

THE CREATION FAITH OF THE PSALMISTS

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Believers intent on discerning the Bible's view on Creation naturally turn to the first three chapters of Genesis, with their striking accounts of creation by the word of God, paradise in the Garden of Eden, and the Fall. This is no doubt in part because of these chapters' position at the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures and, in part, because the elaborate creation narrative therein has captivated artists and writers from John Milton to Michelangelo. Such a focus on the Genesis narrative as a source of creation theology is unfortunate, however, because outside the book of Genesis—mainly in Job, Proverbs, Isaiah, and the Psalms—there exists a more extensive and varied collection of writing on the significance of creation in Israel's faith.¹ The Hebrew Scriptures contain a plurality of theologies that coexist together,² and a study of the Hebrew Bible's literature on creation outside the Genesis narrative reveals that this plurality exists, to some extent, with respect to the theology of creation.³

Acknowledging the Hebrew Bible's diversity with regard to the theology of creation, this paper focuses on the function of creation theology in the Psalms. I will argue that, although the Hebrew Psalter does not necessarily contain inconsistent views on creation, the Psalms do offer a variety of perspectives on its theological significance. This variety appears not only in the language and rhetoric that the Psalms use to describe the event of creation, but also in the functions that creation serves in the faith of the psalmists. As I hope to explain, creation serves in conjunction with and sometimes in subservience to other theological motifs, but it is nevertheless a fundamental element of the psalmists' faith, appearing in a variety of psalm forms and in conjunction with some basic foundations of Israel's belief.

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¹Robert A. Oden Jr., "Cosmogony, Cosmology," *ABD* 1:1164-67.

²Rolf P. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 1-2.

³Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, "Introduction: The Theology of Creation Traditions," in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions* (ed. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992), 15.

I. THE RHETORIC OF CREATION

Understanding creation theology in the Psalms begins with a study of the rhetoric—the language and imagery—that the psalmists use when they employ the creation motif. This language is often terse and occasionally quite indirect. Sometimes the terse reference is quite clear, as when the psalmist states: “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Ps 121:2). Other times the terse reference is rather vague. In Ps 29:3 the statement that “The voice of the LORD is over the waters” is likely a veiled adaptation of the Canaanite/Ugaritic myths describing the creator god’s action in stilling the primordial waters of chaos at Creation.⁴ On some occasions, the reference is ambiguous. When in Ps 149:2 the psalmist says, “Let Israel be glad in its Maker,” does this refer to the original creation of the world, or to the creation of the covenant with Israel, or to both? Of course, many psalms contain an extended and straightforward development of the theme of creation, Psalms 19 and 104 being the best examples. Thus, in discerning the psalmists’ Creation faith one is often, though not always, relegated to the realm of inference and oblique expression.

Equally significant is the dual imagery the psalmists use in describing God’s action in creation. On the one hand are various passages explaining creation as the result of God’s nearly effortless workmanship.⁵ God may be envisioned having created with an act of pure speech: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spoke, and it came to be” (Ps 33:6, 9). This image of creation by the word of God is consistent, of course, with Genesis 1, where the world is formed in response to God’s repeated commands, “Let there be” In the Psalms, God is also imagined as having formed the heavens and the earth by acting upon the matter of the universe like a craftsman. Thus, the psalmist describes creation as “the work of your fingers” (Ps 8:3), notes “the dry land, which his hands have formed” (Ps 95:5), and states that God “gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle” (Ps 33:7). These passages present creation, whether by speech or act, as the work of God on the inanimate matter of the universe.

On the other hand there are several passages explaining creation as the outcome of God’s victory in a battle against chaos, usually imagined as a triumph over the primordial waters of the universe and the sea monster(s) that inhabited them.⁶ This battle imagery appears to draw on a vision of creation borrowed from Canaanite and/or Ugaritic mythology.⁷ Thus, in Psalm 74 the psalmist states: “You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the

⁴Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (Waco: Word, 1983), 247.

⁵J. Trublet, “Le motif de la creation dans les Psaumes,” *Foi et Vie* 87 (1988): 24-32.

⁶*Ibid.*, 35-37.

⁷Thomas Romer, “La Redecouverte d’un mythe dans l’ancien testament: la creation comme combat,” *ETR* 64 (1989): 562-68.

dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan" (Ps 74:13-14). Likewise, in Psalm 89 the psalmist states: "You rule the raging of the sea. . . . You crushed Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm. . . . the world and all that is in it—you have founded them" (Ps 89:9-11). Usually, these passages contain only brief allusions to this battle and/or God's victory, as when the psalmist portrays God as sitting "enthroned over the flood" (Ps 29:10) or notes that "the waters stood above the mountains. At your rebuke they flee" (Ps 106:6-7).

Whether represented as craftsmanship or battle, God's act of creation is viewed as a continuing process. With respect to the battle imagery, the psalmist may portray God as engaged in a constantly recurring struggle against forces of chaos that would reverse the good work of the original creation.⁸ Thus, Psalm 65 notes that God "established the mountains" but also proclaims: "You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves" (Ps 65:6-7). Here, God is envisioned exercising present control over the primordial waters of chaos.⁹ Similarly, in Psalm 104 the waters of chaos are pushed back and assigned boundaries, "that they might not again cover the earth," the implication being that chaos would return if God's power as Creator were suspended.¹⁰ With respect to the craftsman imagery, the psalmists often portray this continuous process by means of God's day-to-day action in nurturing and sustaining the natural world.¹¹ Thus, the psalmist may note God's control of the phenomenon of day and night, of the heavenly bodies, and of rain, plant growth, and the seasons (Pss 50:1; 65:8-10; 74:16-17; 135:7; 147:8-9).

Historical circumstance provides one explanation for this lack of uniformity in the Psalms' vision of creation. The composition of the Psalms, spread out as it apparently was over nearly a millennium, allowed natural evolution as well as outside cultural influences to shape the worldviews of the various psalmists.¹² However, the lack of uniformity is also explained by the surprising tolerance of diversity in the theological vision of the Hebrew Bible's editors generally and those who compiled the Psalter in particular.¹³ In addition, the story of creation that the Psalms relate is told *confessionally*, "that is, to express faith in God, and not to engage in prescientific, prephilosophical reflections about nature."¹⁴ The

⁸John L. McKenzie, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought," (*NJBC*; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1293.

⁹Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (Dallas: Word, 1990), 142.

¹⁰Bernhard W. Anderson, "Introduction: Mythopoeic and Theological Dimensions of Biblical Creation Faith," in *Creation in the Old Testament* (ed. Bernhard W. Anderson; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 11.

¹¹Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 252.

¹²Oden, *ABD* 1:1163-64.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 82.

Psalms therefore emphasize a vertical dimension—the relationship between God and humankind—rather than a horizontal dimension focused on the temporal movement of history.¹⁵

Reasons also exist for the terse, oblique nature of the rhetoric of creation. For one thing, the Psalms are not theological treatises but liturgical compositions meant for use in worship.¹⁶ In addition, except perhaps in a few psalms of praise, creation never becomes the primary focus, but rather serves a subsidiary role in support of themes such as suffering, trust, and salvation.¹⁷ Moreover, the mythological imagery was undoubtedly well known from interaction with surrounding cultures. It may also be true that the idea of Israel's God as the Creator of the world was so fundamental that it did not always merit detailed development. Some combination of these factors undoubtedly accounts for the succinct nature of creation rhetoric in the Psalms.

II. IMPORTANT THEMATIC UNIFORMITY

Despite such stark diversity, however, the Psalms also speak with uniformity about many fundamental ideas regarding creation. To begin with, the Psalms uniformly describe creation as the result of God's direct action rather than a cosmic accident or circumstance. The God of Israel is the one "who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Ps 146:6), and the one "who set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken" (Ps 104:5). The Psalms also affirm that God existed before Creation, exists apart from it, and will continue to exist when creation passes away (Ps 90:2; 102:26-27). In addition, the Psalms agree with Genesis and other biblical traditions in conceiving creation as "structured space," that is, as "a universal system, a cosmos, in which every realm has its proper place and function, including humans."¹⁸ Thus, in the act of Creation, God "fixed all the bounds of the earth. . . . made summer and winter" and "spread out the earth on the waters. . . . made the great lights. . . . the sun to rule over the day. . . . the moon and stars to rule over the night" (Pss 74:17; 136:6-9). In short, despite the diversity of language and imagery, the Psalms share a fundamental conviction about the ultimate cause of the created order as well as God's relationship to and existence apart from that order.

However, the Psalms also appear to share a fundamental conviction about the importance of creation in Israel's faith. In particular, creation does not appear to hold central stage.¹⁹ Rather, it

¹⁵Ibid., 84.

¹⁶John H. Eaton, "The Psalms and Israelite Worship," in *Tradition and Interpretation* (ed. Gerhard W. Anderson; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 263-72.

¹⁷Trublet, "Le motif de la creation," 48.

¹⁸Kruger, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 186-87.

¹⁹Richard J. Clifford, "The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation," *TS* 46 (1985): 507-8.

functions in a subsidiary role, along with or in support of another, more central theological point. For example, a few psalms present creation out of chaos as the first divine act in a chain of God's salvific activity for Israel; God liberated Israel from oppression just as he liberated the world from chaos.²⁰ Thus, in Psalm 136 the psalmists encourage the faithful to thank God for his goodness, noting repeatedly that "his steadfast love endures forever." The evidence for the assurance of this continuing "steadfast love" begins with the acts of Creation ("who spread out the earth on the waters... who made the great lights") and continues with the acts of liberation from oppression in Egypt ("who struck Egypt through their firstborn . . . and brought Israel out from among them. . . . who divided the Red Sea in two . . . who led his people through the wilderness"). Similarly, in Psalm 135 the psalmist's praise of God as the one "who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth . . . and brings out the wind from his storehouses" continues uninterrupted into the praise of God as the one "who struck down the firstborn of Egypt . . . struck down many nations . . . and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to his people Israel" (Ps 135:7-8, 10, 12).²¹

The act of Creation in such psalms is thus remembered in conjunction with God's saving action in history, even though the relationship between Creation and salvation is not expressly stated.²² In short, creation and redemption are directly related to each other. "The creation involves making the physical universe and then leading the people into their part of that universe."²³ In a sense, the psalmist's praise in these psalms is not just for the goodness of the original creation, but for the goodness of the creation of Israel.²⁴ Thus, in these psalms, Creation faith does not form the sole basis for the believer's relationship with God, but serves in conjunction with God's continuing action in history as evidenced by the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

On the other hand, Psalms 19 and 104 are sometimes represented as offering "an unadulterated doctrine of Creation which stands on its own ground."²⁵ With respect to Psalm 19, this may be because scholars often divide the poem into two originally unrelated parts. In the first part, creation proclaims God's glory and evidences God's "handiwork" (Ps 19:1-4). In the second part, one finds a more sustained and intense praise of God's Torah (Ps 19:7-14). The first part may well have been based on ancient eulogies of a sun god, apart from any interest in Israelite conceptions of God's Torah.²⁶

²⁰Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 209-10.

²¹Richard J. Clifford, "Creation in the Psalms," in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, 65-66.

²²Gerhard Von Rad, "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, 54-56.

²³Clifford, "The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation," 515-16.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 515.

²⁵Von Rad, "The Theological Problem," 61.

²⁶Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 179-80.

However, assuming there was such a joinder of these “unrelated” parts, that joinder shows that creation’s praise of God was intended to serve in partnership with the praise of God’s law. The important point, however, is that to the extent the two parts of the psalm are related (perhaps in that they both express completeness—of God’s creation and of God’s law²⁷), the praise of nature appears subordinate to the praise of God’s law.²⁸ Thus, “though the vast firmament so high above us declares God’s praise, it is the Torah of God alone that reveals to mankind that he has a place in the universal scheme of things.”²⁹ On the other hand, Psalm 104 focuses almost solely on creation. It makes no reference to the people or history of Israel, and it has affinities to Genesis 1 that include linguistic parallels and a similar sequence of events.³⁰ Thus, one might indeed describe Psalm 104 as a true “hymn of creation,” but as such it is the exception that proves the rule for Creation faith in the Psalms. For the most part, and as discussed below, creation most often serves in a supporting role in the faith of the psalmists.

Nevertheless, this subsidiary role is significant, both in terms of its frequency in the Psalter and in its prominent function in a wide variety of psalms. Thus, creation appears as a motif throughout a broad range of traditional form-critical categories of psalms, from hymns to laments to royal psalms. The following discussion will demonstrate a variety of these functions, in particular: (a) as a basis for confidence in God’s redemptive power; (b) as an argument to motivate God to act in the present; and (c) as a warrant for social or ethical order in the world.

III. REPRESENTATIVE FUNCTIONS OF CREATION THEOLOGY

One of the most common functions of Creation theology is demonstrating the basis for the believer’s *confidence in God’s saving or redemptive power*. This is often expressed quite simply, as in Psalm 121: “I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved” (Ps 121:1-3). The idea is expressed more indirectly in Psalm 95: “O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (Ps 95:6-7). Here, creation implies *belonging to God* as sheep belong to and are led by their shepherd.³¹ Confidence in God as the Creator is also expressed in the mythological language of creation. Thus, in Psalm 93 the psalmist proclaims:

²⁷Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 343.

²⁸Trublet, “Le Motif de la creation,” 47.

²⁹Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 183.

³⁰Anderson, “Introduction,” 11.

³¹Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos*, 81.

The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty. . . . The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice. . . . More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters... majestic on high is the LORD. (Ps 93:3-4)

In Psalm 98, as a result of God's great victory, "Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; . . . Let the floods clap their hands. . . . for he is coming to judge the earth" (Ps 98:1, 7-9). In these two psalms, "the waters of chaos have become so tamed and transformed that, instead of being hostile to Yahweh, they roar their acclaim to the king."³² In this role, Creation is not a theory about how the world came to be, but rather serves as an affirmation "that the world is a well-ordered, reliable, and life-giving system, because God has ordained it that way and continues to preside effectively over the process."³³

Related perhaps to this role in instilling confidence in the ordered world is the function of *motivating God to act on behalf of the believer* or the community in the present. Thus, in Psalm 74, the psalmist asks God to "Remember your congregation, which you acquired long ago" (Ps 74:2). After recounting the destruction and ransacking of God's sanctuary, the psalmist almost tauntingly asks God: "Is the enemy to revile your name forever?" (Ps 74:10). Then he reminds God of his past greatness:

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 have fixed all the bounds of the earth; you made summer and winter. (Ps 74:12-17)

Similarly, in Psalm 89, the psalmist asks why, if God showed his faithfulness at Creation, he would not continue to show faithfulness with respect to his covenant with David to establish his throne forever.³⁴ Creation is similarly invoked to motivate God to action in Psalms 90 and 102. In each of these psalms, the psalmist liturgically remembers God's original act of salvation—liberation of the world from chaos—in order to move God to renew that act of salvation in the present by redeeming the believer or the community.³⁵

In some psalms, Creation serves as a *warrant for maintaining a certain social order*.³⁶ An example is Psalm 89, generally classified as a sort of royal lament for a recent defeat of a Davidic king.³⁷ The psalm begins with a recital of the covenant with David to "establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations," and later it speaks of the anointing of David and the promise to give him

³²Ibid., 100.

³³Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 26.

³⁴Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 428-30.

³⁵Clifford, "The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation," 512.

³⁶Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 149.

³⁷Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 416-18.

power over enemies and defeat his foes (Ps 89:3-4, 19-37). In between these two passages is a reference to God's faithfulness and mighty acts, illustrated by God's mythological defeat of the sea creature Rahab at Creation and the founding of the world (Ps 89:9-12). It is a regular feature of communal laments to recite glorious deeds of the past, but here the placement of the Creation story in the middle of the recital of the covenant and faithfulness suggest that Creation and the covenant with David constitute a single event.³⁸

The psalm regards the founding of the house of David as part of the foundation of the world, just as several Mesopotamian cosmogonies list the king and the temple as things created at the beginning.³⁹

In addition, God promises to the king the power that God mustered at Creation to defeat chaos: "I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers" (Ps 89:25). For the Davidic king, God will repeat the divine victory at Creation: just as God kept the cosmic waters of chaos at bay, he will assert similar power to maintain David's throne.⁴⁰

The powers overcome by Yahweh (Ps 89:10-13) have their counterpart in the Davidic ruler's domination of an earthly kingdom. . . . The cosmic taming power of Yahweh in vv 10-13 is demonstrated in the ruling power of the king.⁴¹

Thus, God's continued faithfulness in maintaining the created order will be paralleled by God's continued faithfulness in maintaining the rule of a Davidic dynasty.

Psalm 146 shows creation functioning *in the service of an ethical order*. The psalm is a hymn of praise to God, urging the believer not to trust "in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help" (Ps 146:2). Instead, believers are truly blessed "whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever" (Ps 146:5-6). Immediately following the recital of God's creative act and faithfulness, there appears a recital of the acts of God in ensuring justice. It is the God of Jacob

who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD opens the eyes of the blind; The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down. . . . he upholds the orphan and the widow. (Ps 146:5-8)

Similar sentiments appear in Psalm 33, where God's love of righteousness and justice is confirmed with a description of God's

³⁸Clifford, "Creation in the Psalms," 64-65.

³⁹Ibid., 63.

⁴⁰Anderson, "Introduction," 9, 103.

⁴¹Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 423.

action at Creation (Ps 33:4-9). Here, God's sense for order in the natural world is linked to God's sense for order in society. God's faithfulness in creation means a continuing faithfulness evidenced in a specific commitment to an ethical order.⁴²

A similar function for creation appears in Psalm 24. The psalm begins with a sort of hymn to God the Creator: "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it . . . for he has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers" (Ps 24:1-2). The second and somewhat liturgical part of the psalm emphasizes that entitlement to participate in worship and receive God's blessing belongs only to "those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to do what is false, and do not swear deceitfully" (Ps 24:3-6). The poetic motifs in the opening hymn, those of order (the created world) and chaos (the subjugation of the "seas" and "rivers") are thus transformed into moral concepts, good and evil, with respect to qualifications for worship.⁴³

IV. FROM ORIENTATION TO NEW ORIENTATION

The above discussion shows creation playing a role in a variety of the traditional forms of psalms, e.g., hymn, royal psalm, lament. As Brueggemann suggests, however, the Psalms might also be classified existentially in terms of the realities of human life. That is, the Psalms can be roughly grouped in categories of *orientation*, of *disorientation*, and of *new orientation*, since "the flow of human life characteristically is located either in the actual experience of one of these settings or is in movement from one to another."⁴⁴ Brueggemann expressly notes the presence of Creation faith primarily in what he identifies as psalms of *orientation*, such as Psalms 8, 33, 104, and 145, with their expression of confidence in the reliable orderliness of God's world and God's faithfulness in maintaining that order.⁴⁵ But as the preceding discussion above has shown regarding the function of creation in the Psalter, God's work in creating the world and sustaining the created world functions within Brueggemann's other two categories as well.

Thus, Creation faith serves in Psalm 74, a psalm of *disorientation*, to motivate God to address the disorientation and fix it: "Yahweh is known to be the answer to chaos, even as in the first combat against chaos."⁴⁶ Similarly, in Psalms 143 the psalmist prays to God for salvation from enemies, and states: "I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands" (Ps 143:5). This could be a reference solely to the Exodus tradition,⁴⁷

⁴²Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 155-56.

⁴³Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 212-13.

⁴⁴Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 19.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 28-38.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁷Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* (Waco: Word, 1983), 284.

but it is just as likely that it refers also or exclusively to the works of Creation. In Psalm 77 the psalmist recites:

I will remember your wonders of old. I will meditate on all your work, . . . With your strong arm you redeemed your people, . . . When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; the very deep trembled. . . . Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters." (Ps 74:11, 15-16, 19)

Here, the battle against the water references the parting of the Red Sea, the parting of the Jordan, *and the* cosmic battle against the primordial waters of chaos.⁴⁸ Finally, creation functions within the category of psalms of *new orientation*, to the extent they include hymns of praise.⁴⁹ Thus, in Psalm 146 the psalmist counts as blessed those "whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Ps 146:5-6). The following verses, noting God's faithfulness in deliverance from oppression and need, confirm the psalm as one remembering a moment of rescue from disorientation.⁵⁰ In short, a theology of creation pervades the Psalms even as categorized existentially.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The above discussion presents a representative rather than exhaustive survey of themes expressed by the psalmists' Creation faith. More could undoubtedly be said about the psalmist's Creation faith in the context of other, traditional form-critical categories of the Psalms, or with respect to other aspects of Israel's faith and worship. The point of the above discussion, however, is simply to demonstrate that creation serves in a variety of functions and occurs within a broad range of psalm types. In short, creation is not only a fundamental theological motif in Israel's faith, but is a pervasive and versatile motif as it is confessed in the Psalms.

To confirm this, one need only note the extent to which creation is expressly and directly connected to affirmations of God's "steadfast love" (חסד), the latter idea constituting one of the most fundamental theological concepts in the Hebrew Bible.⁵¹ Creation often appears in psalms extolling God's "steadfast love," and frequently the psalmist directly relates the fact of Creation to God's faithfulness. Psalm 136 is perhaps the best example. There the psalmist recites examples of God's acts of Creation—"O give thanks to the Lord of lords, . . . who alone does great wonders, . . . who by understanding made the heavens, . . . who spread out the earth on the waters, . . . who made the great lights," separating them with the affirmation "for his steadfast love endures forever" (Ps 136:3-9).

⁴⁸Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos*, 108; Clifford, "Creation in the Psalms," 63.

⁴⁹Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 158.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 163.

⁵¹Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 217, 226.

"These specific actions that live on the lips of Israel permit the larger witness that Yahweh is indeed everywhere and always reliable."⁵² In other psalms, the same relationship is made, sometimes expressly and sometimes implicitly. Psalm 89 begins with a hymn that sets the tone of the entire psalm: "I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever, with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations" (Ps 89:1). A few verses later, the psalmist affirms that "Your faithfulness surrounds you," and then recites God's act of Creation in crushing Rahab, founding the heavens and the earth, and creating north and south (Ps 89:8-12). In Psalm 33 the psalmist states that "the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD," and he follows immediately with a recital of Creation: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made. . . . For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Ps 33:5, 6-9). In Psalm 100 the psalmist notes that "It is he that made us" and ends the psalm with the standard "his steadfast love endures forever" (Ps 100:3, 5). Although God's "steadfast love" is often associated with the saving of Israel from oppression, the Psalms demonstrate that the original act of Creation also manifests this "steadfast love."

This observation suggests that Creation theology may have had a more central place in Israel's worship than one might think, given the extended Exodus narrative and the frequent recapitulations of the Exodus event in the Psalms and the prophets. Knierim thus notes that there is little basis, ultimately, for concluding that Israel's Creation faith is subordinate to its theology of history, which emphasizes God's saving action in liberating Israel from oppression in Egypt and leading them to the Promised Land.⁵³ One might cite, in support of that thesis, those psalms which offer Creation in itself as a basis for praise of God. This would include Psalm 149 ("Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created"); Psalm 135 ("Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good . . . he it is who makes the clouds rise at the ends of the earth"); and Psalm 93 ("The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty. . . . He has established the world; it shall never be moved"). It is perhaps in these hymns that the Psalms come closest to expressing an outright theology of Creation *per se*, not subordinated to such issues as social or ethical order, trust and confidence, or Israel's covenant relationship. Although the praise is often directed at God for a number of reasons, creation of the world in and of itself appears as a proper and sufficient basis for such praise.

This is not to suggest that the Psalms encompass, even implicitly or indirectly, the complete expression of Israel's Creation faith. For example, one item missing from the Psalms' Creation faith is the eschatological dimension so strongly suggested in the prophets, where God's creative power will transform eschatological chaos into

⁵²*Ibid.*, 214.

⁵³Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 180.

a new creation.⁵⁴ Thus, Isaiah looks to a future restoration of Israel to Zion and promises, based on God's defeat of Rahab at Creation, that "the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing" (Is 51:9-11).⁵⁵ Moreover, the extended Creation narrative in Genesis 1 certainly develops many themes much more fully than they are developed in the Psalms. Nevertheless, the Psalms arguably present creation as having much fuller significance, not only because of the diversity of themes and functions presented, but particularly because they present Creation faith in the context of Israel's public worship.

This suggests one final observation about Creation faith in the Psalms. As suggested in the introduction, the mere placement of the Creation narrative at the beginning of the Hebrew Bible, along with the extended narrative treatment it is given there, undoubtedly confirms for many believers the centrality of creation in Israel's faith. Yet the suggestion by Genesis 1-3 of the importance of creation in Israel's faith finds little expression elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible—except perhaps in the Psalms. As this study shows, Creation faith pervades the Psalms on many levels. Thus, one could well argue that even if the Genesis Creation narrative did not exist, one could conclude from the Psalms themselves that creation held a fundamental place in Israel's faith and worship.

⁵⁴McKenzie, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought," 1294.

⁵⁵Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos*, 108-9.