

God's Plan of Restoration for His Disordered Creation

Theological Report: Paper

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Introduction

It is no secret that the world we live in is a world of pain, turmoil, death, decay, and disorder. There is a sort of “wrongness” to the world that we can easily observe. We humans experience this feeling everyday. Something is off. Something is not right. Does it not feel like the world is just consumed in *chaos*? Yet this is not always how it was. At some point in time, the beginning of time, there was a God who created everything and called it “good.” An all-powerful, loving Creator took nothing and fabricated something. He established *order*. He grew a beautiful garden right on the edge of chaos, and He invited us humans to be a part of it. As the story goes, something happened to His ordered and good creation. Humanity fell, and invited chaos, death, and destruction into the world. Thankfully though, that is not the end of the story.

The books of the Bible tell the story of God’s ultimate plan of restoration for all of His creation. Humanity, being a part of that creation and made in His image, experiences a taste of this restoration through the common word of “redemption,” describing Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for us at the cross. However, God’s ultimate plan of restoration is so much bigger than just that. This paper will walk through the whole Biblical narrative and explore some of these ideas: that God, an all-powerful Creator who masters over chaos, installed order in His creation, and though it fell into chaos and death, He implemented a plan of restoration seen throughout the entire Biblical story, initiated and completed by Him, but still involving us humans in the process! The order that was stripped away into chaos will soon be re-ordered again, and one day we will stand with God upon the earth, His newly restored creation.

In the Beginning: Setting the Stage

The true ramifications and interpretations of any Biblical passage can often be traced all the way back to the very beginning, in Genesis 1-3. These three chapters contain the context for the entire Biblical worldview! Therefore, as we look at the theme of restoration throughout the Bible, we must spend significant time here first.

Genesis 1-2

From the very first words of the Bible, we are introduced to who God is. Genesis 1:1 says, *“¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* Right away, God declares through His Word that the primal reality behind everything is Himself. And who is God or what does God do? God *created*. This all-powerful being who existed before anything else is a Creator. This verse is foundational, not only is it simply our introduction into the entire Biblical story, but it is also our introduction into discovering who God is within the pages of the Bible. From here, we are drawn into the story more so by the context that which first surrounds God.

Genesis 1:2 continues, *“²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”* This sentence is at first confusing when looking at the following verses. How could “waters” exist before God spoke and created anything? In all honesty, this scripture (and a few other verses around this section) brings up a lot of controversy and confusion, but only when the attempt is made to apply the Genesis creation account to modern day science or our understanding of the origin of the universe. That is like fitting a square peg in a round hole, it could be done with force and there might be some valid points in the application, but that was not its original intent. The intent of Genesis 1-3 (as well as the whole book of Genesis and, debatably, the entire Bible) is an introduction and a description of who God is, not an explanation of the start of the universe.

Here we need to take a quick dive into something that was culturally well known at the time Genesis was written. In many myths and legends, the ocean (or large bodies of water in general) were often attributed to themes of chaos or the unknown, a wild and untamed place steeped in darkness. In fact, some early Mesopotamian creation myths start with gods rising from the chaotic depths of waters. So basically, “chaotic waters” was often a thematic imagery of a state of confusion, a wasteland, and a disordered and feared place. We can understand what this meant and felt like as we simply think about our own understanding of the oceans. Still today, over 80% of our oceans have yet to be explored (or even seen!) by humans. We know more about outer space than we do about our own oceans. That’s terrifying! Genesis begins by telling us that this is the state of the universe: *“the earth was formless and void”* In other

words, the earth was a place of absolute chaos, a wasteland of confusion and disorder, a wild and untamed wilderness.

However, this is also where the Genesis account differs from the other myths and legends of the time. Genesis already declared that God is a Creator, so why also include the line that God was “*hovering over the waters?*” What does this tell us about God the Creator? Unlike the other gods of the time, this God of Genesis 1 did not rise from the chaotic waters or fight them back. He simply “*hovered over*” them. *In the very beginning, God the Creator is shown to be Master of the universe, presiding over (and being unaffected by) chaos and disorder itself.* This revelation is substantial, and these are only the first two sentences of the Bible!

What follows in Genesis 1:3-2:3 is an account of God’s actual creation of the cosmos. Described in seven days, God brings order and life to the cosmos simply by speaking. In doing so, He put boundaries on chaos (showing once again His mastery over it): He split the waters of the sky and the sea, He contained the waters of the sea with dry land, He partitioned the day and night by giving light and darkness each their time, and He created creatures of all kinds to fill each part of His creation, even the waters themselves! And God called all of it “*good.*” Lastly, God created human beings, made in His image, with the purpose to “*fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground*” (Genesis 1:28). God created human beings, separate from the rest of His creation, so that we might co-reign with Him over His creation. God then placed these new humans, Adam and Eve, in a special garden He made for them, a starting place for them to spread His life and order throughout the earth. Their only charge was to remain under the authority of the all-powerful Creator who made them, and not define their own authority for themselves. However, as the familiar story goes, humanity did not last very long in the garden.

Genesis 3

The purpose of this paper is to look at God and who He is within His plan of restoration, but it's important to take a moment and note how humanity is the reason this restoration plan is necessary in the first place. By the cunning craftiness of an outside voice, Adam and Eve were deceived and chose to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, violating God’s

command. God created the heavens and the earth, He partitioned chaos and death by bringing in order and life. In their sin, humanity rejected this reality, and so exposed themselves and all of creation to chaos. They invited disorder to invade and, in a way, allowed “chaotic waters” to flood over creation and make it into a wild wilderness of confusion and death again. The curses that God gives the serpent, Eve, and Adam are profound, but in Genesis 3:17, God speaks to Adam and says specifically, “*Cursed is the ground because of you,*” revealing that creation itself does indeed bear the weight of humanity’s fall.

Even through humanity’s misstep, God was not deferred. God was not changed by Adam’s failure, and He has not changed since. As soon as Adam and Eve left the garden, He initiated His plan of restoring order back to His creation, revealing different aspects of Himself to each and every generation. From the beginning of Genesis and throughout the Bible, God continually reveals that He is Master over chaos.

God: Master Over Chaos

Continuing on from Genesis’ introduction of God, we see how God reveals himself as Master over chaos. Though this is revealed in many specific ways throughout scripture, there are a curious amount of instances that tie back to the “chaotic waters” imagery discussed previously. We will quickly look through two major instances in the Biblical storyline, both within Genesis and Exodus.

The Flood

God created the world and called it “good,” then humanity invited chaos and death into His creation, causing a downward spiral of the spreading of wickedness that eventually leads to the Flood story in Genesis 6-9. Oftentimes this story brings confusion and a hard question, how could a good God destroy the world? But we know from Genesis 1 that God is a Creator, not a destroyer. God did not bring the Flood because He was vindictive, vengeful, or in a tantrum as we may be tempted to believe. No, God was in anguish and regret at the state of His creation. Genesis 6:6 says that, “*His heart was deeply troubled.*” God was heartbroken, like an artist who notices that the piece he is making has not turned out as he originally intended, so in great pain he dismantles it and starts anew. If God is a Creator, this is how the Flood story

must be viewed. In sending the Flood, God brought creation back to its original state (“chaotic waters”), establishing room for His restorative plan to be put into action.

However, this isn't even the coolest part about the Flood story. *God utilized the “chaotic waters” of disorder and destruction for His own purposes of creation and order.* Once again, we see that God stands unaffected above chaos and death and that He also has used and still can use the disordered state of His creation to bring about new order and life. This sets a strangely paradoxical precedent seen throughout the rest of the Bible: for order to be restored, it must be brought through disorder. In order to receive new life, one must be brought through death. Noah’s family were preserved and saved from the “chaotic waters” by the ark (Hebrew: “Ta-va”). And on the other side, when the flood recedes and dry land is once again separated from the waters, God meets with Noah and establishes the first covenant with humanity, saying the same words He says to Adam, *“Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth”* (Genesis 9:1). The Flood story and the covenant that God made with Noah was the first major step in God’s restorative plan, and it also revealed once again God’s sovereignty over all His creation.

Splitting the Red Sea

After God’s covenant with Noah, God establishes a covenant with Abraham, declaring a people group as His possession and vessel to bring about His redemption, salvation, and restoration to the earth. These Israelites become enslaved in Egypt and cry out to God, setting the stage for the Exodus, a story of God’s mighty power and salvation for His people. God raises up a man named Moses by first preserving him as a baby in a floating basket in the roaring waters of the Nile River (by the way, “basket” being the same Hebrew word “Ta-va” used for “ark” in the Flood story). God calls Moses out of the wilderness to confront Pharaoh, declare His name to His people (the Israelites), and make His name known among the nations. The climax of this story is of course the splitting of the Red Sea, where the Israelites finally escape the clutches of Egypt through God’s miraculous power. Exodus 14:21-22 says, ²¹ *Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided,* ²² *and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left”* (emphasis added). As the Israelites walked through the sea on dry land and made it to safety on the other side, the Egyptians were

consumed by those same waters. *Once again, God shows His power and mastery over chaos and uses it as a means of salvation for His people.*

Through the narratives of Genesis and Exodus, God is described as a Creator who is determined to restore order to His creation. God reveals Himself as Master over that chaos, unaffected by the death and disorder affecting His creation. The Flood story and the Exodus story reveal the initial actions of God's restorative plan. They set the stage for the next phase in God's plan: a way back into His presence for His people.

Restoring Order: The Law

God's rescue of the Israelites from the harsh hand of the Egyptians established God's name and reputation for the surrounding nations, but in reality it did not change the central problem facing humanity and all creation. God still needed to create a way in which His newly declared people could be *permanently* lifted out of chaos and death. Ultimately, this comes in the form of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, but first the basis needed to be in order to put that plan in place. Hence, the Mosaic Covenant, or The Law as it is maybe more commonly referred to. The second half of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy go into great detail regarding the guidelines given by God to the Israelites and the laws they were to live by, which is a lot more than just the Ten Commandments! Nowadays, we often have a sour viewpoint of the law, viewing God as some malicious dictator bent on making life harder for everyone. However, this just is not the case! Many nations surrounding Israel during this time in history believed in some sort of pagan gods or idol worship. These religions often involved a lot of guesswork, hoping that the right prayers were prayed or the correct sacrifices were offered so that the god(s) would bless and not curse. Not so with God! He did not want His people to be fearful of His ways or left in the confusion of their position with Him. So, He created the Law, which is at its base is really a giant instruction manual on how to get close to Him. God did not make His people guess! *Through the Law, God created a systematic order on how humanity could experience life in His presence and creation again.* The purpose of the Law was to show the Israelites a new way of living, a way out of death and chaos and into life and God's presence. When we read through the Old Testament with this mindset, God is revealed not as a tyrant, but as a gracious redeemer. This is a God who knows the problem His people and His

creation is facing, and is actively working to draw them out of it. This is a God focused on restoring His creation!

Of course, as the story of the Bible goes, the Law was not the perfect solution. God's people failed again and again and again in trying to follow God's Law. An instruction manual on how to escape chaos was not enough to restore humanity, let alone all of creation. The only solution was for God Himself to step into the scene, and face chaos experienced in creation head on.

God and the Human Experience

Before going on and discussing Jesus, we should pause quickly and explain another relevant facet of the disorder and "chaos waters" theme in the Bible. Even as God's plan of restoration is enacted throughout history, it is pretty clear that chaos, destruction, and death are still very relevant on the scene, even among God's people. As mentioned in the introduction, we can feel this ourselves as we look around at the painful, broken world we live in. If God is restoring order to creation, why does it feel like things are only getting worse?

The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is full of recordings of God's people crying out to Him about the seemingly unjust chaos they are experiencing in their lives while living fully devoted to Him and His Law. A lot of these are in the book of Psalms, recorded laments of people struggling with their doubts with God's order out loud. The entire book of Lamentations is Jeremiah the prophet's complaint to God. In these scriptures, sometimes God directly answers the lament and other times He does not. The one clear truth is that God, being Master over chaos, is big enough to handle all of our questions and our doubts.

Job

The book of Job is probably the largest example of an interaction like this, and it is often the most confusing. We do not have the time to go in depth into the entire book of Job, but know first of all that this book does not answer the question we often ask, "why do bad things happen to good people?" In Job, we are not given an answer as to why Job went through such

a terrible ordeal. The beauty of this book is that we are given an answer to a different question, one that we often fail to ask, “who is still in control?”

After Job’s long cries out to God demanding He give an account of His justice, God responds in person *“out of the storm”* (Job 38:1). God does not give Job the explanation why that he was asking for, instead He challenges him, *“”⁴ Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand”* (Job 38:4). God answers Job by revealing Himself once again as the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He then takes Job on this cosmic tour, showing Job how little he really knows. What’s curious about this interaction is that God goes into great detail talking about a particular creature called Leviathan, a monster of the depths that makes it home among the “chaos waters.” Whether this is an analogy or an actual ancient creature, who knows! The point is that God describes Leviathan as powerful and dangerous to Job and that he is surely to get hurt or die if he interacts with it. However, God does not call this creature evil. In poetic prose, God shows that even though the monster of chaos is very real and very powerful, and even that *“nothing on Earth is its equal”* (Job 41:33), Leviathan is not outside of His reach.

So, what do we do when we feel completely entrapped by the disorder and death surrounding us? What do we do when we feel we are drowning in the “chaos waters?” We trust. Even when it feels like He is doing nothing, God is always in control and always moving within His creation, restoring order and life even if we can’t see it. *God is still the Master over chaos even when we feel chaos is the master over us.* Through the story of Job, we see that God does not rule the cosmos by His justice (what we would view as right and wrong), but by His divine wisdom (which is so much higher than us). As we respond in the midst of our personal chaos by putting our faith and trust in Him, He is faithful enough to respond *“out of the storm”* and remind us that His plan of restoration is still underway.

Jesus Christ: Restoration’s Climax

At last, we come to Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of God’s promise and the climax of His plan. During His time of ministry on Earth, Jesus declared the new Gospel message saying, *“¹⁵ The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”* (Mark 1:15). In Jesus, God brought His Kingdom down to Earth once again, just as it was in the

garden of Eden. Jesus embodied God's plan of restoration through His own displays of Mastery over chaos and of course through the cross, where chaos and death were dealt with once and for all.

Above the Waters: Master Over Chaos

Jesus performed many miraculous signs revealing His power as God throughout His ministry, but the most interesting miracles to note are the miracles involving water, a direct revelation of how Jesus also dealt with the "chaos waters." Jesus' first miracle was one of these, when He turned water into wine. Following the symbolism of Genesis 1, here Jesus brought "life" from "chaos waters." From something that was dead and useless, Jesus created something fitting for the wedding banquet. John 2:11 says, *"¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."* Of course, the more famous examples of Jesus' Mastery over "chaos waters" is when He calms the storm and when He walks on water. Three of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) record the story of Jesus calming the storm and again three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, John) record the story of Jesus walking on water. Clearly these stories depict something, because after all, what better way for Jesus to reveal Himself just like His Father as Master over chaos than by literally controlling the wind and the waves? In Jesus' first instance of calming the storm, the disciples respond with recognition of Jesus' power. *"⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, 'Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!'" (Mark 4:41).* Not only did Jesus have control over the chaos, but He also revealed Himself as far above it. In the second story, Jesus walked across the water completely undeterred by the waves surrounding Him, while His disciples were terrified. *In His miracles on the waters, Jesus revealed Himself to be unaffected by chaos and disorder, just like God.* Only God Himself could overcome chaos and death for His creation, which is exactly what Jesus did.

Death and Resurrection

Jesus was God Himself, sent down to Earth to bring the ordered Kingdom of life back to a disordered creation steeped in death. The only way for creation to be made new and right again was for Jesus to be consumed by death on our behalf. The cross was that moment. This is the climax of God's plan for all creation: His Son crucified, unjustly hung on display for all

creation to witness. However, just like Noah and the Flood, this was not the end. By His own power, Jesus rose from the dead victorious! Jesus took on the full weight of humanity's sin and "drowned" beneath the "chaos waters," a fate that should have been ours and all creations, and He walked out of the tomb like a King. By His resurrection, God's righteous order was established again, God's Kingdom could once again come down to Earth. Through Jesus, all of creation is restored.

Jesus' resurrection was a shock to His disciples, but it should not have been. After all, Jesus made these claims about Himself before His death: *"I am the resurrection and the life"* (John 11:25) and *"I am the way and the truth and the life"* (John 14:6). Jesus Christ holds all of God's order and life. That is why Jesus is now King over all creation. The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 1:20-23, *"[God] raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way"* (emphasis added). Likewise in Philippians 2:9-11, *"⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (emphasis added). By fully succumbing to chaos in His death and completely overpowering it in His resurrection, Jesus Christ has become the pinnacle of God's restoration for creation.

A Way Out

So, what of us humans? How can we escape the clutches of chaos, disorder, destruction, and death? Just like Noah on the ark and just like the Israelites in the Red Sea, the way out is by following Jesus' in His descent through the "chaos waters" and His rise out the other side. Paul says in Romans 6:3-4, *"³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."* The only way to order and life is by going through chaos and death. By identifying with Christ in His death and believing in His resurrection we can enter into God's Kingdom here on earth.

As the apostle Peter says so well in 1 Peter 1:3-4, ^{“3} *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade ...*” (emphasis added). Jesus offers us the truest hope of restoration into an order that will never change and last forever. Praise be to God indeed!

The End: A New Beginning

Through Jesus’ death and resurrection and ascension to Kingdom, creation has already been restored, but it has also not yet been fully made anew. This “already, not yet” tension is the age we live in, where we can experience the new life offered in Jesus but still also feel the effects of the chaos of the world around us. Paul speaks of this tension in Romans 8:18-21 on the topic of suffering,

^{“18} *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God*” (emphasis added).

Likewise, in the second half of the scripture passage mentioned above, Peter says in 1 Peter 1:4-5, ^{“4} *... This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time*” (emphasis added). Make no mistake, Jesus’ death and resurrection was the moment of victory, but the new creation is still waiting to be completely realized. Step by step and stage by stage, creation is continually being restored, as we also have a part in spreading God’s Kingdom here on the earth! And we look ahead knowing the hope we have in God’s final restored creation.

In a vision from God, the apostle John describes this new heavens and earth in Revelation 21-22. ^{“1} *Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea*” (Revelation 21:1, emphasis added). No more does the image of “chaos waters” threaten creation or humanity within. In the new creation, God has fully eradicated all chaos, death, and disorder. All that is left is His order, life, and light!

^{“3} *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.*

⁴ *'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'"* (Revelation 21:3-4, emphasis added).

No longer will there be a need for a specific way back to God's presence, for God's presence will be everywhere.

"²² I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:22-27, emphasis added).

God's restoration will bring about a new order within the New Eden.

"¹ Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:1-5, emphasis added).

This is our hope! And this is the final act of God's plan of restoration for His disordered creation: a new beginning within His loving order for all of eternity.