exile and who are trying to understand the chaos in which they find themselves. Ezekiel emphasizes that God is still in control. Even though the people of God have failed to live as they should, God does not fail in fulfilling his promise. He is still in command of history. In addition to this, Ezekiel reminds the people that God will one day be present with them again. God’s presence has left the temple, and in the midst of this desolate time Ezekiel reminds his listeners that one day God will bring restoration and his people will enjoy his presence once again. Although the world is full of chaos and disorder, one day God will restore order and Shalom. This turbulent time will not last forever.⁹³

Daniel also addresses the remnant of Israel. It is a reassurance that God is still sovereign. It is also an encouragement to stay true to one’s identity and function. Daniel remains faithful to God and his life is preserved. However, whether death comes or not, what matters is that the God the people of Israel are called to worship is more powerful than any other gods. This theme can be seen echoed in Revelation, where the saints are called to remain true to who God has made them even unto death. In addition to this, Daniel also contains apocalyptic sections. One can see that one day God will return and establish his kingdom. One day all will be as it should be. Eventually, God will eradicate evil forever.

⁹³ Ibid., 200-201.

Jonah's story is a clear example of what will happen when people try to live outside of their God-given sphere. Jonah decides not to go to Nineveh, and chaos (a literal storm) is the result. God uses this disorder to bring Jonah back to his function. It also highlights what can happen when people do live according to their function and purpose. The city of Nineveh repents and returns to right relationship with God, and he forgives them and has mercy on them.

Amos intervenes on behalf of Israel, and God restrains from sending chaos upon them in the form of locusts and fire. However, God will not hold back forever.⁹⁴ There will come a time when he will stop holding back and will let the forces of chaos loose. This is a precursor to the events described in Revelation, when chaos is let loose upon the people on the earth. However, the book ends with a picture of the restoration of Israel. God will restore the fortunes of his people. This, too, finds its fulfillment in Revelation. One day creation will be re-created and the people will never again be uprooted.

Hosea provides a picture of God's relationship with his people. One can see God imposing a function on Hosea by telling him to marry the prostitute Gomer. Gomer represents Israel living in unfaithfulness to the covenant. He marries her and refuses to desert her despite her continuing infidelity. He continually calls her back to himself and redeems her out of bondage. Despite her recurrent descent into chaos, God persists in stubbornly and lovingly calling her out of it.

⁹⁴ Waltke, 835.

Micah shows that God will triumph over evil, no matter the chaos and disorder of the world. The faithful God of the covenant will keep his promise and will not abandon his people to destruction.⁹⁵

In Zephaniah, one can see God describing the dissolution of creation that will come at the end of time. Everything on the face of the earth will be swept away. The opening chapters describe the chaos to which God will give the earth over. However, a message of hope is also given in that the Lord God will dwell in the midst of the people who are faithful to him. God will bring his people together and will make them renowned. One can see that this would be the fulfillment of the covenant between God and his people. Despite the chaos on earth, God can always be counted on to fulfill his self-imposed function.

Joel urges the people of God to repent and live covenant-fulfilling lives. He describes the chaos in the land as a consequence of disobedience, and urges the people to change their ways. He describes the coming day of the Lord as great and very awesome. The Lord will bring judgment and chaos on those who do not live according to the law of the Lord.

Nahum describes God as sovereign and perfectly just. He punishes those who do not remain faithful to him. This is also seen in Revelation. The result of the punishment described shows the nation of Nineveh in chaos.

Obadiah follows this theme by reminding the Israelites that while they might be overcome by chaos for a finite period of time, if they remain faithful they will be delivered out of that chaos and the agents of chaos will be destroyed.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 837.

Habakkuk describes the just as living by faith. By doing this, they remain in right relationship with God. They wait with the knowledge that God will return to fulfill his promises. God will also fulfill his promise that the wicked will be judged and evil will be dealt with.

Malachi deals with the fact that the promises of the Lord have not yet been fulfilled. Israel is overcome by conquering nations. Malachi suggests that the reason for this is a failure to live up to the covenant relationship, or a failure to fulfill function. The covenant has been profaned and God has been robbed. The priests of the nation fail to fulfill their role as holy mediators between the people and God, and fail to correctly represent the word of God. Malachi looks forward to the great day of the Lord when evil will be dealt with. Malachi bids them to remember who they are, to remember the Law of Moses, and live according to that law.⁹⁶

The Writings

The Psalms also illustrate the function and chaos tension in the cosmos. They celebrate the Creator-God. There are five types of psalms: lament, royal, praise, wisdom, and thanksgiving. The lament psalms are the cry for God to end the disorder, chaos, and evil in the world now. They come out of a place of grief or despair. They are a plea for God to fulfill his function and to bring the world back to the way that it is supposed to be. The royal psalms point forward to the function bringer. They extol God as the royal one who will set the world to rights. The praise psalms exalt God as the sovereign king of the ordered cosmos. The wisdom psalms discuss the way that the people of God should live and fulfill their function. Finally, the thanksgiving psalms thank God for his goodness and for the good works that he does in the lives of his people.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 847.

In Ecclesiastes, one reads of a hopeless world in which everything is meaningless. The writer is in despair at the state of the world. The world in which he lives has lost its function such that wicked people prosper and righteous people have tribulation. The writer mourns at this. Without the order that God placed in the world, the world can seem meaningless and hopeless.

The book of Job also illustrates this point. Order is turned upside down and evil is allowed to work in a righteous man's life. This is counter-intuitive and does not seem to be the way that the world should work. However, both Ecclesiastes and Job are reminders that this is the way that the world is. The world is unjust and painful. Function and order are turned upside down and twisted, and the chaos that is a result of evil causes pain and discouragement. However, Job is also a reminder the God is in control. Even when the world seems infused with evil and spinning out of control, God is still the sovereign God of order and justice that he always has been. At the end of the story, he will deal with evil once and for all.

The Gospels

1. The Incarnation

The Gospels continue the meta-narrative of Scripture and begin with the birth of Christ. The first chapter of the Gospel of John closely parallels the first chapter of Genesis. John describes the Word, Jesus, as being with God and as being God. He was in the beginning with God. He was a creating agent in the process of ordering and creating the cosmos, and without him not one thing was created. Without Jesus, nothing has order, function, or being.

Life is in the Word, and he is the light. He shines into the darkness, and the darkness cannot extinguish his light. This true light, the Creator, became part of the creation. He came into the world that had been made through him. By coming to earth as a human, God once again

imposes a function on himself. He limits himself to humanity, and he comes to fulfill a purpose. Jesus fulfills the promises that have been given to the people of God throughout their history. He is sent to fulfill God's purpose for his creation.

Matthew begins with a genealogy. This traces Jesus' lineage back to Abraham. From this, one can see that Jesus will be the fulfillment of the promise that God has made to his people.

God is dwelling with his people for the first time since the Garden of Eden. Thus, the incarnation of Jesus is clearly the ushering in of some part of the way that things are supposed to be and the way that things are supposed to function. God is once again walking among his people. However, the world is in such chaos and disorder that they do not give him the glory and the worship that he deserves. Instead, they mock, revile, and oppose him. However, Jesus remains true to his function and dies for all of humanity, even those that oppose him.

2. Teaching

Jesus teaches that the time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come. This is the kingdom of which God's people were designed to be a part. God's promise has begun to come to fruition. God will reign on earth, and his people will reign with him, just as was described in Genesis 1. This is the ushering in of the proper, God-ordained order and function of the world.

Jesus preaches on the Sermon on the Mount in a redefinition of the Law and the function of his people. He assures the people that he has come not to abolish the Law. The coming of Jesus does not make the function of the people of God obsolete. Rather, he fulfills the Law. He makes it possible for the people of God to fulfill their function. They are able to be in

communion with God and bear his image across the earth. They will be able to have the power to choose between chaos and order, and the power of evil will not be able to dictate their choices.

Jesus describes the function of his people as being salt and light. They are to remain true to who they are, and they are to be the salt of the world. They are to accurately bear God's image to the rest of humanity, and through this cause the other people of the world to worship the true God as well. They are to be stewards of creation and be good in a world of evil. They are to be the light of the world. The world has become saturated with darkness, and chaos is everywhere. However, Jesus creates his people to be people of light. They are not to walk in the darkness but rather to shine into it and bring light to the people of the world. The ultimate goal of the people of God is for God to get the glory. Jesus does not change the function of the people of God. He makes it possible for them to fulfill it. He re-creates them, making them a new creation and calling them out of the chaos of their old way of life.

Jesus states that he will give his people rest. Again one can see that rest is an integral part of living in the kingdom of God. Jesus declares that he is the Lord of the Sabbath, and that the Sabbath was made for man. The function of the Sabbath is for the benefit of man, and when people twist this relationship, chaos results. Because of Jesus, man will be able to begin to have the rest that has been missing from life since the Fall. However, this rest will most fully be realized in the end of time, as described in Revelation.

Jesus describes the end of the age in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. Lawlessness will increase. The "powers of heaven will be shaken", the "sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky". This imagery is fairly evident in Revelation when creation begins to come apart at the seams. He compares it to the flood and Noah in its coming.

No one knows when it will occur, but when it does the chaos that ensues will result in a purified population of God's people. In that chaos, however, nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.

3. Disciples

Jesus calls out twelve disciples and gives them a function. They are to be his companions while he is on earth, and they will start his church after his ascension. They will be the start of the true Israel. He appoints them specifically. Again, one can see that God calls people out and re-creates their identity, giving them a function to fulfill in his kingdom.

The followers of Jesus are known by their fruit. The fulfilling of their function as people of God is evidence that they know him. Identity is so closely tied with function that they cannot be separated.

The fact that Jesus calls twelve disciples is quite significant. Just as there are twelve tribes of Israel, so Jesus calls twelve disciples. These will be the pillars of the true Israel. They will be the beginning of the church. God is calling Israel back to its purpose. Where Israel has failed in the past, the true Israel will be more able to fulfill their God-given function.

Jesus gives the disciples a function as he travels with them on the way to Jerusalem to die. He defines their role more clearly because he knows that his time with them is short. He reminds them that fulfilling their function will require total commitment and surrender. They cannot live half-lives. Rather, they have had their identity changed because of their experience with Jesus, and they have to live accordingly. He intends for his disciples to participate in his mission. As the true Israel, they are to bring God glory among the other nations, and to bear the mark of Christ in such a way that everyone else, regardless of ethnicity, worships God. Jesus

goes down to Jerusalem to fulfill his function that will cause the people of the world to have relationship with God and ultimately bring about Shalom. As he does so, he gives his disciples a function to fulfill after his death.

4. Miracles

The miracles of Jesus are examples of Jesus installing order in a world of disorder. He directly intervenes and brings order and function back to a world that has been broken by chaos.

He heals the sick and crippled. In doing so, he works against the evil that is in the world and shows people a glimpse of what life should look like. There should be no pain or illness. As he heals the sick, he brings order back into a life that has been in chaos. He makes it possible for those he heals to have a full and rich life and fulfill more of their function than perhaps they could before. After he heals the sick, he tells them to sin no more. He has brought order into their lives, and so their lives should reflect that order. They should choose to live lives that reflect the people that God has made them to be. Sickness and sin are connected, and order and healing and a righteous life are connected. When Jesus affects one, he should necessarily affect the other.

He casts out demons. By doing this, Jesus demonstrates that he has power over the forces of evil at work in the world. The world has been invaded by the powers of evil that have twisted function and made life chaotic. However, Jesus shows that he has authority over the chaos in the world because he has complete authority over evil.

Jesus also shows that he has power over the chaotic agents of weather. This is his creation. He installed the functions and their functionaries, and they are ultimately subservient to him. While there may be chaos in the world and evil might have twisted them to be destructive forces, they ultimately still belong to God and can be calmed by him. However, in Revelation,

God lets them spiral out of control. He stops intervening against their chaos and in his judgment allows them free reign, resulting in the dissolution of creation.

Jesus also has the power over food and agriculture. He can feed five thousand men with only loaves and fishes. He is also in control of time. He is able to appear to over 500 people at the same time. By demonstrating his control over weather, time, and agriculture, Jesus proves again that he is the Creator-God who brings order out of chaos and installed function in creation. The functions of time, weather, and agriculture are the very functions that God installed in Genesis to bring order to the cosmos.

He even has the power to bring life out of death. This is the ultimate bringing out of function from non-function and order from chaos.

In his miracles, Jesus can again be seen as the Creator-God who brings order out of chaos. He brings order to the cosmos.

5. Opposition

Jesus, the one who fulfills the law and the one who gives function, is opposed by agents of anti-function and lawlessness.

Some of his main opposition comes from the Pharisees and the religious leaders. The majority of the religious leaders at the time had become experts at following the Law. However, they had made the mistake of assuming that this obedience was the sum total of their function. Jesus comes and declares that a life that is righteously lived is more than isolating actions from identity. Living as a member of the kingdom of God involves a greater function than just obedience to the Law. It involves a total life that is lived in relationship to God. Jesus thus

challenges the status quo and calls many of the religious leaders hypocrites for living half-lives in which they have made works their identity rather than having their works flow from their identity.

In addition to this, Jesus fulfills his function in a way that no one was expecting. He looks nothing like the conception of Messiah that the religious leaders had in mind. He does not fulfill the functions that they imagined he would. There is no epic battle against Rome, no defeating of the opposing nations. Rather, there are meals with sinners, healings on the Sabbath, and a redefinition of tradition. However, Jesus is merely fulfilling the function that God has given his people all along. They are to live in relationship with him across the earth, and from their lives that are lived out of that relationship they are to influence others to give glory and allegiance to God. This is the function that God originally gave his people, and yet the religious leaders have reduced function to actions and to obedience to the Law. However, the Law was never meant to be the sole function of the people. It was to enable them to fulfill their function. By reducing their role to the Law, the religious leaders have lost out on their ultimate function. When Jesus comes and reminds them of what life is really supposed to look like, the tensions begin to rise.

The Jews sought to kill Jesus because he called God his father, thus making himself equal with God. It is evident that the Pharisees were disbelieving of the sphere of which Jesus claimed to be a part.

Jesus reminds his followers that they still live in a world of evil, and thus chaos is ever-pervasive. Because of this, his followers will face persecution and opposition. The forces of evil will work against them, be they demons or humanity. However, they need not fear, because God

is ultimately Lord over the chaos that evil attempts to use. One day, God will use that evil to destroy itself.

6. Cross and Resurrection

The baptism and the transfiguration provide glimpses of the way things ought to be. They are the way that Jesus will become king. They reveal parts of his function. He will be a king, but a suffering servant king. The people cannot possibly believe this. It does not fit their conception of Messiah, their sphere in which they believe he should be placed, or the way they imagined God would save humanity. The quintessential moment for this is Christ's death on the cross. However, in the resurrection God proves to them that his way is right. To overcome, one must be overcome. God used death against itself, just as he will use chaos against itself in Revelation. Evil agents are ultimately self-destructing, and they can only survive while there is some inhibition against them to rebel and work against. They are parasites,⁹⁷ feeding off of what is good and twisting and corrupting it. However, when God removes this inhibition and lets evil do its work, they have nothing to destroy but themselves. In a world that lacks all function, the agents of anti-function cannot survive. They are intrinsically and ontologically dependent upon that which they are against.

Both at the transfiguration and at the baptism, God names Jesus as his son. By doing this, he creates him to the disciples. He makes his function known. In the baptism of Jesus, God calls Jesus his beloved son. God thus shows the people who are watching and listening what sphere Jesus is in. by knowing this, his role and his importance are implied. God calls Jesus out. He too has a function. This is a self-imposed function, and even in his death we see God-in-humanity

⁹⁷ Plantinga, 89.

deliberately choosing to fulfill it. He limits himself to humanity, to death, and even to death on a cross.

Before his death, he also re-infused the Passover with function. While it still held the function God gave it in the Exodus event, it not adds a looking-forward component as well. Jesus gives new meaning to the elements of the Passover. He also promises his disciples that he will not drink of the vine until his return. In doing this, he has taken an event that looks back and given it present and future significance and function as well. It is not long after this last Passover meal that Jesus is crucified.

The death of Jesus is the fulfillment of his function. However, this is a function that he has chosen. As the God of the cosmos, he has chosen to limit himself even to death. As Jesus dies, the veil that encloses and isolates the Holy of Holies in the temple tears in two. Just as the sky split in the baptism and God spoke to the people, so now the cloth rips apart in the temple. God's presence is no longer inaccessible. He has returned to dwell with his people, and the ultimate fulfillment of this will be seen in Revelation. Thus, order and function are at least partially restored to the people of God. They were made in his image and designed to have community with him. To live without this is to live with an only partially fulfilled function and order at best. Now, however, God paves the way for function to be fulfilled. In John, Jesus' final word is "τετελεσται," meaning "It is finished." He has fulfilled the function for which he came, and God's promises have been kept. The kingdom has been ushered in, and the world will never be the same. The world changed irrevocably when Adam sinned, but the death of Jesus brings about an irreversible change that is of a far greater magnitude.

However, the people at the time did not see the crucifixion this way. Rather, they saw it as the ultimate dashing of their hopes. Jesus was to have been Messiah, the redeemer. His death should have been an impossibility. Yet God proves that his way was the right way when he raises Jesus from the dead. Death has been defeated by death, and by allowing himself to be overcome, Jesus has robbed death of all of its power. The Creator-God is once again shown to be the master over all evil and anti-function forces. Jesus fulfills his function. He inaugurates the kingdom of God and thus makes it possible for the people of God to fulfill their function. He makes relationship between God and man possible. In his resurrection is the promise that while evil reigns on the earth, it will not always be this way. There will come a day when evil will pass away and the world will once again be the way that it is supposed to be. Order will return to the cosmos, and shalom will be restored.

7. Commission, Spirit, and Church.

Jesus' parting words of Matthew are to install a function among his people. He gives them the command to make disciples. They are to spread the kingdom of God and from their lives people should bring God glory. This has always been the function of God's people. They are, as chosen image bearers of Christ, to spread the kingdom of God as they go across the world. They are to observe all that they have been commanded, because it is who they are. They have been re-created and called out, and thus they have been given a function and a new way of living. The purpose of the people of God is to live and function in the kingdom of God that has ushered in.

They are to carry out their mission just as Jesus has carried out his. Just as in Genesis God ordained humanity to reign on the earth and share in his function, so now Jesus tells those

who bear the mark of Christ on their hearts to share in his function. Jesus leaves his people as creative agents. He gives them the Holy Spirit to enable them to carry out their function. Also, by giving them the Spirit, Jesus makes a step toward the oughtness of the world. In a perfect and ordered creation, God dwells with his people. Here, even in this world of chaos, the kingdom of God has been ushered in and God dwells with his people through first Jesus and now the Holy Spirit. God's people are not alone.

The Church and Paul

God has not left his people alone. He has left them with a specific function and a specific role to fulfill. The book of Acts continues the story of the church and the fulfilling of its commission.

The book of Acts shows the people of God carrying out the commission and function they have been given. They live in community with one another, live their lives as an expression of worship to God, and spread the news of Christ and his kingdom across the world. They show a commitment to Christ and his teaching and allow this to change their identities and their lives. They are not the people that they used to be, and so they live differently. Humanity is finally fulfilling the function for which it was designed.

One can read of humans in Acts performing miracles. They are continuing the ministry that Jesus began, and as they do so they point back to their risen Savior.

One also sees how the Christians are able to live with the presence of God. The Holy Spirit is given to them, and they this are in communion with the one who created them. The goal of God with humanity has been at least partially fulfilled, and will see its complete fulfillment in Revelation. No longer is the temple a necessary structure, for God dwells with his people once

again, not in a building, but among them. In order to relate to God and fulfill one's function as a created human, one must accept Jesus as Messiah and as the one who fulfilled God's promise and plan.

However, the Christians are caught in a world that is in the grips of a world that is defined by evil. Humanity must deal with the consequences of sin – chaos. This chaos disrupts lives and destroys the God-given order. However, the God that they serve is master even over the chaos, and they need not fear for their eternal lives.

In the tension between persecution and the temptation to compromise their new life, the Christians have to figure out how to live out their identities. Helping with this is Paul's *raison d'être*.

Paul, too, has been re-created by Christ. Paul is called out of a life in which he was working against the mission of Christ. He was actively persecuting Christians. However, God called him out of that life. After his encounter with God, he was given a new name and a new life. With that recreation of identity came a function that Paul was meant to fulfill. Paul does this to the best of his ability, and God uses him greatly in the spreading and discipling of the early church. Paul is a creative agent in God's kingdom, telling others of the gospel and helping other Christians stay true to their function.

Paul frequently uses language that describes himself and the people of God as being called out. Throughout the story of Scripture, one can note God calling out people to himself. He re-creates them and gives them a new identity and gives them a function to fulfill. One can see that Paul continues to talk about this. The Christians have been called out of their old way of life. They are a new creation, and so should walk in the new way of life that God has set out for them.

The letter to the Romans describes God giving humanity up to the lusts of their hearts. God's judgment on unrighteous people was not so much that he inflicted suffering upon them, but rather they let them do exactly as they pleased and let them experience the consequences that come with evil doing its work. When the people acted as they pleased, they became full of unrighteousness and evil. They became infused with that to which they gave themselves. Despite God's warning that this leads to death, they chose to do it anyway. They are only alive by God's mercy. God is one day going to judge evil, and if people are characterized by evil then they too will experience that judgment.

Yet, for those who have accepted Christ, the outcome is incomparably better. They can have peace with God through their justification by faith. They can participate in shalom. They know that one day they will participate in creation as it was meant to be. Jesus Christ fulfilled the function that humanity could not, and instead of sinning and bringing death and subsequent chaos, lived a righteous life and brought eternal life.

God's people are thus faced with a choice. They can live like the people that they have been created to be. They have been called out of the power of sin and placed under the power of righteousness. They can flourish in this realm and fulfill their function as new creation, or they can attempt to live in the sphere that they have left behind. Over and over, Paul reminds them that living out of their sphere will bring only death. Remaining in Christ will bring life, just as Jesus told them that it would.

One can see from the relationship between sin and the law in Romans that sin takes every opportunity to corrupt and overthrow what God installs in creation. It takes the Law and produces sin in people. It takes elements of God's creation and spins them towards chaos.

God has sent the Spirit into the world, and so his people should live in community with him. Paul consistently reminds those who read his letters that they should walk by the Spirit. In doing so, they will be living out their function. They will thus fulfill the whole law, live in community with God, and live in community with one another. The people are designed to live with God, and God has sent the Spirit to live with them. Thus, they should live as they were created to and live with him and under his direction.

Paul describes Christians as being fellow heirs with Christ. One is reminded of Genesis 1, in which humanity was created to reign on the earth and have dominion over it. One can see this coming to fruition in the kingdom of God.

The creation is described as waiting “with eager longing” in Romans 8:19 for the day to come when the world is set to rights. Paul describes how creation was subjected to futility. One can note again that humanity’s sin does not just affect humanity. All of creation has been affected by sin and by the chaos that has resulted from sin. Satan has twisted the elements of creation and infused them with chaos. Yet, this state of the world will not last forever.

In Romans 9:22, Paul describes God enduring with much patience vessels of wrath. In doing so, he will eventually show his wrath and make known his power. God holds back his wrath for a time and has patience with the world, but one day he will stop holding back. This is described in Revelation.

Paul reminds the Romans that their function is to make themselves spiritual sacrifices, living lives that are holy and acceptable to God. They should not continue to live in the sphere from whence they came, but should be transformed to life in the new sphere and new identity.

Paul also describes Christians as called according to the purpose of God. In fulfilling our function, we fulfill the will of God.

In 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul deals with division in the church and how Christians should act, both individually and in relation to one another. He also describes his ministry. Paul is concerned with the way the Christians are living because the way that they live reflects who they are in Christ. If they are living in a way contrary to the way of life to which they were called, they are not being true to who they are. They are not living according to their function. As Paul justifies and carries out his mission, he knows that he is fulfilling the function to which God has called him.

Part of the function is to live in the body of Christ and work together. Christians have been given gifts with their new identity, and they should live out their identity and use their gifts for the glory of God. This, too, is the function of the people of God.

1 Corinthians 1:27 shows that sin takes what is good and corrupts it for its own purposes. In contrast, God takes what has been corrupted and redeems it for both his purposes and the benefit of what he is redeeming.

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul confronts the issue that one must keep the Law in order to truly live a Christian life. People are thus reducing the Christian life and function to externalities rather than a life that encompasses all of oneself. Paul exhorts the Christians to live by faith rather than by works alone. Living by faith requires a life from the heart, and it will shape one's character. One's character determines how one behaves. Thus, in living by faith, the Christians will actually uphold the law. Paul also makes a contrast between the chaos of slavery to the flesh and law and the order and freedom that comes with submission to the Spirit. God

wants to set his people free. This was evidenced in the Exodus and still remains true. However, his people can choose to submit themselves to slavery, and by doing so they lose part of their function.

Paul also exhorts them to walk by the Spirit. The works of the Spirit are works that lead to order and Shalom. They promote the mission of God. They exemplify the people of God living out their function. The works of the flesh, however, only lead to disorder and chaos. Again, one can see that the judgment that comes from living in unrighteousness is ultimately that one is under the power of a self-destructing evil. This will eventually lead to ruin and dissolution.

One can see evidence of the work of the Spirit in a life that is functioning as it should in the letter of Philippians. Paul is infused with joy as he talks to his fellow believers.

The identity of the Christians is so firmly founded on Christ that Paul must address the question of who Christ is. The answer is found in Colossians. Paul describes him as the one through whom all things were created. Again one can see the importance of the creative function of God. Christ is the one who holds all things together. Evil and chaos have infused society and the world has been threatening to fall apart. However, Christ is the center that holds everything together. He is the one who will eventually come to make all things new and rid the world of evil forever.

In the letters to the Thessalonians, Paul teaches that a holy life is required and expected of a Christian.⁹⁸ Again one can see that there should be no dichotomy between who a person is and what a person does. He also discusses the coming day of the Lord and the times at the end that are to come. He gives them hope that the Lord will one day return. He has promised that he

⁹⁸ David S. Dockery, *Holman Bible Handbook*, (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992), 729.

would, and he will fulfill his promise. However, as the day of the Lord draws near there will also be a man of lawlessness. Paul talks about God restraining lawlessness until the proper time arrives. However, at some point God will no longer restrain this force and chaos will result. Paul then goes on to discuss what it will be like during this time of chaos, and this can be seen to be proven true in the letter of Revelation.

Paul writes to Timothy and Titus in order to instruct them as his younger associates.⁹⁹ In doing so, he hopes to further inform them of how they should act and how the church should function. He teaches them about what their function should look like. Paul also emphasizes how important it is to live a godly life. The implications for what this godly life looks like in a situation concerning a master and a former slave can be seen in the letter of Philemon, in which Paul exhorts Philemon to welcome back the runaway slave in love.

Hebrews describes Jesus Christ as the perfect High Priest who is able to be the flawless sacrifice to cover all sin. It is Christ who is the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament. It is in him that the function that God imposed on himself is fulfilled. God not only fulfills his part of the covenant, but by Jesus being the Great High Priest he performs the function that humanity could not.

The writer of Hebrews also describes the rest for the people of God. They will flourish in his care as they were created to. The rest that they forfeited in Eden can finally be theirs again. Ultimately, rest will be restored to the people of God and they will be able to live out their function in communion with God once again.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 736.

James writes to Christians who are facing persecution. He tells them to consider it joy when they encounter trials, and to continue to live the Christian life. James shows that identity and actions cannot be separated when he says that faith without works is dead. Faith is evident from the actions of the Christians. Identity and works cannot be dichotomized. To do so is to lose both.

Peter writes to the Christians about living in world that is saturated with evil and is in chaos. The anti-function forces will work against the Christians, the creative agents of function, in the world. However, even in this suffering, God will produce good results. God will use the chaos to his advantage and grow the Christians in their character. Just as part of Christ's function was to suffer and die, so too part of their function will include suffering. They are to be like Christ, and thus that will include sharing in his function. However, this means that they will share in his reign as well.

John, too, writes about Christian living in his epistles. He discusses the fact that as Christians, the audience should be living lives of righteousness and love. They also need to hold to the proper and correct teaching about Christ. It is again evident that John is calling the people to whom he is writing to be true to who they are. As Christians, their lives should be distinctive as they fulfill their function. They should hold true to the accurate teaching about that function and about Christ. If they lose sight of the truth in which they believe, they will lose part of who they are. If they lose part of who they are, they will fail to live as they should. They will fall out of their function, and disorder will result. Jude too spoke against the false teaching that could so easily pervade and infect the church.

Revelation

Historical Context

The message of Revelation continues the meta-narrative of Scripture and provides a climactic conclusion to the overarching Story. The historical-cultural context of the letter remains important to understanding the message to the original audience. To understand the message of the letter, one must understand the background of the writer and his initial audience.

The author of Revelation identifies himself in the first verse of the letter as “John.” However, he gives no further specifications to his identity. There are three main suggestions given for his identity. The first is that John is the apostle John. This was proposed by Justin Martyr, and quickly became the accepted view.¹⁰⁰ It has also been suggested that a “Johannine school” produced this letter, John’s gospel, and the epistles of John.¹⁰¹ However, while the three written bodies are different stylistically, one must question whether they are actually different enough to support the theory of different authors. Eusebius proposed that John the Elder wrote the letter of Revelation, while the apostle wrote the Gospel. However, this theory cannot go far beyond speculation as there is not much evidence to support it.

While there are many differences in the fourth gospel and the letter of Revelation, these differences may be due to genre as opposed to authorship. There are multiple reasons for believing that the apostle John wrote the letter of Revelation. The fact that the early church

¹⁰⁰Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 2.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

fathers believed that he wrote it is helpful in the support of apostolic authorship. Johannine authorship is the best supported and seems to make the most sense, and thus most scholars hold the view that the apostle John wrote the letter of Revelation.

The dating of the letter of Revelation is also a difficult task, but there are two main suggestions of time periods in which the letter was written. The first is that it was written during the reign of the emperor Domitian. The early church fathers believed that the letter was written during this time¹⁰², which was around the end of the first century. Others believe that the letter was written some years earlier, when the empire was under the rule of Nero.¹⁰³ Both emperors persecuted believers, and persecution is certainly seen in the letter of Revelation. However, many have suggested that Nero's persecution took place mainly in Rome, while the persecution that Domitian commanded was more widespread and occurred throughout the empire. The latter would fit more closely with the letter of Revelation, as it addresses persecution in the churches all across the empire. In addition to this evidence, the letter seems to allude to the legend of Nero Redivivus. This belief, which entailed Nero returning from the dead to rule, could of course only have come into being after his actual death. This in turn leads people to believe that the letter was written after the death of Nero while Domitian was in power. Domitian also made claims to deity and his cult spread throughout all of Asia around the mid-90s.¹⁰⁴ This again would suggest that the letter was written in the later part of the first century.

A central issue in the later part of the first century was the worship of the emperor. When Alexander the Great conquered parts of the Middle East and Asia, he set himself up as divine and

¹⁰² Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*. The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 35.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 36.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 36.

he accepted the worship of his subjects.¹⁰⁵ When Rome gained control of the Mediterranean world, they allowed that part of the world to continue emperor worship. However, it was considered an act of incredible hubris to declare oneself divine while one was still alive. Many emperors were declared divine, but only after their death. Gaius Caligula, Nero, and Domitian were the only ones to demand worship while they were still living.¹⁰⁶ Each of the seven cities to whom the letter of Revelation is addressed was exposed to the imperial cult, with Ephesus and Smyrna being the primary cities that hosted the temples of the emperor.¹⁰⁷ There was much pressure within the cities to practice rituals at these temples or to worship at them.

The letter of Revelation also identifies the place where it was written. John states that he wrote it while he was on the Island of Patmos. He was on this island in exile.

The recipients of this letter are the seven churches in Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Thyatira, Sardis, Pergamum, and Laodicea. The letter was meant to be read out loud to a group of listening people.

The Christians to whom the letter of Revelation was written were in a difficult place. They faced persecution from multiple camps: the Roman Empire as well as the Jewish world. While Judaism was initially considered a sect of Judaism, Judaism began to distance itself more and more from Christianity. Thus, Christians were no longer privy to the privileges given to Jewish people that exempted them from worshiping the Roman gods. There was much social and economic pressure from the Roman world to compromise the Christian faith and live as everyone else lived. Trade guilds were a large part of life in the major cities, and membership in these trade guilds promoted one's business, and economic and social status. However, these trade

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 37.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 38.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 37.

guilds also included the worship of the gods and participation in festivals celebrating the patron deities of each guild. To choose to abstain from membership in a guild was to condemn oneself to an economically and socially isolated life.¹⁰⁸

Revelation provides a counter-reality to the Christians to whom it is written.¹⁰⁹ It reminds the Christians of what reality truly is. It reminds them that God is on the throne, that he wins, and that he is coming back soon. God is Lord, and Caesar is merely a man created by the Almighty God. The Christians might face persecution, but they can overcome by allowing themselves to be overcome. Life may be difficult, but the reward that they will receive for persevering and overcoming is more than worth the struggles that they face. It reminds them of who they have been created to be, and it gives them a reason to fulfill the function that they have been given despite the myriad difficulties that they might face.

Revelation is an apocalyptic prophetic letter. Revelation follows the general form of a letter. It states who wrote the letter and then wishes the recipients "grace and peace." It is addressed to the seven churches mentioned in Asia. This shows that the visions mentioned at the beginning of the letter address specific problems in these churches. However, the number seven symbolizes completeness in the book of Revelation, and thus it can be assumed that the letter of Revelation is meant for the whole church. The letter was likely not simply literary but oral.¹¹⁰ The letter was meant to be read out loud, and a blessing is promised for the one who reads the words of the letter. A blessing is also promised for the one who hears the words of the letter and keeps them.

¹⁰⁸ Osborne, 12.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

The prophetic nature of the letter is described by the letter itself in the first and last chapters of Revelation, where the author described the letter as a prophecy. The origin of this prophecy is God himself. This prophecy is to be obeyed. This means that while the letter does contain a foretelling of events that are to come, it also contains a proclamation of how the Christians should live. The words of the prophecy are to be obeyed. The letter offers the Christians a view into how they should live and persevere in times of persecution.

The prophetic letter of Revelation is also apocalyptic in nature. Apocalyptic is “both a formal type of literature and a mind-set of the group that follows the apocalyptic book.”¹¹¹ An angel or angels describes the visions and explains key elements of them. The rhetorical strategy of the Apocalypse is primarily epideictic in that is an attempt to challenge the readers and act as an impetus for them to act.¹¹² It seeks to change the worldview of the readers. Revelation uses imagery to create a vivid heavenly perspective for the readers and listeners of the letter.¹¹³ By entering this world, their way of thinking is recalibrated and they can refresh their perspective on the world. This perspective is heavenly rather than worldly, and it allows them to survive and overcome the persecution that they are facing.¹¹⁴ It challenges them to come out of apathy and to persevere in the faith in which they began. God is going to win the ultimate victory and the ones who faithfully follow him will be rewarded. The apocalyptic images remind the readers of Revelation that their beliefs are “not strange and odd, but truly normal from God’s perspective.”¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Ibid., 14.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ J. Scott Duvall, *The Story of Israel*. (Downers Grover: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 257.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 257.

¹¹⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*. *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 175.

In Revelation, God provides reassurance to the persecuted believers in the Roman Empire that he is still on the throne. God's kingdom is a present reality, and it is grounded in God's control of the future.¹¹⁶ Despite the trials and persecutions that the Christians have to endure, God is still sovereign. Despite the seeming uncertainty of the outcome, the Christians can know that their hope and future are secure. Despite the fact that Caesar has declared himself lord, it is God who created Caesar. God is the one who is the Lord, and it is he who wins. Jesus has overcome, and he has done this by being overcome by dying on the cross. This stands as an example to the believers. They should remain faithful even unto death, because God has promised them that the ones who overcome and remain faithful will be rewarded. God requires their loyalty, and they should give in to him unquestioningly because he is the one who is on the throne. He is the only one who is worthy. The main message of the ending of the story is that God wins.¹¹⁷ The ones who are being persecuted can be encouraged to remain faithful, and the ones being tempted to compromise their faith should be shocked back into repentance, obedience, and faithful living in accordance with their function.¹¹⁸

Revelation takes place in a series of four main sections¹¹⁹ bookended by an introduction and conclusion. The prologue introduces the writer of the letter, the recipients, and Jesus Christ as the coming Son of Man in glory. The first main segment takes place in chapters 1-3. The seven spirits of God walk among the seven churches. Warnings, encouragement, and promises are given to the seven churches. The second segment is one of God, his character, and the worship of him. This occurs in chapters 4-5. It is God who brings about the new creation, who makes all things new, and on whose character his promises are based. It begins with the

¹¹⁶ Osborne, 15.

¹¹⁷ Duvall, 257.

¹¹⁸ Duvall, 257.

¹¹⁹ Alan F. Johnson, *Hebrews – Revelation*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 588.

image of God on the throne, a vision which inspires worship and awe at the holiness and power of the Creator God. The third section occurs in 6-16. It is from here that one sees the seven sealed scrolls, the seven trumpets, the seven signs, and the seven bowls. The loss of function of the cosmos can be seen at this juncture. Also seen here is the rise of the evil antagonists of the letter. There is a conflict between the forces of God and the forces of evil, as in seen in conflicts with the dragon and conflicts with the beasts. The great conflicts culminate in chapter 16 and the last bowl judgment occurs. The third main section is the description of the final judgment. Babylon is destroyed and judged, and the final victory occurs as the evil empire is ended. The thousand year reign of Christ begins. It is at this juncture that the vision of the new heaven and the new earth occurs as the fourth main segment. The fourth section shows the recreation of the world and the restoration of function. The new heaven and the new earth are described, and the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven. The New Jerusalem is described as the restoration of all creation, and can be visualized as the final Eden. And epilogue then follows, and the letter closes.

God

Central to the letter of Revelation is the God's character. God is worthy of all worship and complete allegiance. God is on the throne and is sovereign over all of history. God wins, in the end.

Revelation 4 begins with God on his throne. The throne image is central in the letter of Revelation, and the throne of God is contrasted with the throne of Satan. It is a symbol of God's cosmic complete sovereignty. There are flashes of lightning, rolls and peals of thunder surrounding the throne. Creation worships at the glory of God, yet these elements are also connected with judgment at later junctures in the letter. These elements of creation are acting

here in worship and awe of their creator. There are four living creatures surrounding his throne with unceasing vigilance over God's creation. These four living creatures are in constant and ceaseless worship of God. They never stop giving him glory, and always proclaim that he is holy, and the All-mighty and All-powerful of the cosmos. The twenty-four elders fall before the throne, casting their crowns before God in a gesture of complete worship and allegiance, and declare that he is worthy to receive glory and honor and praise. The reason for this is that he created all things. He is the Creator of all, and by his will everything existed and was created. It is interesting to note that both terms are used. While this might simply be a figure of speech to emphasize the absolute creative power of God, it is still worthy on noting that there might be a distinction between existence and creation. God caused everything to exist. However, he then "created" it, giving it function and order. He is the creator of everything; he holds everything together (as in Colossians 1:17). He has given everything order and function and created the world the way that it was supposed to be. He is worthy of worship.

Revelation 5 shows that Jesus is worthy to open the scrolls and begin the judgments upon the world. Here the ushering in of the final events of the old creation are about to commence. Jesus is worthy because he has conquered and overcome. However, despite the fact that he is the Lion of Judah, he overcame death by allowing himself to be overcome. He has defeated death by its own means. He is like a Lamb that has been slain. Throughout the rest of the book, evil will also be defeated by its own means. God will bring judgment, yes, but sometimes judgment is simply God letting evil do its work. Evil will destroy itself.

Function connected to the character of God

Here, in Revelation 5, the function of the people of God is echoed. God created them, called them out of an undefined people and made them into a people of kingdom and priests. They have a function that they were designed to perform. They are designed to reign on the earth. This has become their identity. They are to live in relationship with God and bring him glory and they have dominion over the earth and inspire the worship of God among the peoples of the world.

Loss of function

The judgments of Revelation stand in contrast to both the creation account and the Exodus narrative. They are compared more frequently to the Exodus narrative. However, as illustrated previously, the Exodus plagues themselves can be understood to stand in contrast to the story of creation. For this reason, the judgments are compared to the days of creation. The broad picture of the judgments can also illustrate again that God uses chaos, an agent of evil, to master evil. Just as he used the chaotic flood of water in the time of Noah to rid the world of evil, so now he uses chaos to destroy evil in Revelation.

In the process of creation, God installed a function and an order in the world. Everything had its place and sphere, and was functioning within that sphere. However, after the entrance of sin into the world, the function and order of the world was twisted and corrupted. God has been holding the world back from complete corruption, preserving it until his appointed time comes. In Revelation, one can see that his time has now come. He stops holding chaos back and lets evil do its work. The result is chaos in the extreme. Disorder is everywhere. The world goes crazy and begins to fall apart. The judgment of God is sometimes simply letting evil work, and this is

seen very clearly in Revelation. Creation itself participates in its own release.¹²⁰ God allows humans to reap the rewards of what they have been sowing. Death, pain, destruction and chaos are the result. In this chaos, one can see stark contrasts to the days of creation. The functions of time, weather, and agriculture that God installed all fall apart. The functionaries that God put in places begin to malfunction. The world seems to explode in dissolution. The creation has come to its conclusion as God allows evil to reign.

However, in the end, after evil has wrought chaos upon itself, God comes and re-creates a world in which there is perfect order, function, and Shalom.

Seals

The first seal shows the chaos that has been unleashed in the world. Men slay one another. The second seal shows that community is broken and death takes some of the population/humanity. There is no peace or Shalom. This is not the way that the world is supposed to be, and the violence that began in Genesis is seen as the sin of Cain is repeated. Men murder one another and instead of multiplying begin to subtract from their number. The blessing is reversed and they not only do not fulfill their function but they work against it. In the third seal, food becomes expensive. The ground that is supposed to provide nourishment and agriculture has not yielded all that it should. Corruption has spread among the land. Again, the functions that were instilled in the beginning have been falling apart and are coming to their complete dissolution. This is also seen in the fourth seal. Death, the ultimate enemy let in by sin, the ultimate destruction of function, comes in many forms. These forms show the chaos that occurred as a result of sin. People die by famine, and the earth that was supposed to support them

¹²⁰ Osborne, 242.

no longer does so. The death by the sword shows the level of anarchy that has descended on the world. Pestilence shows that the healthy order that God instilled has fallen apart. The wild beasts of the earth that were supposed to be under the dominion of men have risen up against them and the hierarchy and functions have fallen apart.

The fifth seal shows the agony of those who have been slain. In a move that is a picture of the ultimate rest to come, God gives them rest and tells them to wait a little longer. In the midst of the creation imagery, one can see the place that the rest from the creation story has in all of this. The rest belongs to the people of God. One is reminded of God resting in his new temple on the seventh day as described in Genesis.

In the sixth seal, there is a great earthquake. The ground that was cursed because of Adam writhes in pain and chaos. The sun becomes black. The functionary that was installed to give light and help distinguish the time that gives order to creation becomes darkened. The property that gives it its function is blocked. The moon becomes like blood, and it too loses its function as the light in the nighttime. Stars fall to the earth instead of being the lights in the sky that they were designed to be. The sky vanishes. The sky was installed as a separation for the waters, but the distinctions in the world are becoming completely blurred. Every mountain and island shifts and moves. Nothing is where it is supposed to be, and nothing is functioning the way that it is supposed to. All elements of creation are losing their function and havoc is being wrought upon humanity.

Keener suggests that

“the specific images contributed to the overall picture of the dissolution of the cosmos as we know it, the reversal of creation. The impact on the reader is to be complete: There is

no security, no firm ground to stand on, nothing in the universe to depend on except God himself."¹²¹

Creation is reversed and God is the only thing that remains and holds everything together.

In Revelation 7, there is an image of four angels holding back the wind. One sees an image of the powers of God holding back destruction until the appointed time. Destruction is waiting, but God has his angels standing guard holding it back until forces of chaos until the servants of God are sealed. Chaos is at work in the world, straining against order, seeking to destroy. In God's mercy he has held it back for the sake of his people, and for the sake of humanity. But the time is coming when he will allow the angels to stop holding back the wind and destruction and chaos will be set free. 1 Enoch 36.2-3 notes that "some [people] believed that the winds supported the dome of heaven." Other ancients noted that if unchecked, the winds would blow away earth, sea, and heaven.¹²² Here, God is letting the winds blow unchecked, and chaos does its work. However, God's people are given the promise of not hungering, not thirsting, and not being struck by the sun. This promise reminds one of the sanctuary that was depicted in Eden. This concept of peace and idyll has been a theme from the very beginning of the story.

In the seventh seal, angels with seven trumpets are described. The seal brings thunder, rumblings, lightning, and an earthquake. The whole earth, all of creation, goes to extremes in its worship of God. It is as if the holiness of God causes the chaos in it to react violently and the sin that has cursed it to tremble, lights to spontaneously flash, and thunder to simply peal and roll. God's holiness excites intense reaction of the chaos. God's holiness is so other to the chaos-

¹²¹ Keener, 225.

¹²² Virgil, *Aenid*, 1.56-59.

infused situation of the earth that it is as if the fallenness of the earth must react in the presence of God. Just as the demons reacted with intensity when Jesus declared his divinity, creation reacts and trembles at the glory of God. Like putting potassium in water, the reaction is violent and swift. There is something in creation that recognizes its creator, but it cannot worship as it should because of the evil on earth. However, God will destroy the evil forever and restore creation to its original sphere.

Trumpets

The trumpet judgments also parallel the *yoms* of creation. Nature falls apart and hail and fire fall in the first trumpet. This hail and fire is mixed with blood, which is also reminiscent of the Egyptian plagues. A third of the earth is burned up, a third of the trees are burned up, and all the green grass is burned up. The remnants of nature and agriculture on the earth are destroyed. Eden and the ideal garden are gone, and chaos and destruction are all that remains.

In the second trumpet, a third of the sea becomes blood. This blood kills the sea creatures and destroys a third of the ships. The water is no longer used for life, and is decidedly chaotic. It actually becomes an agent of death as it changes to blood and destroys life.

In the third trumpet, a star falls from heaven. The body that is supposed to remain in the sky falls out of it. Distinctions are blurred and the earth is in chaos. The fresh water that had remained pure becomes bitter and useless in that it cannot perform its function. This chaotic water in the fallen world stands in contrast to the spring of eternal life which Jesus gives from freely.

In the fourth judgment, one sees the heavenly bodies lose their function and fall apart. A third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars are afflicted are struck and afflicted.

A third of the light is gone. A third of the day was kept from shining. Distinctions between day and night are blurred. Time cannot function in a world without an ordered rhythm.

In the fifth trumpet, a star once again falls, and smoke from the pit fills the air and the sky. The separation between the earth and sky is again blurred, and the functionaries that God installed to remain in the heavens fall to earth. Out of the smoke from the pit come locusts. One is reminded of the locusts in Exodus that caused havoc on the Egyptian crops. This time, they do not destroy the function of agriculture. Rather, they tear at the health of humanity. In a supreme moment of irony, even the people looking for death cannot find it. Death, the ultimate destroyer of function, cannot function without the permission of God.

In the sixth trumpet, the angels that are holding back the River Euphrates are released. Again there is the image that God has been holding back destruction. Now, he releases what he has been holding back and lets it take its course. The water is no longer distinct from the land, and the result is destruction and chaos. A third of mankind is killed. Fire and sulfur kill a third of mankind as well. This fire and sulfur is merely a preview of the destructive fire and sulfur that is to come in which God will throw Satan and his agents.

The chaos on the earth creates destruction, and yet the people do not repent. The rest of mankind does not repent of the works of their hands nor do they give up worshipping demons and idols, nor do they repent of what John describes as "their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." They continue in the sin in which they are living, and the chaos only continues. It is a positive feedback reaction. The more chaos happens, the more sin seems to happen, and this only throws the world into more chaos. This is the final dissolution, and still the people choose to live in sin and curse God.

The seventh trumpet begins with the declaration that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever. His reign shall be a reign of order in which everything fulfills its function and has its place. It is a place of peace, of shalom, as opposed to the chaos and destruction and death and is now on the world. Thanks and gratitude are ascribed to God because he has taken his great power and begun to reign. The nations rage at this event, but God's wrath comes anyway. John states that the time has finally come for the dead to be judged, servants to be rewarded, and the destroyers of the earth to be destroyed. Once again, there are flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. Not for the first time, one can see the earth's violent reaction at the glory, holiness, and wrath of the Creator-God.

Bowls

In the first bowl judgment, harmful and painful sores are inflicted on the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. This is reminiscent of the sixth Egyptian plague in which painful sores broke out on people.

In the second bowl judgment, the sea becomes like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing in it dies. Again, God shows his mastery over the water and the chaos. The Roman Empire would have depended on water for their trade.¹²³ The water that brings death again stands in contrast to the pure water that comes from the spring of life from which Christ gives freely. Mastered water can yield life and prosperity, but left to the chaos it loses this quality and becomes functionless and detrimental.

¹²³ Osborne, 580

In the third bowl judgment, the rivers and springs become blood as well. The sources of water on the earth have become riddled with chaos and disorder. There is an angel in charge of the waters just as there were angels holding back the winds at the four corners.

The bowls are interrupted with a judgment doxology. God is declared to be just and holy. He is the Almighty who have given the wicked on earth what they deserve. For so long, order has been disrupted and the wicked have prospered. They have caused suffering and tribulation for God's people. Now, they are finally receiving the just payment for their acts of evil. In this, even the chaotic judgments are a way of restoring order to the world.

In the fourth judgment, the sun scorched people with fire. The luminaries that were given specific places in the cosmos break out of these places. They fall into disorder, and this disorder is detrimental to the created beings on the earth. However, instead of calling out to the God of order who had given order to the universe, the people curse him. They did not repent and give glory to the God who had power over the plagues. They are completely corrupted and refuse to repent.

The fifth bowl judgment also deals with the luminaries that God placed in the sky. God instructed them to give light. God created a day and a night, and thus installed an order and a calendar for the world. The world was given a sense of time. In the fifth bowl, the world is plunged into darkness. Not only does the sun cease to perform, but the whole concept of day and night becomes skewed. It is dark when it should be light, and the God-given order continues to fall apart.

In the sixth bowl, the water of the Euphrates dries up completely. This water that used to mark the boundaries of the Garden of Eden is now completely dry. There are three unclean

spirits like frogs in the mouths of the prophets. These are slightly reminiscent of the plague of frogs in Egypt.

In the seventh bowl, there are flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake. These echo the sounds around the throne of God. This image shows that God is sovereign and in complete control of the cosmos. Now, they are connected to judgment. The earthquake is the greatest earthquake the earth has ever seen. The city is divided into three parts, and the mountains and islands are displaced. Nothing is in its rightful order or where it is supposed to be. Hailstones fall and the chaos that the earth is in can be seen. Still, however, the people cursed the God who was in control.

The loss of function is a judgment, but it is a judgment that humanity has brought on themselves. This is not the isolated wrath of God that comes out of a place of hate for his creation. Rather, humanity allowed sin to enter the ordered world, and these are the effects of it. God then put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. One of these effects is chaos, and the whole world feels the aftershocks. Through it all, however, God is using that chaos to ultimately defeat evil itself.

Restoration/recreation of function

After the chaos wrought by evil, the time comes for the world to be re-created. Evil has been allowed to do its work, and now it is time for God to do his. In stark contrast to the destructive work of evil, God's work is healing and restorative. God is going to re-create the world and restore it to the state of Shalom. Evil and disorder are going to be eradicated forever,

and humans will be able to flourish and fulfill their function in community with God and with one another.

As one examines this restoration in more detail, it is helpful to more closely look at some of the words and concepts implemented in the last chapters of Revelation.

Word and Concept Analysis

Καινη

Καινος is one of the two most common words for new since the classical Greek period. νεος signifies something that was not there before. Καινος, however, represents something that is new and distinctive. While νεος is new in time or origin, καινος is new in nature. Καινος represents something that is different from the usual and that is superior in value or attraction.¹²⁴

In the New Testament the word καινος means “not yet used” or “unusual,” but it especially means “new in kind.” This is what the word signifies in Revelation. To use the word “νεος” would imply something that was newly brought into existence and that was only temporary. However, “καινος” implies something that has changed in essence and that is permanent and intransient. Something can be made new without losing its former identity and can still be recognizable.¹²⁵

θαλασσα

The sea is one of the parts of the old creation that is singled out as no longer existing. The sea had various identifications. The first was that the sea was the origin of cosmic evil. The

¹²⁴ G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 448.

¹²⁵ Beale, 1040.

second was the unbelieving and rebellious nations that caused suffering and tribulation for the people of God. The third was as a place of the dead. The fourth was that the sea was the primary avenue through which adulterous trade occurred and was made possible. The fifth was that the sea was a literal body of water that was occasionally used to represent all of creation.¹²⁶ Added to this is the sea as a representation of chaos and chaotic forces. These forces were mastered by God in Genesis, and one can thus see a return to the Genesis creation as God once again masters the sea. All of these meanings probably come into play in this context. The sea can represent these things, for in the new creation there will be no more cosmic evil, no more suffering for God's people, no more death or dead, no more adulterous trade as all people live in worship to God, no more of the old creation, and no more chaos. All of this is explained elsewhere in the letter of Revelation. Thus, the absence of the sea signifies all of the above.

Ετοιμαζω

This term is used for divine creation and preservation. When used in terms of nature and history, the word is meant to reflect the "pulsating, living quality of the biblical concept of God."¹²⁷ It reflects God's eternal being and nature. The word is also used for the preparations and accomplishments of God in soteriological terms. When the word is used in connection with humans, it speaks of a readiness and preparedness in relation to God.¹²⁸ In Revelation, God is the one carrying out the action of preparation. His preparation reflects his holiness, his character, his living quality. This has been down to the new city, or to the saints. God has prepared humanity for himself.

¹²⁶ Beale, 1042.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, vol II, 704.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 704.

Σκηνη

This word takes on real theological significance first in the LXX. The word is used for tent of tabernacle, and it is used to describe the dwelling of God among his people. This is the place where his people can meet with him. There is a close link between the words “σκηνη” and “ναος” in Revelation.¹²⁹ While in the Old Testament the presence of God was bound by a physical temple, in Revelation all people can experience his tabernacling presence as he dwells with them.¹³⁰

Revelation 20

In Revelation 20, the believers are described as reigning with Christ for 1000 years. The people of God can finally fulfill their function. They can live out who they were created to be. God created man to have dominion over the earth in Genesis 1, and now his people can finally see the fulfillment of that. Not only will they reign, but they will reign with Christ as God’s children. They are described as priests of God and of Christ. Once again, God will establish his temple and give humans a function to perform in it. This time, unlike in Genesis, humanity will continually fulfill its function.

John states that the second death has no power over the first resurrection. A world is established where death and sin do not hold power over humanity. Death, which entered the world with sin, is finally abolished. Christ’s death caused it to lose its power, and now God eradicates it forever.

¹²⁹ Ibid., vol VII, 370.

¹³⁰ Beale, 1046

The beast which stood on the sand of the sea, the symbol of chaos, is finally destroyed, as are the nations that followed him. These nations are described as being numbered like the sands of the sea. They are left to their chaos, and when chaos has wrought its damage, they are consumed by fire from heaven.

The chapter goes on to describe a throne, before which earth and sky flee. God is going to make all things new, and it begins at the center of everything – the throne of God.

Revelation 21.1

This verse follows the idea introduced in 20.11 of the first heaven and earth passing away. After they pass away John sees a new heaven and a new earth. The word choice of the verse echoes Genesis 1.1 where it says that God created the heavens and earth. There is a clear parallel here, but in contrast to the old creation this is the new heaven and the new earth.¹³¹

Isaiah ended his prophecy by promising that God would one day create a new heaven and a new earth that would not pass away but would endure. The passage in Isaiah 65 has clear echoes of the creation account in Genesis 1. This promise is seen to come to fulfillment in Revelation 21.1. God has created the new heaven and the new earth.¹³²

The first creation has dissolved/passed away, and the second creation is here to replace and supersede it. This second creation is described as “new.” *Καίνο*ς refers to a change in “quality or essence” as opposed to something that has never before been brought into existence.¹³³ The use of this word in this way is frequently found in New Testament eschatological settings. There is a distinct difference in quality between the old creation and the

¹³¹ Osborne, 729.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Beale, 1040.

new creation.¹³⁴ The old creation was broken and temporary. The new creation stands in contrast to this. While the old creation was in chaos and full of sin, this new creation is ordered and perfect. It is permanent and eternal. This will be a whole different kind of creation than the one before. The essence of the creation has been changed and redeemed.¹³⁵ Existence will not be the same.

Beale suggests that this is a figurative new creation rather than a literal one. However, this does not exclude the literal destruction of the old creation, just as the future resurrection does not exclude the literal destruction of the old body. Beale suggests that this suggests a “radically changed cosmos” that is still identifiable with the old cosmos. It will be a renewal of the old cosmos.

Osborne suggests that the dichotomy between the first heaven and the first earth will no longer exist. This time, God will dwell with his people and heaven has come down to earth. Heaven and earth are “united into a larger reality.”¹³⁶

John then states that “the sea is no longer there.” The sea traditionally represents chaos and disorder. Beale suggests various identifications of the sea by drawing from elsewhere in the Apocalypse. First, it is the origin of cosmic evil, especially in light of the Old Testament background. This is seen not just in the tradition of the Hebrew people but in other cultures and religions as well. In Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures, the sea was viewed as a source of evil that must be mastered. Secondly, the sea is also identified with the unbelieving and rebellious people that refuse to give their loyalty to God. These people are the ones causing suffering for the people of God. Thirdly, it is identified with a place of the dead. Fourthly, the sea was the

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Osborne, 730.

¹³⁶ Osborne, 730.

primary location of the idolatrous trade activity of the world. Finally, the sea was a literal body of water which was sometimes mentioned in conjunction with the earth. It could be used as a synecdoche to represent the totality of the old creation. Beale's conclusion is that in this instance the sea encompasses all of these meanings and nuances. When the new creation is established the threat the Satan poses will not be there because he will be permanently excluded. Rebellious nations will no longer pose a threat because they will have been judged as well. The sea cannot be a place of the dead because there will be no more death. There will no longer be any idolatrous trade, as everyone will be worshipping God. There will be no chaos and disorder in the new creation, as it is characterized by peace. The sea no longer acts as separation between people and between heaven and earth, because people can be united and heaven will have come down to earth.¹³⁷

However, given the recent allusion to Isaiah 65 and the overall theme of the letter of Revelation, the meaning for the word "sea" that is likely foremost in John's mind is probably the one that focuses on the sea as a source of tribulation and suffering for the people of God. This tribulation will not exist in the new creation. This concept is later developed in verse 4, as will be seen when John describes death as no longer being present. This verse also echoes Isaiah 51, where the removal of the waters at the Red Sea is metaphorically equated with the removal of sorrow when the new creation comes.¹³⁸ This time, however, the waters are not simply momentarily parted. They are removed forever. There will be no more evil and suffering for the people of God.

¹³⁷ Beale, 1042.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1043.

Revelation 21.2

In verse 2, John describes seeing a new holy city Jerusalem. The phrase “holy city Jerusalem” is used in Isaiah 52 where God’s people are promised that they will one day no longer suffer from captivity but will be redeemed and restored to the presence of God. To the adjective “holy” John adds “new.” This again reinforces that the essence of this new city is different, and there is no chaos or sin in it at all. This is also alluded to in Isaiah 62, where Isaiah states that Jerusalem will be called by a new name. Isaiah then goes on to describe how this implies a new marriage relationship with God.¹³⁹ The city will be beautiful and the Lord will delight in her. This is echoed in verse 2 when John describes the city as a bride adorned and prepared for her husband. God has prepared the bride to the advantage of himself. The holy city has been prepared for God.

The city is described as “coming down from heaven from God.” The new heaven, the new earth, and the new city are all described in this way. This leaves the reader in no doubt that the new creation has come and it is orchestrated by God. The phrase “from heaven” would have been sufficient, but the phrase “from God” is added. This brings the reader’s attention back to the vision of the throne in chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation, where God is described as being on the throne in all of his glory. He is on the throne, and he wins. It is from heaven and from God as he sits on his throne that the new creation and the new city descend. The descent of the city frames multiple descents described throughout the letter. When things descend, it is often a sign of God’s sovereignty over the earth.¹⁴⁰ It is coming down from heaven from God himself.

¹³⁹ Beale, 1044

¹⁴⁰ Osborne, 732

The new city Jerusalem is described as a “bride adorned for her husband.” As previously mentioned, the mirrors the language used in Isaiah to describe the end-time restoration. The language of “the holy city, the new Jerusalem” comes from a prophecy in Isaiah 52 and 62 contain much marital imagery. Revelation describes Jerusalem as a bride adorned for her husband, and this can also be seen in Isaiah 61.10 where Zion is personified. She speaks in prophetic prophecies and says that she was adorned as a bride. The second verse in chapter 21 thus gives assurance that the cosmic promises of Isaiah will come to pass.¹⁴¹ The bride is a metaphor for the saints. This same imagery is used in Revelation 19 where the bride of the Lamb is described as wearing fine, pure, and bright linen. This linen is identified as the righteous acts of the saints.

The verb ετοιμαζω is used elsewhere in Revelation to describe events or situations that are brought about not by human action but by God.¹⁴² In this instance, too, the new city has been prepared by God. His people have been vindicated, justified, and redeemed. The bride has been prepared “for her husband.” The bride has been prepared for God for himself and for his own advantage. God has been preparing his people to be his bride throughout the course of history.¹⁴³ The preparations are finally complete, and the fulfillment of the relationship can begin as a marriage.

The city stands in contrast to the contrast to the city of Babylon that was previously mentioned in verse 18. While Babylon was described as a whore and a prostitute, the new holy city is described as a pure bride who is ready for a faithful marriage relationship.

¹⁴¹G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker) 1150.

¹⁴² Beale, 1045.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Revelation 21.3

Verse 3 begins with the phrase “and I heard a great voice saying.” This phrase is used multiple times throughout the letter of Revelation. What follows is generally a word from God or from an angel of God. The phrase “from the throne” is added, again emphasizing that the vision John has is from the throne where God sits. It once again reminds the reader of the throne room vision and the encouragement and awe inspired from this vision. The voice declares that the dwelling of God is with men. The word used for “dwelling” is “σκηνη.” The first part of the verse is essentially a translation of the “Shekinah,” which meant communion for God and his people.¹⁴⁴ The presence of God on earth began with God dwelling with humanity in the garden as his temple. When sin came into the world, God did not dwell with humanity as intimately. However, he instructed his people to build him a tabernacle (σκηνη) where he would be with them. He dwelt in the tabernacle and then later in the temple until the glory of God eventually left the temple. Jesus then came as the Word incarnate, and now the Holy Spirit resides within the church. Here, the reader sees what the presence of God will be like in the eschaton. God will once again dwell with his people as he did in Genesis. The word used to describe this dwelling is that same one that is used to describe the tabernacle. This is the presence of God that has been sought after throughout the Jewish history, and yet this time it has been restored to its original state. God once again dwells with man. Previously, the temple had been a physical building to separate the Israelites from the other nations. This is no longer necessary, as God dwells with the directly and the nations no longer need to be separated. His dwelling is not in a temple or a tabernacle building, but rather with the world as his temple. This again links to Genesis, where God created a temple for himself and then dwelt there. In this verse, one can see that God again is dwelling with man and the new creation is his temple. This time, there will be no sin to disrupt

¹⁴⁴ Osborne, 734.

the temple of God. This time, he will dwell with his people forever. The temple that God constructed for himself in Genesis will once again be on the earth.

The verse reiterates this concept by stating that God will dwell with them. The cognate of the noun σκηνή is used here as the verb. The verse then continues by saying that they will be his people. This reflects back to the covenant in Exodus where God promises the people of Israel that they will be his people if they keep the commandments. While Israel originally failed this command, God is promising his people that this time they will be his people forever. In Revelation, the people described are not longer Jewish but they are a multiethnic people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. All of these people will experience God's tabernacling presence. John then hears the voice repeat the second half of the promise that God will be with them as their God.

Revelation 21.4

This verse is a continuation of the preceding verse, further expanding what it means for God to dwell with men and for them to be his people. The first phrase shows that God will “wipe every tear from their eye.” This promise again can be seen as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 25.8 which promises that God will remove every tear from the eyes of his people. The verse goes on to describe that this will be a comfort from death. In Revelation 21.4, death is completely done away with. This verse is also seen to follow Revelation 7.17, where it says that God will wipe every tear from the eye of his people. Isaiah 25.8 goes on to mention that this will be a comfort from death. This flows directly into the second half of Revelation 21.4 that describes death as being no more.

Isaiah 35.10 and 51.11 predict that pain, grief, and groaning will pass away. Only one verse earlier in Isaiah, a reflection was made on the first exodus where God caused the sea to dry up. Here, there will no longer be any sea. This is closely mirrored in this verse in Revelation. God not only wipes every tear from the eye of his people, but he removes all sources of sorrow. The second half of the verse shows that death will be no more and crying, mourning, and pain will be abolished. The phrase “there will no longer be” is reflective of Isaiah 65. All the causes of sorrow have been removed, and there can be eternal joy and bliss. There is absolute peace and security. These various forms of sorrow that have been removed can be seen as an expansion of the sea in verse 1 that is no more. This again alludes to a passage in Isaiah. Isaiah 51 shows the prophet reflecting on the first exodus. God removed the water that hindered the deliverance of God’s people from Israel, and in Revelation one can see God removing the figurative water that hinders the eternal shalom of his people. His people can now be fully redeemed and have complete communion with himself.¹⁴⁵

The conclusion of 21.4 gives the reason for all of this. The conclusion of Revelation 21.4 is that the first or former things have passed away. This continues the Isaiah 35 and 51 allusions, while also alluding to Isaiah 65.17. The first things have no place in the new creation.¹⁴⁶ This continues the Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 51 allusions, while simultaneously calling to mind Isaiah 65.17, which also parallel this expression. Verse 1 and verse 4 of Revelation 4 are in parallel to one another. Both contain expressions of cosmic dissolution, and both give insight into the way that things will be when God comes to restore all things. This dissolution is the cause of the

¹⁴⁵ Osborne, 735.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

conditions of the new world.¹⁴⁷ However, now the old creation has completely passed away, and this allows for the advent of the new creation in which there will be no sin, death, or pain.

Revelation 21.5

This verse continues the theme of the ushering in of the new creation. The verse begins with a voice from the one sitting on the throne. In the light of the awesome scene in Revelation 4, the one sitting on the throne is clearly God. This is the God who created all things, and who is once again creating. This is the God who is the All Mighty, the ruler of all, the one who is worthy of all worship. This is the holy God who is speaking. The Creator God is once again creating, as he did in Genesis, and this time he is making all things new.

This verse draws specifically from Isaiah 43.19, where God declares “I am making things new.”¹⁴⁸ Paul had described this promise in 2 Corinthians 5.17 as beginning to be fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ. The new kingdom was ushered in, and it is now coming to fulfillment in the new creation. God is making all things new. What was once begun in part is now coming to completion.¹⁴⁹

John is once again instructed to write, just as he was when he was given the message to the seven churches. This instruction to write is the last of seven commands to do so throughout the letter of Revelation.¹⁵⁰ The words he is told to write are described as “faithful and true.” This is likely a hendiadys, in which two words are used to describe one concept: the words of God are trustworthy.¹⁵¹ These words echo Isaiah 65.16, when Isaiah refers to God as the Amen, or the truthful one. In Isaiah 65, the blessing that God will bring about is the new creation that God will

¹⁴⁷ Beale, 1050.

¹⁴⁸ Beale and Carson, 1151.

¹⁴⁹ Beale, 1052.

¹⁵⁰ David E. Aune, *Revelation*. Word Biblical Commentary. (Dallas: Word, 1997).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

one day bring about. The trustworthiness of God in this context is based on the certainty of the coming of his new creation.¹⁵²

Revelation 21.6

John then hears the word “γεγοναυ.” This means “it has happened” or “they are done.” This indicates that the climax of the judgments has come to a close. The chaotic judgments and their effects have run their course, and chaos has wreaked its havoc. Now, sin has finally been dealt with. It is over. Something new can begin. It reminds one of Jesus’ words “It is finished!” as he died upon the cross. There, the new age was ushered in. Here, the new age is brought to fulfillment.

God then describes himself. He begins with the formula “I AM.” This causes the readers to reflect on the name of God that he revealed when he was speaking to Moses as is found in Exodus. The God who is speaking is the God of the covenant. He has brought the story to the end that is truly a beginning, and the covenant can be fulfilled as it was meant to be. he then describes himself with titles that clearly indicate his sovereignty over history, time, and all of creation. He rules over the beginning of history, the end of history, and all of the events in between.¹⁵³ He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. These titles are likely a merism, in which two opposite poles of something are used to emphasize the totality of everything that falls in between.¹⁵⁴ The title “first and the last” is also an echo of Isaiah 44.6 and

¹⁵² Beale, 1052.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 1054.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

48.12, where the title was meant to convey that Yahweh was in control at the beginning of the nation and would remain in control until the end.¹⁵⁵

This is only the second time in the book of Revelation that God has been directly quoted.¹⁵⁶ The first was in 1.8, where God again declared himself to be the first and the last. These two quotations form bookends to the letter and remind the readers of the character, eternity, and sovereignty of God. God is the one who is guiding history. He began the great story, and so he will surely bring it to a fitting conclusion.

God then gives a promise that he will give the water of life freely to the one who is thirsty. Isaiah 49.10 describes water being given as a reward. This sustenance is a metaphorical representation of eternal life. Revelation 21.6 thus clearly parallels Isaiah 49.10. The living waters have their origin in Christ. A life of fellowship and right relationship with God is implied. This will be life as it is meant to be lived. This life is reserved for the one who is “thirsting.” These are the ones who have faith in Christ and have persevered through the trials and tribulations described in the letter. God, being full of grace, will give these people the waters of life freely or without cost. Isaiah 49.10 makes a statement about the mercy of God, and how he has mercy on his people to whom he guides by the fountains of water. This is seen echoed in Revelation 21.6 in that God gives the water freely.

Revelation 21.7

Verse 7 begins to more specifically identify who the people of God are. God’s people are the ones who persevere and overcome. Overcoming looks differently than the rest of the world might imagine. To overcome, one must sometimes be overcome. One can overcome by the

¹⁵⁵ Osborne, 738.

¹⁵⁶ Beale, 1054.

blood of the Lamb, the word of one's testimony, and not loving one's life unto death. The overcomers' lives are characterized by a faith that does not compromise, despite the threat of persecution and death.¹⁵⁷ This verse is a challenge to the readers and listeners of the letter.¹⁵⁸ They should remain strong and stay faithful, because the one who overcomes will be able to inherit "these things."

"These things" sum up the inheritance that is mentioned in all the letters.¹⁵⁹ The inheritance will be part of the new heaven and the new earth. However, what is even more incredible is that fact that the one who overcomes will be the son of God. God will be his God. He will be in a familial relationship with God forever. This is the paramount blessing. This is the ultimate reason for continuing to persevere in the hopes of overcoming. God himself will be with the one who does. A parallel is found in the reference to "inheriting" the promised blessings in the Davidic prophecy of 2 Samuel 7.14. Isaiah 55.1-3 continues this idea and God promises those who thirst that he will make an "everlasting covenant, the sure mercies of David" with Israel.¹⁶⁰

Now, the promise of the Old Testament is applied through the lens of Christ. Christ corporately represents his people. What he inherits, they will inherit. Christ is still unique in his divinity, but the people who he represents are able to participate in the blessings of his status as a son.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1057.

¹⁵⁸ Osborne, 739.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Beale and Carson, 1151.

¹⁶¹ Beale, 1058.

Revelation 21.8

In contrast to the one who inherits that is seen in verse 7 are the groups of people in verse 8. The ones who are not part of God's people will be excluded from the blessing of his eternal and relational presence. This eternal separation is in and of itself a judgment.¹⁶²

John begins the list with the cowards. The rest of the list probably describes people outside of the church, and yet "cowards" would seem to imply people within the church who failed to keep the faith and persevere.¹⁶³ This is thus a continuation of the challenge extended in the previous verse. This time, it takes on the force of a warning.

The list of sins or vices is a summary of all of the sins that John has been warning the church about. Faithlessness describes the basic sin that would lead the people of the earth to reject God and is also the sin of the false teachers mentioned in the letter to Pergamum.¹⁶⁴ The abominable, or heinous, acts are seen as the works of the prostitute mentioned in 17.4-5. Murder clearly refers to the earth dwellers that have killed the saints of God. "Pornications" was both part of the Nicolaitan cult and is seen to be practiced by the earth dwellers. It was also often linked to idolatry in the forms of ritual worship. Magic was a common part of the first century world. Idolatry is a central theme in the book, and is seen in all facets of society. It is also central to the false religion of which the beast was a proponent. It also links back to the Imperial Cult and the worship of Rome or the emperor. Liars stand in antithesis to God, whose words are

¹⁶² Ibid., 1059.

¹⁶³ Osborne, 741.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

faithful and true.¹⁶⁵ This group ends the list because it again causes believers to reflect if their actions and lifestyle match the faith that they purport to have.¹⁶⁶

The fact that there will be none of these people in the new creation reiterates that the new creation functions on a higher moral standard than the one that currently exists. However, it will be one a higher moral order even than creation before the Fall, where the liar was still able to enter the garden and tempt the first humans. This time, there will be no liars at all.

The people of God have participated with Christ in his resurrection. They are immune to the second death. However, the wicked people receive their part (or inheritance) in the burning lake of fire and sulfur. The contrast has already been drawn between the first creation and the second. While the first was temporary, the second lasts eternally. Thus, the second death is one that does not end but continues into the ages. However, this death happens outside of the new creation. Death has no place in the new heaven and the new earth.¹⁶⁷

In Revelation 21, one can see that all the chaos of the world is outside the New Jerusalem. All is order inside. The New Jerusalem itself is described as a cube with precise numbers and precise measurements. The cube imagery implies a perfection and exactness that was disrupted in the old creation because of sin.

There is no temple in this city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. The people of God can finally dwell with God again. There is no tabernacle or temple. There need be no manmade building to ensure that God can dwell with his people. The promise of the Holy Spirit has come to fruition and God once again makes his dwelling with his people.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Beale, 1060.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

In the original creation, God created time and functionalities to give light. In the new creation, there is no need of sun or moon. The glory of God gives it light. The lamp is the Lamb. God can dwell with his people so fully that there is not even a need for a sun. There will be no night and no darkness. The nations walk by God's light, and the kings of earth bring their glory into it. Instead of humans attempting to bring glory to themselves, they give glory to God. All creation is functioning as it should, living with God and giving glory to him.

There is nothing unclean or detestable or false in the new city, but only those written in the Lamb's book of life. The new city is a place of life and flourishing, and unclean forces that are anti-function have no place in the new creation.

Revelation 22

There is a river of water of life flowing from the throne. The water of this river stands in contrast to the chaotic seas that brought death in the old creation. There is also a tree of life. In Genesis 1, there was also a tree of life. one can see a return to the beginning and a return to Shalom. This tree yields its fruit each month. It is dependable and always available. Nothing will happen this time to separate humanity from life forever. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Just as Jesus healed while he was on earth, now all the nations can go to the tree and receive restorative healing.

In the New Creation, there will no longer be anything accursed. In contrast to the cursed existence of the old creation, in the center of this creation are the throne and the holy Lamb. His servants will worship him as their function suggests they should. God's creation will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads. They bear the image of God and now his name is on their foreheads. One also recalls the signs of the Levite priests that read "holy to the LORD" on

their heads. Humanity was made to bear the image of God, and this is seen to be fulfilled in the New Creation. They will reign forever and ever, bearing the image and name of God.

In the closing words of the letter, God commands John not to seal up the words of the prophecy of the book. He declares that the time is near for the fulfillment of the prophecy. He tells John to let the evildoer still do evil, the filthy still be filthy, the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy. One can again see that God lets the consequences of humanity work out in their lives. While he has designed a function for humanity, if they attempt to live outside of that he lets them. He also lets them experience the consequences of that action and the chaos that results from it.

God ends the book with the words "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me." God again imposes a function on himself and promises to return soon. He declares that those who wash their robes and live in righteousness, as their function would suggest, are blessed. These are the people of who have the right to the tree of life. They may enter the city by the gates and live in it forever, while the chaotic things and all those who practice falsehood are left outside. God's people who live out their function now will be free to live out their function forever in his presence. However, those who abandon their function now will be separated from it forever. This entails being separated from the presence of God.

Conclusion

Any first year Chemistry student could tell you that we live in a world in which the principle of entropy stands true – we live in a world that has a tendency toward disorder. And yet this was not always the case.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He brought order out of chaos, and installed functions in the cosmos. Inherent in the idea of a cosmos is an ordered arrangement. God did this, and he called it good. Everything had a sphere in which to function and flourish. Everything was in right relationship with all things, and communion with God was possible. The world was as it should be. This was Shalom.

In Shalom, humanity was made to bear the image of God. They were to multiply and spread throughout the earth, and they were to give glory to God with everything that they did. They were to rule as priests in his temple. They were to share in his creative function. For some time, this happened. They were creative agents on the earth as they named the animals. They had communion with God. Then, however, everything changed.

Humanity chose to sin, and with this sin came the disruption of all that God had created. Sin created cracks in the ordered world, and through these cracks came chaos. Sin twisted chaos and used it to infuse the earth and attempt to turn things upside down. Humanity was cursed, and fulfilling function no longer came naturally. It became difficult to live as they should. One choice affected every facet of their lives. Their ability to commune with God was shattered, and the functions that they had been given were no longer a simple out-flowing of who they were. This would require work. Most importantly, they were separated from God. They could no

longer be wholly who they should be, because they were created in connection with God. That connection was broken.

All of creation was affected by the sin of humanity. With the sin that came into the world, the spheres and order that God had placed in the creation were knocked off center. Creation longed to get back to the way that it should be, but sin took advantage of its advantageous position and continued to move things off center. Things tended toward disorder. Without God replacing the order that had been lost, there was a tendency toward chaos. Ever since that moment, sin has been causing creation to spin out of control while creation eagerly awaits its redemption.

God then begins the task of bringing order back to the world. He directly intervenes in the lives of people, but despite the temporary return to order the effects seem only transient. Sin remains, and as long as sin and evil are in the world order can never fully be restored. Sin and order are mutually exclusive. In an ordered world, things function as they ought. Sin, however, is anti-function. Thus, throughout the whole story of Scripture, God's people keep falling into sin and the subsequent chaos.

Through it all, however, God is the clear master over evil and the chaos that can come with it. Even when it seems as though things are completely out of control, God still shows his sovereignty. He is sovereign to the extent that he can use the forces of chaos against themselves. He can use evil to master evil. He takes advantage of the fatal flaw of evil – its destructive nature. It destroys without limit, and it will destroy even itself. It will eat itself if there is nothing good for it to feed on.

God remains faithful throughout the story, even when his people are faithless and fail to fulfill their function. God continually limits himself and imposes a function on himself, and he is consistently faithful to fulfill that function. In his mercy, he does not let evil have complete reign over the earth. He does not allow utter chaos. Rather, into the midst of that chaotic and evil-saturated world he sends his son, Jesus.

Jesus is the one who holds everything together. In a world spinning towards entropy and destruction, Jesus is the plumb line that is going to redeem the people of God and creation. Jesus is the linchpin in God's plan to bring order back and to recreate a broken world.

God limits himself to humanity, and then to death, and that death is on a cross. Once again God uses the anti-function forces against themselves. Jesus dies, and by dying he will conquer death. With his death and subsequent resurrection, Jesus makes a return to Shalom for the people of God possible. This is the one who was promised. This is the one for whom they have been waiting. And he is faithful to the end to fulfill his function.

When Jesus is raised from the dead, the whole world changes. Nothing can be the same. The ultimate anti-function force, death, has lost its power. The future kingdom of God has broken into the world, and the people of God wait eagerly for the day when their hopes for restoration and re-fulfillment of function will finally be realized. As they wait for God to fulfill his function, they attempt to fulfill theirs.

They have been called out of chaos and are a new creation, and so they attempt to live out who they are. Their identities and their actions are so closely linked that they cannot be dichotomized.

This, then, is where we find ourselves in the Story. We are caught in a world that has been thrown off-center by sin and is spinning into chaos. The forces against us are dead-set on having us fail to fulfill our function. For our function can cause change. However, God continually lays out who we are and what we are here for. We thus know how to understand ourselves and how to behave. The imperative (commands on how to live) is built into the indicative (statements about who we are). We must be who we are and who we have been created to be. This is our function. There should be no dichotomy between who we are and what we do. To separate the two is to lose part of ourselves.

Our function is to live in communion with God and with one another. We are part of the kingdom of God, and our function is to spread that kingdom. This kingdom of restoration and the good news of redemption are completely opposed to the forces of evil at work in the world. Thus, we face persecution. We face the temptation to compromise. Yet, we must hold on with expectation, for the end of the story has not yet come.

One day, God is going to stop holding back the chaos with which sin threatens to destroy the world. One day, he will allow humanity to reap the full ramifications of the consequences of their choices and actions outside of their sphere and in opposition to God. Creation will explode, and all function and order will be turned upside down. Chaos will seem to be all-pervasive and evil will seem to have won. However, even in the midst of that, God is still sovereign. God is still on the throne. And he remains faithful to fulfill his function and his promises. He has not abandoned his people.

One day, God is coming to make all things new. He is going to restore creation. In the remains of the old world that has been ruined by sin and chaos, God steps in. Creation has

participated in its own release and it is into the aftermath of letting evil do its work that God begins to create once again. Out of that chaos he re-creates. There will be a new creation, a New Heaven and New Earth. Shalom will finally be realized. God will once again dwell with his people. All will function as it should and order will be completely restored. There will be flourishing and fulfillment for all aspects of the creation, and everything will live in the presence of God.

This, then, is the end, or rather the re-beginning, of the Story. This is the ending for which we are waiting. Let us remember who we are and who we have been created to be. Let us live out our function and live in accordance with the will of God. There is freedom in this, as we walk by the Spirit. We hold on with expectation, because the day is coming when God will return. Order and function will be restored. In the New Creation, we will live in Shalom with our faithful and loving God forever.

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