

Margaret Barker

## The Book of Enoch and Cosmic Sin.

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“Unity with nature is the foundation of man’s existence on the planet. It is the foundation of all social relationships between groups and people. Without it, the present civilisation, like those of the past, will move towards decline and decay.” —Edmond Bordeaux Szekely

**The Book of Enoch is the oldest apocalyptic writing known.** In the centuries after it was written it was held in high esteem, but eventually fell from favour, and by the ninth century it had disappeared altogether. It was not until 1773 that two Ethiopic manuscripts were discovered in Abyssinia. The Book of Enoch was also ‘rediscovered’ earlier this century among the Dead Sea Scrolls in the caves of Qumran.

According to Genesis, Enoch “walked with God and was no more, because God took him away” (Gen. 5.24). This walking with God was understood to refer to special revelations made to him, and this— together with his mysterious disappearance— added to his popularity amongst apocalyptic writers. The Book of Enoch influenced later Jewish apocrypha, and left marks in the New Testament and amongst the works of the early Fathers. It still gives important insights into the Origin of Evil and Covenant theory (see ‘The Cosmic Covenant’ by Robert Murray in this issue).

In two places in that part of 1 Enoch referred to as the *Similitudes*, we read of a “Great Oath” which binds the forces of the Creation. At first sight, this seems to be an idea so bizarre that it cannot have any relevance to twentieth-century Christianity. When this idea of the ‘Cosmic Covenant’ is explored, however, it proves to be one of the most significant aspects of Enochic theology, and one which comes very near to much of what environmentalists are saying today. It provides a totally new way of looking at the Creation. Even though 1 Enoch was known and used by the first Christians, this aspect of its theology was lost along with so much else.

### The Great Oath

This important document, the *Similitudes*, describes Enoch’s three visions, of which two are about a ‘Great Oath’. In 1 Enoch 41, all the heavenly bodies are kept on their course in accordance with the oath which binds them. 1 Enoch 69 sees the workings of the Great Oath. The first part of the text is confused, but we are told that the powerful oath was entrusted to the

archangel Michael. The oath secures the order of the Creation, and holds the heavens firm and the Earth secure. It keeps the sea in check with a barrier of sand. It regulates the course of the Sun and Moon. Then there is a list of all the other forces of Creation: spirits of water, winds, thunders, hail, frost, mist, rain and dew. They all function safely through the strength of the great oath, and they praise the Lord of Spirits. The text here seems to be in the form of a poem or hymn, with a refrain at the end of each section: “And they are strong through his oath:

And the heaven was suspended before the world was created, And for ever.  
And through it the earth was founded upon the water,  
And from the secret recesses of the mountains come beautiful waters,  
From the creation of the world and unto eternity.  
And through that oath the sea was created,  
And as its foundation He set for it the sand against the time of (its) anger.  
And it dare not pass beyond it from the creation of the world unto eternity.  
And through that oath are the depths made fast,  
And abide and stir not from their place from eternity to eternity,  
And through that oath the sun and moon complete their course,  
And deviate not from their ordinance from eternity to eternity.  
And through that oath the stars complete their course,  
And He calls them by their names,  
And they answer Him from eternity to eternity...  
And this oath is mighty over them,  
And through it [they are preserved and] their paths are preserved,  
And their course is not destroyed.”— 1 Enoch 69.16-21,25

## Binding the Creation

The idea of creating by ‘binding’ the forces of Creation— the elements— is very ancient. It was widely known among ancient peoples who believed in a cosmic or eternal covenant, which kept all things in harmony, in accordance with a divine plan. To break this covenant was to release forces which could destroy Creation. It is interesting that the Hebrew word for covenant, *b’rith*, is thought to be related to the word for ‘binding’. The German word for ‘covenant’ is ‘*bund*’. Its verb ‘*binden*’ means ‘binding’. In effect, a ‘*Bund*’ is a binding oath.

The climax of the last vision of judgement in the *Similitudes* is the revealing of the Son of Man and his passing judgement on all those who had corrupted the Earth— binding them, so that evil passes away.

## The ‘Cosmic Covenant’

Covenant is a very important word in the Bible; the very names by which the two parts are known, Old Testament and New Testament, actually mean Old Covenant and New Covenant.

By exploring the ancient concept of the eternal covenant, which is mentioned in the Old Testament, we may add another dimension to our understanding of Christianity as a New Covenant.

We think of covenant in connection with the great figures of the Old Testament— Noah, Abraham, David and Moses. Each covenant marks a step forward in the religious history of Israel. After the great flood, God makes a covenant with all living creatures that the Earth will never again be destroyed by flood (Gen. 9.8-11). Noah and his family are obliged in their turn never to shed blood, nor to consume it. With Abraham, there were two occasions of covenant; the land of Canaan was to be given to his descendants (Gen. 15.18-21), and all his male children had to be circumcised (Gen. 17.9-14). A covenant was made with Moses and the Israelite people at Sinai, when the Ten Commandments were given (Exodus 24.8), and the blood of a sacrificial ox was sprinkled on the altar and on the people to seal the covenant. A royal covenant— the eternal covenant— as made with David (2 Sam 7.13), promising to establish his dynasty forever.

The Great Oath, the Cosmic Covenant and the Eternal Covenant are all, in essence, the same thing, and we find the ideas in several parts of the Old Testament.

## **Shutting Out the Waters of Chaos**

Genesis 1 offers several hints that it replaced an older account of the Creation story (see 'The Cosmic Covenant' by Robert Murray in this issue). It is very different from the image of a binding and restraining of evil forces, although later traditions imply that this was the work of Day One, and so part of the forbidden mystery. Nonetheless, Genesis 1 gives a picture of ordered calm. God commands and it is done. The waters separate, the firmament appears and there are no hostile seas. Wherever the Genesis meditation on the nature of the world originated, it reflects a relatively late view of the Creation.

Nowhere is the older account of the Creation spelt out in the Old Testament. It has been overlooked. We have to pick up what hints we can from the prophets and the Psalms, and in the books which are not in the Old Testament. These fit into a coherent picture of a more violent Creation, where hostile forces were restrained by the power of God. Enoch's two short pieces on the Great Oath are the best extended account in existence.

Job 38 describes the Creation in a very Enochic way. The Lord asks Job: "who shut in the sea with doors... and prescribed bounds for it?" (38.8-10); "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades?" (38.31). This is exactly what we find in Enoch; binding the waters and the heavenly bodies. The 'Prayer of Manasseh', in the Deutero-Canonical books ["Apocrypha"], begins by addressing God as the one who shackled the sea, confined the deep and sealed it with his terrible and glorious name. Here, as in Enoch, it is the power of the name which binds the unruly forces. Here and in the story of the evil angels, which will be described further on, we find that

water, depth and chaos are closely linked. Although not prominent in Enoch, this idea is deeply rooted in the Near-Eastern creation.

There are several legends about restraining the great flood and all that it represents. One, in the Babylonian Talmud, says that King David suppressed the great flood by writing the name of God on a potsherd, and throwing it into the deep. The power of the name kept the waters in check.

The Psalms are full of pictures of God's triumph over the waters, or rescuing his faithful ones from the threat of being overwhelmed by them. Psalm 18.16-17 says that the Lord rescues the Psalmist from many waters, from strong enemies and those who hate him. Time and again, we find that God sets bounds for the sea which it may not pass. They were the sign that the cosmic covenant was secure. Psalm 24.2 says the Lord founded the Earth on the seas. Psalm 46 describes the power of God in the midst of roaring waters which symbolise threatening forces; here they are raging nations (Ps. 46.6). Psalm 69 begins: "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck". Psalm 93.4 says the Lord is mightier than the sea.

Water, and the binding of it, is one of the strongest symbolisms in the New Testament. It is Jesus, the revelation of the Word of God, who 'binds' this unruly force forever. It is with water that one is baptised, and thus 'bound'. When Jesus stills the storm, the disciples ask: "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?" (Matt. 8.27). When the seer John sees the new Jerusalem, the first Heaven and the first Earth have passed away, and there is no more sea (Rev. 21.1). In all these instances, the sea represents what it had represented in the older mythology— chaos. Power over the sea was proof of divine power. Thus Jesus stills the storm, Peter is safe so long as he has faith, and the new Creation in Revelation has no more evil.

## **The Web of Life**

The scriptures make clear that the everlasting covenant does not just bind the natural forces; it also includes moral restraints, and gives us a picture of one law embracing what we might divide into two: the natural and the moral. One of the best descriptions of this idea comes not from the ancient Near East, but from our Anglo-Saxon ancestors. In *The Way of Wyrð*, Brian Bates describes their world-view as he has reconstructed it from an ancient manuscript in the British Museum.

They had a vision of the universe, from the gods to the underworld, connected by an enormous all-reaching system of fibres, rather like a three-dimensional spider 's web. Everything was connected by strands of fibre to the all-encompassing web. This image far surpasses in ambition our present views of ecology, in which we have extended notions of cause and effect to include longer and more lateral chains of influence in the natural world. The web of fibres of the Anglo-Saxon sorcerer offers an ecological model which encompasses individual life events as well as general physical and biological phenomena, non-material as well as material events,

and challenges the very cause-and-effect chains upon which our ecological theories depend (p.12).

This image of the web is very powerful, especially when contrasted with the linear way of thought, which sees one thing causing another in an endless chain, and one person holding ultimate power. Progress, pilgrimage, getting there and 'making it' are aspects of a linear view of life. The web view, with everything in all-encompassing interdependence, and several causes and effects in every rupture, whether in the material or non-material world, represents more accurately the thought-world of the cosmic covenant. Progress is not seen as a great alteration, exploiting what we have been given, but rather as healing through 're-binding'. The great restoration is about reconstructing the web.

The Old Testament contains many examples of the vision of destruction; of what happens when the covenant which binds the created order is broken. Some of the prophetic pictures of the broken covenant speak directly to our age of ecological crisis. Isaiah 24.4-6 sees heaven and earth withering. Note the parallel from the Lord's prayer: "on Earth as it is in Heaven".

"The earth mourns and withers,  
the world languishes and withers;  
the heavens languish together with the earth.  
The earth lies polluted  
under its inhabitants;  
for they have transgressed the laws,  
violated the statutes,  
broken the everlasting covenant.  
Therefore a curse devours the earth,  
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;  
therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched,  
and few men are left."

This is the same picture as Enoch's, and the pattern continues to correspond. In Enoch, the broken covenant leads to the judgement; as it does here in Isaiah 24.21-22:

"On that day the Lord will punish  
the host of heaven, in heaven,  
and the kings of the earth, on the Earth.  
They will be gathered together  
as prisoners in a pit,  
they will be shut up in a prison,  
and after many days they will be punished."

The Old Testament describes the connection between 'fertility' and 'peace' in numerous passages (Ezekiel 34.25). Since peace is ensured by the covenant, its breaking will affect the

fertility of the land. Such is the meaning of droughts and bad harvests. Isaiah 33:7-9 couldn't make this any clearer:

“The envoys of peace weep bitterly,  
The treaty is broken  
Its witnesses are despised  
The land mourns and wastes away..  
And Bashan (smooth, fertile land) and Carmel (garden)  
Drop their leaves.”

When the covenant is broken, powerful destructive forces are released and the Creation is at risk. We see another picture of this in Joel. Evil enemies had come against the land (2:2):

“Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains  
a great and powerful people;  
their like has never been from of old  
nor will be again after them  
through the years of all generations.”

and the land itself had ceased to bear food (1:17):

“The seed shrivels under the clods,  
the storehouses are desolate;  
the granaries are ruined  
because the grain has failed.”

We think of the disasters of war and the disasters of famine as belonging to separate categories, but the prophets saw both as aspects of the broken covenant.

## **The Great Restoration**

The way to restoration is expressed in “Rend your hearts, and not your garments.” (Joel 2.13) and the Lord's promise, “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh” (Joel 2.28). When the great covenant was to be restored, the Earth was to regain its fertility, and the people of God were to be saved from the evil forces which had broken the cosmic covenant (Joel 3). It was this passage in Joel which inspired Peter's great Pentecost sermon (Acts 2.14-36). This shows that the giving of the Spirit and the birth of the Church were closely bound up with the vision of a renewal of the cosmic covenant; the restoration of all Creation. The apocalyptic tradition, which was the mother of Christianity, preserved the idea of the cosmic covenant, the judgement, and the great renewal.

The binding of evil also has a place in the New Testament. Casting out demons requires that the Strong One be bound first (Matt. 12.29). In Revelation 20.1-16, St. John saw how the Strong One (Azazel) was bound for a thousand years, so that the Earth could enjoy the Millennium

Kingdom— Eden restored. Peter, having recognised Jesus as the Messiah, is given the power to bind and to loose, both in Heaven and on Earth (Matt. 16.13-19). The most likely explanation of Peter's commission is that he was given power over the evil ones (Luke 10.17, where demons are subjected in Jesus' name— note the role of the name in the task of binding).

The power given to Peter (symbolised by the keys of the kingdom of Heaven which now form the papal coat of arms) was later interpreted as the power to bind and loose sins, the power to absolve. The roots of the idea, however, lie not in forgiving the sin committed by human beings, but in protecting them from evil done to them. The binding was the restraining of evil forces.

In Enoch's Book of the Watchers, the evil forces are described in an amazingly realistic manner. He tells of the revolt of 200 powerful angels led by Azazel and Semihazah. Knowing the secrets of Creation, they came down from Heaven and taught them to humankind. A later version says that beautiful adorned women lured still more angels to them.

According to The Book of Enoch, the rebel angels, or 'watchers', "took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms and enchantments... They became pregnant, and they bore great giants, who consumed all the acquisitions of men. And when men could no longer sustain them, the giants turned against them and devoured mankind. And they began to sin against birds, and beasts, and reptiles, and fish, and to devour one another's flesh, and drink the blood. Then the earth laid accusation against the lawless ones." (VII.1)

"Azazel taught men to make swords, and knives, and shields, and breastplates, and made known to them the metals (of the earth) and the art of working them, and bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of antimony, and the beautifying of the eyelids, and all kinds of costly stones, and all colouring tinctures. And there arose much godlessness, and they committed fornication, and they were led astray and became corrupt in all their ways." (VIII.1)

In doing this, they violated powerful taboos, and hence committed the most heinous cosmic sins— including, as we have seen, just what we are doing today on an ever greater scale. They wilfully destroyed the natural order by extracting metals from the bowels of the Earth to develop technological instruments of war and of seduction. The fallen angels are incarnate in our self-serving political and corporate leaders, who are blind to their real obligations to Heaven and to Earth, and who still persist in oppressing and denaturing God's Creation— very significantly, they were made blind.

In his vision, Enoch saw the Son of Man restoring the great bonds of creation, healing the rift between Earth and Heaven, and thus restoring the cosmos.

The miracle of healing in John 9 shows how deeply this world-view permeates the Gospels. A man had been born blind, not because of any sin, but so that the power of God could be shown. Jesus healed him. Jesus asked the blind man if he believed in the Son of Man. Why should

Jesus have asked about the Son of Man when there had been a healing of blindness? If we read the Fourth Gospel in the light of Enoch, we realise that the ending of blindness was a sign that the power of evil was being broken and the cosmic covenant was being restored. This was the true role of the Son of Man.

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In the Book of Enoch it says that the leader of the fallen angels was called Azazel, and he is often identified with Lucifer (the Lightbringer) or Lumiel (the light of God™). He taught men to forge swords and make shields and breastplates (body armour). Azazel also taught them metallurgy and how to mine from the earth and use different metals. As we have seen, the fallen angel repented his sins and sentenced himself to cosmic exile among the stars. The Book of Jubilee says that the archangels bound the Watchers in the depths of the earth and in Judaic lore they are imprisoned in a mysterious second Heaven. However, it is also said that some of these mighty warriors have a special place reserved for them in Sheol, the Jewish underworld.

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