1

BY WAY OF BACKGROUND

So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm . . . and God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:21

Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the earth. You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

Psalm 74:12–14

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD! Awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago! Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?

Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to cross over?

Isaiah 51:9–10

And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

Revelation 12:7–8

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THERE BE DRAGONS ALL over the Bible. From the great sea monsters of Genesis to the great dragon of Revelation, dragons appear as the Bible opens and closes, and they pop their grisly heads up at various junctures in between. How did they get there and what on earth (or indeed in heaven) are they doing there? Dragons belong within comedy or fantasy. They make strange companions for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for Moses and David, for Jesus and Paul. *Puff the Magic Dragon*, much as we love him, does not belong in the Psalms. The presence of so many sea monsters in Scripture seems strange. So this opening chapter of the book is devoted to answering the first of the questions above: how did so many dragons find their way into the pages of Holy Writ?

Comical as they may be to people today, stories of dragons have abounded in earlier civilizations. The cultures of the ancient Near East were no exception. They told tales of dragons that spoke of threat, conflict, and victory. The dragon presented some sort of threat and a warrior god defeated the dragon and so removed the threat. The plot was clearly popular and arguably continues to the present day in the legend of St. George and the dragon.[1] Below we will re-tell the tales they told in ancient Near Eastern myths, and trace the steps of our dragons as they crept out of these myths and into the pages of ancient Jewish and early Christian literature.

MYTHS FROM THE ANCIENT EAST

The story of the conquest of the dragon occurs in many forms in ancient Near Eastern literature. There are local variations in the myth. However, the hero is normally the storm god. The enemy is often a dragon but it is sometimes pictured as a river or rivers, the sea, or some other demonic beast. The plots in which the actual combat between the warrior god and his or her foe occur differ considerably in detail. Nonetheless they all have the basic plot of the divine warrior hero conquering the demonic and often draconian enemy.

1. For fuller studies of the way the myth developed across history see, Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*; Cohn *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come*; and Gaster, *Thespis*. The latter is an older study but still very much worth a read.

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Enuma Elish

Probably the best known of these myths is the Babylonian story known as the *Enuma Elish*.[2] Trouble is brewing in the courts of heaven. The mother god Tiamat and the father god Apsu have had a row about how to handle their noisy children. Aspu and his vizier Mummu wanted to kill them. Tiamat said that they had to put up with the noise. Apsu and his sidekick decided to go ahead with their plan anyway. One of the children, the god Ea, got wind of this and had Apsu and Mummu murdered in a pre-emptive strike. He is now irritating Tiamat by sending wind and waves over her day and night. Tiamat has been advised to avenge the death of her husband and deal with her wayward son Ea. So she assembles a mighty army of "serpents, dragons, and hairy hero-men, lion monsters, lion men, scorpion men, mighty demons, fish men, and bull men" (*Enuma Elish* I 142–44) under the leadership of her consort Qingu.

Tiamat informs Ea that she is ready for battle. This horrifies him. Having recovered from the initial shock Ea takes counsel from his grandfather Anshar who panics and blames him for creating this mess. Ea tries to face Tiamat with a spell but, realizing that his strategy is hopeless, retreats and suggests Anshar sends somebody else against Tiamat. Anshar sends the god Anu who also retreats. The assembly of the gods lies silent, panicked, and angry. Then Marduk steps up and promises to kill Tiamat provided he is then made king of the gods. In view of the terrifying fact that Tiamat has created an army of "monster serpents, pointed of fang, with merciless incisors" and "filled their bodies with venom for blood" (*Enuma Elish* III 24–26) the gods make Marduk king and send him off to defeat Tiamat.

Marduk gathers his weapons together, including thunderbolts, fire, and various winds. He rides a terrible storm demon (as his chariot) towards Tiamat. They fight in single combat. Marduk captures her in his net and blows an ill wind into her mouth so she cannot close it. He fires an arrow directly inside her that pierces her heart. When they see their mighty matriarch lies dead, her demonic and draconian armies flee before Marduk who kills some of them and takes others prisoner.

Then Marduk splits Tiamat in two and creates the world from her carcass (*Enuma Elish* IV 135–V 64). Tiamat being pictured as the sea (*Enuma*

2. For the full text of this myth, see the translation by Benjamin R. Foster (*COS* 1.111:390–402). For a discussion of the myth and its background, see Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 167–69. For an introduction and translation of the *Enuma Elish*, see Foster, *From Distant Days*, 9–51.

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Elish VII 71–75, 132–35), Marduk stretches half her waters out above the heavens in this act of creation and the other half of her waters are placed below the earth (*Enuma Elish* IV 139–40; V 54–59).[3] The gods are very grateful and pronounce in praise the fifty names of Marduk.

The Storm God and the Serpent

This Hittite myth comes from ancient Anatolia (modern Turkey). Part of the story is lost but the outline is as follows.[4] When the storm god of heaven and the serpent arrive in the town of Kiškilušša, the serpent kills the storm god. The goddess Inara helps the storm god get his revenge (the myth assumes that the storm god comes back to life). He invites all the gods to a banquet she prepares. Meantime, she asks the mortal Ḫupašiya to help her. He agrees to this provided she sleeps with him, which she does. She prepares the banquet for the gods and hides Ḫupašiya until the gods are enjoying the party. The serpent and his progeny become sufficiently bloated at the banquet that they cannot get back into their hole. Ḫupašiya appears and ties them up. The storm god comes in and kills the serpent. Then Inara builds a house outside Tarukka and settles Ḫupašiya there, ordering him not to look out of the window. He does and hankers after his wife and children. The full text of the next section does not survive but it seems that Inara gets incensed by Ḫupašiya whining about missing his family and kills him.

The later version of this myth adds some extra color.[5] When the serpent defeats the storm god, he takes out his eyes and heart. So the storm god settles on a ruse. He marries the daughter of a pauper and they have a son who marries the daughter of the serpent. The storm god instructs his son to demand his eyes and heart back from the serpent. He does so and carries the missing organs back to his father. Restored to full health, he returns to the sea where he battles the serpent and kills it.

3. For Tiamat representing the sea, see also Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 169.

4. For the text of the myth, see the translation by Gary Beckman (*COS* 1.56:150–51). For a brief introduction to the story, see Green, *Storm-God*, 147–51.

5. The text of this later version can also be found in the translation by Gary Beckman (*COS* 1.56:150–51).

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The Myth of Ba'lu and Yammu

The closest of these stories both in time and location to biblical texts is probably the myth of Ba'lu and Yammu. This tale comes from Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra in Syria) from about 1400 BC. Parts of the text are missing and so piecing together the story can prove difficult in places. However scholars generally agree on the basic outline.[6]

The high god 'Ilu summons the goddess 'Anatu and the craftsman god Kôṯaru-wa-Ḥasīsu. When the gods are gathered in council, messengers from the sea god Yammu (also called Ruler Naharu) demand that they give up Ba'lu so that Yammu might steal his gold. 'Ilu tells the messengers that Ba'lu will bring tribute to Yammu and delivers him to the messengers as their prisoner.

Ba'lu is furious and grabs a weapon. 'Anatu tries to restrain him, advising him that Yammu is too strong for him. But Ba'lu swears to destroy Yammu and Yammu hides under his throne in fear. Kôṯaru-wa-Ḥasīsu pronounces that Ba'lu will become king eternally. He makes a mace, Yagrušu or "Drive Out," with which Ba'lu strikes Yammu on the upper body. Yammu is strong and this does not defeat him. Kôṯaru-wa-Ḥasīsu provides Ba'lu with another mace, 'Ayyamurru or Expeller, with which Ba'lu strikes Yammu on the head. Yammu falls to the ground and Ba'lu sets about tearing him apart. A temple is built for Ba'lu who roars from heaven with his thunder and makes the earth tremble at his voice.

The fragmentary nature of the text leaves the story with some rough edges. Another part of the text speaks of Ba'lu as defeating "Lôtan, the fleeing serpent . . . the twisting serpent, the close-coiling one with seven heads" rather than defeating Yammu/Ruler Naharu (*KTU* 1.5 i 29–30).[7] Elsewhere 'Anatu makes the claim:

> I have smitten 'Ilu's beloved Yammu, I have finished off the great Naharu. I have bound the dragon's jaws, have destroyed it, have smitten the twisting serpent, the close coiled one with seven heads. (*KTU* 1.3 iii 39–41)[8]

6. For the full text of this myth, see the translations by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.86:241–74) and Nicholas Wyatt, *Religious Texts*, 34–146. For detailed discussion of the myth, see also Smith, *Baal Cycle*, 1–114.

7. For translation, see *COS* 1.86:265.

8. For translation, see *COS* 1.86:252.

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Despite these slight incongruities, the outlines of the divine warrior pattern of myth may be seen. Ba'lu plays the part of the storm god. Not only does he thunder from heaven and make the mountains tremble (*KTU* 1.4 vii 28–35) but he rides the clouds as a chariot (e.g., *KTU* 1.4 v 60). He defeats his enemies who are Yammu and Ruler Naharu. Yammu translates as "sea" and Naharu translates as "river." Ba'lu defeats an enemy god pictured as waters. The foes of Ba'lu are also depicted as the serpent Lôtan, whose seven heads suggest he is some kind of dragon or mythical monster. The descriptions "close-coiling" and "twisting serpent" identify the enemy of Ba'lu as the enemy of 'Anatu. She describes this enemy as a dragon and identifies it with Yammu and Naharu. So this myth depicts the storm god Ba'lu (and his consort 'Anatu) defeating their enemies who are variously depicted as the sea, a river, and a seven-headed twisting serpent or dragon.

The similarities with the Hittite myth of the storm god and the serpent are apparent. The two adversaries are the storm god and a serpent god. That the storm god goes to the sea to defeat the serpent suggests an association between the serpent and the sea. Rivalry exists between the two but the storm god vanquishes the serpent in the end. The *Enuma Elish* follows the same pattern. Marduk rides the storm and fights with the elements of the storm, thunders, and winds. Tiamat takes the form of the sea and her army consists of dragons, serpents, and other demonic mixed beasts. Marduk fights Tiamat and beats her in battle.

So ancient Near Eastern myths were a fertile breeding ground for dragons. Moreover, for all their individuality and differences in detail, these myths follow the same broad outline. The serpent god or dragon or sea or other form of chaotic waters pose a threat or lay down a challenge. This is perceived as evil by the storm god. The storm god meets the challenge by battling the sea god or dragon and vanquishing them. These myths are by and large earlier than biblical writings and so it is almost certain that dragons migrated from these myths and into the Bible. So when they snuck into Scripture, what did they do there?

WHEN DRAGONS SNUCK INTO THE BIBLE

Elements of this ancient Near Eastern mythical pattern can be found in biblical texts.[9] However, the version of the myth in these writings is different.

9. The classic study of this mythology in biblical literature is Hermann Gunkel, *Chaos and Creation*, which compares biblical myth with Babylonian myth. A more recent study

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The stories of the *Enuma Elish*, the myth of Ba'lu and Yammu, and the Hittite story of the Serpent are precisely that, stories. The myth never really occurs as a story in biblical writings. At best it occurs as an extended scene from a wider story. Most often it appears in fragmentary form. Scenes from the story pop up in texts and although the texts do not tell the whole tale, these snippets are unmistakably derived from the wider story of God defeating the dragon or chaos waters. Often these fragments are like flashbacks to particular scenes in the wider story. The reader who knows the ancient myths gets the impression that the Hebrew writers just assumed that everybody was familiar with the story and they liked to use it creatively. The dragons move from center stage and begin to take on cameo roles.

Probably the closest we come to a full version of the story is found in Psalm 18. In this song of thanksgiving the psalmist praises God as his rock and for enabling him to defeat his enemies. After initial cries of praise, the psalmist offers this testimony (Ps 18:4–16):

> The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of perdition assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears. Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. He bowed the heavens, and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub, and flew; he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering around him, his canopy thick clouds dark with water. Out of the brightness before him

that updates Gunkel and makes use of parallels with Canaanite myth is Day, *God's Conflict*. Recently David Tsumura (*Creation and Destruction*) and Rebecca Watson (*Chaos Uncreated*) have disputed the extent to which ancient Near Eastern myths have influenced biblical writings and seek to demonstrate that it had little to do with creation in Israelite tradition. However, both authors accept the presence of a myth of God fighting the dragon in biblical texts. Tsumura (*Creation and Destruction*, 191–95) admits that at least the figures of Rahab and Leviathan (Pss 74:13–14; 89:9–10; Job 3:8; Isa 27:1) demonstrate the presence of a myth in biblical texts like ancient Near Eastern dragon myths. Watson (*Chaos Uncreated*, 166–68, 186–89) also admits the presence of a Hebrew myth in Psalms 74 and 89 that speaks of God defeating the dragon. Given that neither author has been able to disprove the presence of the myth in biblical texts, it is reasonable to work with the assumption that the biblical writers knew of this myth. There is no need to engage further here with some of the more questionable arguments they offer or with Watson's concerning presupposition that biblical literature can be read in isolation of other ancient literature and be fully and properly understood.

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> there broke through his clouds hailstones and coals of fire. The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice. And he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; he flashed forth lightnings, and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils. He reached down from on high, he took me; he drew me out of mighty waters.

This narrative clearly tells the story of the storm god defeating the watery enemy. The psalmist cries out that they are close to death and calls on God. God hears the cry of the psalmist and shakes the world's foundations in anger at their predicament. God fumes and breathes fire. God descends from heaven on an angel and the wings of the wind for battle against the watery foe. On approaching the waters God fires lightning arrows, hailstones, and coals of fire but the battle never takes place. Before God arrives the sea has already fled away in defeat, leaving bare its channels and the foundations of the world.[10] God reaches down and saves the psalmist from the waters of chaos and death.[11] The psalmist is really speaking of God saving him from his earthly enemies in local battles (v. 17) and their language is full of vibrant mythology. The psalmist depicts this event in the language of theophany (as it is often called) to highlight their belief that God was involved in saving them from their enemies.

However, this scene is hardly a story in the way that the Babylonian or Canaanite myths are. It lacks the plots, with all their twists and turns, that are found in the Babylonian and Canaanite myths. It also lacks the delightful way in which they develop their characters over the telling of the story. The theophany of God with all his thunder and lightning may be very impressive but the characterization of Yammu and Tiamat with her demonic hordes is much more colorful than that of the sea in Psalm 18, which has slunk away before we even get to see it (vv. 14–15). Doubtless

10. The motif of fleeing chaos waters is known to the tradition (e.g., Pss 104:7, 114:3; *T. Mos* 10:6). The laying bare of sea beds and river beds (e.g., Isa 44:27; 50:2; Nah 1:4; *LAB* 10:5) is a reference to the fact that the chaos waters have already fled in fear from God the divine warrior. The point of the motif is not always appreciated by commentators, e.g., Craigie who has God rebuke the sea bed (*Psalms 1–50*, 174). The *sea*, not the sea bed, is the mythical enemy. Arriving to an empty sea bed rather playfully emphasizes the power and majesty of God as the sea was not going to hang around to find out exactly how painful defeat would be. It quit while it had time. The *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* of Pseudo-Philo is found in the Pseudepigrapha.

11. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 260–61; Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 173–74.

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part of the reason for this is that the psalmist wants to glorify God. So the scene moves from the psalmist in peril to God's glorious actions to save the psalmist. By the time we come to a mention of the sea, it has already fled in terror—so that people can see the power of God.

Even though the battle scene of the story is told in some detail, we need to know the wider story to get the impact of this scene here. The audience only understands the irony of the sea having already fled (and so the greatness of God) because they already know that in these stories gods battle seas and that the battle is normally a struggle. This scene assumes some kind of prior knowledge of the ancient myth with which the psalmist plays to make this point about the power of God, and without which the point would be lost.

The same is true for the vision the prophet Habakkuk has of God in the heavenly chariot fighting the chaos waters with arrows and a flashing spear (Hab 3:3–15):

> God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. The brightness was like the sun; rays came forth from his hand, where his power lay hidden. Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind. He stopped and shook the earth; he looked and made the nations tremble. The eternal mountains were shattered; along his ancient pathways the everlasting hills sank low. I saw the tents of Cushan under affliction; the tent-curtains of the land of Midian trembled. Was your wrath against the rivers, O LORD? Or your anger against the rivers, or your rage against the sea, when you drove your horses, your chariots to victory? You brandished your naked bow, sated were the arrows at your command. You split the earth with rivers. The mountains saw you, and writhed; a torrent of water swept by; the deep gave forth its voice. The sun raised high its hands; the moon stood still in its exalted place, at the light of your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of your flashing spear. In fury you trod the earth, in anger you trampled nations. You came forth to save your people, to save your anointed. You crushed the head of the wicked house, laying it bare from foundation to roof. You pierced with their own arrows the head of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind to scatter us, gloating as if ready to devour the poor who were in hiding. You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the mighty waters.

Alongside Psalm 18, this passage from Habakkuk represents the most sustained description of God's riding out to battle against the forces of chaos

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in biblical writings before the second century BC. As God approaches the battle, mountains and hills shatter in the path of his chariot. The deep cries out in fear before God tramples it in victory. The elements of the battle scene of the story are all there and in great poetic detail.[12] However, this scene from the story, which constitutes the greater part of a hymn of praise (Hab 3:2–19), is not set within a wider story of why God has come out against this watery enemy and what God achieves through this victory. This lack of clear setting has given rise to many and varied understandings of what the story means, and why it is included in the book of Habakkuk.[13] One thing that does seem clear, however, is that the author was working with a traditional story the original audience would have understood.[14]

12. Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 315–41; Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 115. For further discussion see Day, *God's Conflict*, 104–9.

13. See Andersen, *Habakkuk*, 259–61 for a review of different perspectives on this matter.

14. Ibid., 350–55. This myth appears in later Jewish and Christian writings both inside and outside the Bible. The *Testament of Moses*, a Jewish text completed in roughly the same era as the New Testament, tells the same story (*T. Mos* 10:1–8a):

> And then his kingdom will appear throughout his whole creation. And then the devil will have an end, and sorrow will be led away with him. Then the hands of the messenger, who is stationed in the highest place, will be filled. He will avenge them of their enemies immediately. For the heavenly one will arise from his kingly throne, and he will go forth from his holy habitation with indignation and wrath on behalf of his sons. And the earth will tremble, it will be shaken violently right to its very ends. And the high mountains will be made low, and they will be shaken violently, and enclosed valleys will cave in. The sun will not give its light. And the horns of the moon will turn to darkness and they will be broken in pieces, and the whole thing will be turned to blood. And the orbit of the stars will be thrown into disorder. And the sea will recede all the way to the abyss, and the springs of the waters will withdraw, and the rivers will be terrified, because God Most High will surge forth, the Eternal One alone. In full view will he come and punish the nations, and he will destroy their idols. Then you will be happy, O Israel!

The story here is substantially the same as in the earlier texts. God leaves his heavenly dwelling place to come and rescue the people of Israel. The language in which this is depicted in these verses has the earth reeling and falling apart as God comes in glory. The heavenly bodies fall out of their places and the mythical enemy, the sea, flees in fear and dread at the coming of God Most High. The end result of the cosmic upheaval and battle against chaos is actually the salvation of Israel. The translation here is taken from Angel, *Chaos*, 119. The *Testament of Moses* is found in the Pseudepigrapha.

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Alongside these more sustained descriptions of God's battle with the forces of chaos, there are places where the battle scene is captured in just a few lines of poetry. The book of the prophet Nahum begins with such a scene (Nah 1:3–6):

> The Lord is slow to anger but great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither, and the bloom of Lebanon fades. The mountains quake before him, and the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who live in it. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and by him the rocks are broken in pieces.

God comes in the storm with the clouds at his feet (possibly a reference to coming in a cloud chariot).[15] Just as in Psalm 18 and similarly to the myth of Ba'lu (*KTU* 1.4 vii 25–39) the earth convulses before God. God defeats the chaos waters, rebuking them and drying them up.[16]

Scenes like these in the Psalms, prophets, and later apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings demonstrate that Jews and early Christians would have been familiar with a story in which God arises from his dwelling and comes to earth in glory. God rides on or in clouds, thundering and shooting lightning at the enemy. The enemy takes the form of the sea, or sea and rivers, or one or more dragons. God defeats the enemy and is enthroned in the temple or heavenly courtroom. In some texts only fragments of this story appear. Whilst they are clearly part of this story, in and of themselves they only picture a single action or point in the story, or a very truncated scene of the wider myth.

Many of these fragments offer nothing more than a snapshot of a scene in the story. These snapshots might be taken at any point in the story but tend to focus on certain scenes. Many capture views of the theophany of God riding on the cloud chariot. One psalmist calls the worshipping community to "sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds" (Ps 68:4) echoing the description of Ba'lu in the Ugaritic myths (*KTU* 1.4 iii 15).[17] Another psalmist offers the same picture in slightly more detail (Ps 104:1–4):

15. Christensen, *Nahum*, 181–2.
16. Ibid., 181–93.
17. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 176. The text critical issues surrounding the original text of

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> Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great. You are clothed with honor and majesty, wrapped in light as with a garment. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers.

Glorious and majestic, God establishes his throne room over the defeated chaos waters and rides out on a cloud chariot accompanied by winds and lightning. The psalmist pictures the Lord as God of the storm going out to defeat the waters of chaos, which, as it happens, God does a little later in the psalm.

Some fragments focus on the convulsions of the earth and heavens at the advent of the divine warrior. The prophet Isaiah pictures the whole universe thrown into convulsion as the Lord God marches from heaven to earth to judge the king of Babylon (Isa 13:9–13):

> See, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation, and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant, and lay low the insolence of tyrants; . . . I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger.[18]

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this psalm are numerous and Hossfeld and Zenger (*Psalms 2*, 158) suggest an original text that misses the reference to riding on the clouds, but they do accept the image of God riding across the heavens in Ps 68:34 (*Psalms 2*, 159).

18. A similar scene of the shaking of the universe and all its inhabitants can be seen in a much later apocalyptic work (*1 En.* 1:4–9):

> The Great Holy One will come forth from his dwelling, and the eternal God will tread from thence upon Mount Sinai. He will appear with his army, he will appear with his mighty host from the heaven of the heavens. All the watchers will fear and quake, and those who are hiding in all the ends of the earth will sing. All the ends of the earth will be shaken, and trembling and great fear will seize them [the watchers] unto the ends of the earth. The high mountains will be shaken and fall and break apart, and the high hills will be made low and melt like wax before the fire. The earth will be wholly rent asunder, and everything on earth will perish, and there will be judgment on all. With the righteous he will make peace and over the chosen there will be protection, and upon them will be mercy. They will all be God's, and he will grant them good pleasure. He will bless them all, and he will help them

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This scene is terrifying. God comes in majesty surrounded by his army of angels in order to execute judgment on those who have sinned. However, when God punishes Babylon, it means freedom and peace for the people of God.

Some fragments picture the point in the story where God defeats the dragon and the sea. Psalm 74 laments the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (probably by Babylonian soldiers in 586 BC).[19] Part way through the psalmist reminds God of his kingship over creation in the following words (vv. 13–17):

> You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. You cut openings for springs and torrents; you dried up ever-flowing streams. Yours is the day, yours also the night; you established the luminaries and the sun. You have fixed all the bounds of the earth; you made summer and winter.

God crushes heads of the dragons. One dragon is singled out and named, Leviathan. This particular dragon is probably to be identified with the dragon Lôtan of the Ugaritic texts (the three key "letters" of the Ugaritic word, *l-t-n*, appear in the Hebrew word Leviathan also).[20] More evidence that the Ugaritic Lôtan changed its name to Leviathan when crossing the border into the Bible appears elsewhere. Isaiah describes Leviathan as "the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, . . . the dragon that is in the sea" (Isa 27:1). Several hundred years earlier, the writer of the Ugaritic myth described Lôtan in the very same words, "Lôtan, the fleeing serpent . . . the twisting serpent, the close-coiling one with seven heads" (*KTU* 1.5 i 29–30). Leviathan (formerly Lôtan) gets around quite a bit as it also probably reappears in the seven headed dragon of Revelation 12.[21]

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> all. Light will shine upon them, and he will make peace with them. Look, he comes with the myriads of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all, and to destroy the wicked, and to convict all humanity for all the wicked deeds that they have done, and the proud and hard words that sinners spoke against him.

The book of *1 Enoch* may be found in the Pseudepigrapha. The translation here is taken from Nickelsburg and VanderKam, *New Translation*, 19–20.

19. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 243–44; Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 246–47.

20. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 247; on the relationship between the names Lôtan and Leviathan, see the article by Day, *Leviathan*, 295.

21.. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 684; Day, *God's Conflict*, 24.

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Elsewhere the book of Isaiah identifies a monster called Rahab (Isa 51:9): "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! Awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago! Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?" The prophet recalls the picture of the ancient action of God who battled the dragon, piercing it and cutting it into pieces. (This is not unlike the picture of Marduk splitting Tiamat into two pieces in the *Enuma Elish*.) It is not entirely clear whether the dragon is named Rahab or Rahab battles God alongside the dragon.[22] Either way Rahab is clearly a monstrous enemy of God in this mythical struggle. The prophet continues by associating the defeat of the dragon with the drying up of the sea (Isa 51:10): "Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep?"[23] The defeat of the dragon and the sea occur in parallel, just as in Psalm 74. Rahab is pictured as leading a demonic army in one of Job's laments (Job 9:13): "God will not turn back his anger, the helpers of Rahab bowed beneath him."[24] The helpers of Rahab bow beneath God, either cowering in fear at their imminent destruction or possibly after God has taken them captive. This image of Rahab with her band of helpers recalls Tiamat with her army of demonic creatures.

Some fragments focus on the defeat of the forces of chaos. This defeat may take many forms. God kills the monsters in many texts. Psalm 74 and Isaiah 51 speak of the crushing of the heads of Leviathan and the piercing of Rahab respectively. Daniel recounts the putting to death and burning of the fourth beast (Dan 7:11b). Later Jewish and Christian texts like the *Testament of Asher* and the *Psalms of Solomon* both recall earlier tradition in picturing God breaking the head of the dragon (*T. Ash.* 7:2–3; *Pss. Sol.* 2:25–26).[25] But death is not the only fate depicted.

Other Jewish texts offer a glimpse of the chaos waters fleeing in terror from the divine warrior and so the channels of the deep dry up.[26] The

22. Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 2:236; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 331–33; Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 356–57. Both Blenkinsopp and Baltzer write as if Rahab and the dragon are distinct figures. Day (*God's Conflict*, 91–93) seems to assume that Rahab is the dragon.

23. Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 357.

24. Clines, *Job 1–20*, 233; Hartley, *Job*, 173; Habel, *Job*, 192.

25. Angel, *Chaos*, 84, 114. The *Testament of Asher* and the *Psalms of Solomon* may be found in the Pseudepigrapha.

26. The motif of the drying up of the chaos waters in Hebrew tradition seems to reflect the Ugaritic myth where Astarte cries out to Ba'lu to dry up the captive Prince Yammu (Sea) and Judge Nahar (River) (*KTU* 1.2 iv 29–30).

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Testament of Moses has the waters of chaos run from the divine warrior in dread (*T. Mos* 10:6). Pseudo-Philo plays with this tradition in his re-telling of the story of Moses dividing the Red Sea (*LAB* 10:5):[27]

> And God said, "since you have cried out to me, lift up your rod and smite the sea, and it will be dried up." Moses did all this and God rebuked the sea and it dried up. And the streams of water stood up and the depths of the earth became visible, and the foundations of the world were laid bare by the fearful roar of God and by the breath of the anger of the Lord.

The story is lightly touched with language and images of our myth. God rebukes the waters of chaos to defeat them in the Bible (e.g., Ps 104:7).[28] The image and language of the roar and breath of God laying bare the foundations of the world and making the depths of the earth visible reflect the language and imagery of Psalm 18:16.[29] The story of God drying up the sea becomes the story of God defeating chaos.[30]

Certain fragments of the myth recall the imprisonment of the monsters. Where Job asks God whether he (Job) is the sea or a dragon that God sets a guard over him, he is clearly familiar with a myth in which God has the chaos monster imprisoned (Job 7:12).[31] The *Prayer of Manasseh* addresses the Lord God Almighty who "shackled the sea by the word of your command, who confined the deep and sealed it by your fearful and glorious name" (Pr Man 3).[32] The images of shackling and confinement depict the imprisonment of the chaos sea.[33] These images seem to merge with another

27. Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* may be found in the Pseudepigrapha. The translation here is taken from Angel, *Chaos*, 164–65.

28. Day, *Conflict*, 57.

29. See further Angel, *Chaos*, 165; Jacobson, *Pseudo-Philo*, 441.

30. Some would suggest that this is the origin of the Red Sea Story, e.g., Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat*. However, I find it difficult to believe that a tradition like the exodus from Egypt, which is so deeply embedded in the texts of ancient Israel (many of which are not at all mythological, e.g., Exod 14), can simply be traced back to some creative author deciding on behalf of the whole community that they would fabricate a history for themselves out of the myth they used to celebrate the work of God in their lives. If the myth was good enough to use to celebrate this work of God without any reference to the Exodus story (as it is in many psalms, e.g., Psalm 46), is there any evidence that anyone felt the need to fabricate a history for the community out of the myth?

31. Clines, *Job 1–20*, 188–90.

32. The *Prayer of Manasseh* may be found in the Pseudepigrapha.

33. Angel, *Chaos*, 82.

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biblical image in which the shores of the sea are depicted as the boundaries God has set to prevent the sea engulfing creation and turning it back to chaos. The prophet Jeremiah evokes this image, speaking in the voice of God: "I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail, though they roar, they cannot pass over it" (Jer 5:22).

Last but not least, other fragments picture God as enthroned after the defeat of chaos and evil, reigning over it. One psalmist proclaims, "the LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever" (Ps 29:10). The same image appears later in Judaism amongst the writings of the community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls: "great and holy are you, YHWH, the Holy One of the holy ones from generation to generation. In front of him walks glory and behind him the roaring of many waters" (*11Q5* 26.9–10a).[34] God is seated in the throne room of heaven. The defeated chaos waters roar in the background whilst the glory of God fills the sanctuary.

Jews and early Christians clearly knew of a mythical tradition in which God battled the dragon and the sea but they used this myth differently. Other ancient Near Eastern traditions told the whole story. Biblical texts and other Jewish and Christian texts only use bits and pieces from the story. They obviously know the story but never tell it as a story in its own right. Scenes and snippets from the myth are always recounted in the context of another story, prayer, or hymn. Dragons may have snuck into Scripture but they seem to play a game of "now you see me, now you don't." What are they up to?

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PLAYING WITH POETRY

The colorful storytelling of the Babylonian, Hittite, and Canaanite versions of the myth is missing in the Jewish and Christian versions of the myth. Part of this must be the effect of monotheism. Jews and Christians can hardly narrate the wrangling between the gods that occurs in the Babylonian or Ugaritic texts because they only acknowledged the existence of *one* God. However, this cannot be the whole reason. Around the turn of the eras, the Jewish community at Qumran were writing of a battle royal that would take place between the archangelic captain of God's heavenly host and the

34. The text *11Q5* can be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

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denizens of demons led by prince of darkness.[35] Although we do not have complete versions of these stories, what we do possess suggests that some Jews were perfectly capable of writing myths with storylines that were as intricate as those of the ancient Near Eastern versions of the myth.

More likely Jewish and Christian tradition was not primarily interested in the story itself but the theological use that might be made of the story. If dragon stories were well known, then playing with the plot might make for a creative and effective way of making statements about God that would move people to belief in a way that bare statements about God have never really had the ability to do. Songs, poems, and stories convey much more powerfully and deeply religious truths than do (dry) doctrinal statements.

We see this in Psalm 104. The psalmist looks out to sea and tells the gathered worshippers "yonder is the sea, great and wide . . . there go the ships and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it" (Ps 104:25–26). The psalmist knows the story of the conquest of chaos. It has been told earlier in the psalm. God rides out in his cloud chariot (Ps 104:3–4) and defeats the waters of chaos, which flee in terror (Ps 104:7–9). Leviathan is the powerful dragon that alongside the sea threatens to engulf the world in chaos again. God's final speech in Job leaves the reader with no doubt that biblical tradition sees Leviathan as a wild, violent, and (apart from God) unconquerable monster (Job 41:1–34). However, the psalmist chooses to describe Leviathan as a plaything, a toy. God has created Leviathan as something to muck about in the sea.

This picture turns the normal story on its head. Firstly, God creates Leviathan. In the *Enuma Elish* (and possibly in other ancient Near Eastern myths) the warrior god struggles with the monster in order to overcome it. Unless it is defeated the forces of chaos will reign and creation will be impossible. As the psalmist has God create Leviathan, it is no longer the monster that pre-exists creation and that must be defeated for creation to happen. The words "which you formed" reduce Leviathan to one aspect of creation rather than the primordial force that stands against creation. They reduce Leviathan to a shadow of its former self. The idea that Leviathan is created to play around in the sea also adds a comical touch to this cosmic demotion.[36] Not only does Leviathan not threaten God as the dragon that

35. See the *War Scroll* and 11QMelchizedek. Both these texts may be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

36. Levenson, *Creation*, 17. One of his students suggests that Leviathan has become God's "rubber duckey"—a comment I find not only perceptive but also comforting as I realize that I am not the only person who was sufficiently irreverent as a student to draw

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dwells in the primordial ocean before creation but Leviathan's sole reason for existence is play. Little could demean this mighty military monster further.

The relegation of Leviathan to the ranks of creatures God has created for amusement belittles the power of the monster. As the monster seems weaker than myths suggest, God appears correspondingly stronger. God must be stronger in order to be able to control such a beast with such ease. The psalmist plays with the story to make a theological point. Those who knew the story would get the point.

Like the Magi in the Christmas story, dragons came from the East. From their home territory in the myths of ancient Near Eastern cultures, they migrated into the faith, stories, and religious imagination of the biblical authors. From there it was just a few short steps into the biblical texts themselves. However, Jews and early Christians used the story differently from their Babylonian, Hittite, and Ugaritic counterparts. They do not seem to have been interested in it for its own sake. Rather, they ransacked the story for scenes and snippets that would suit their purposes. They wanted to tell it (or bits of it) in new and creative ways that would help them to understand God, their world, and their relationship with God better—and in particular, they used the story to picture how they lived with suffering and God.

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this particular analogy.

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