



**Is someone  
at the  
'Wheel'?**

**Isaiah 44:24 to 45:13**

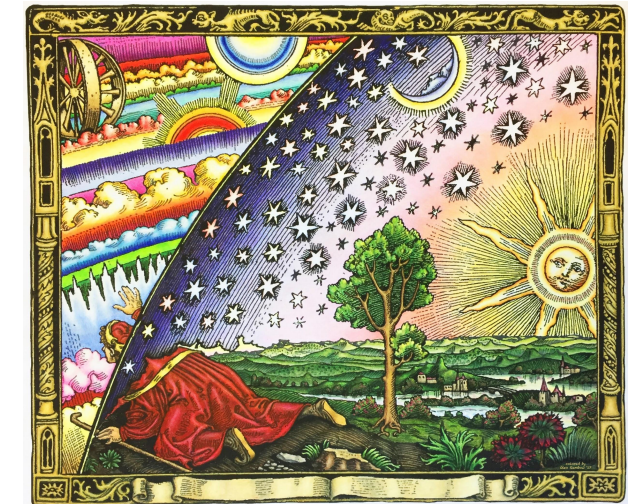
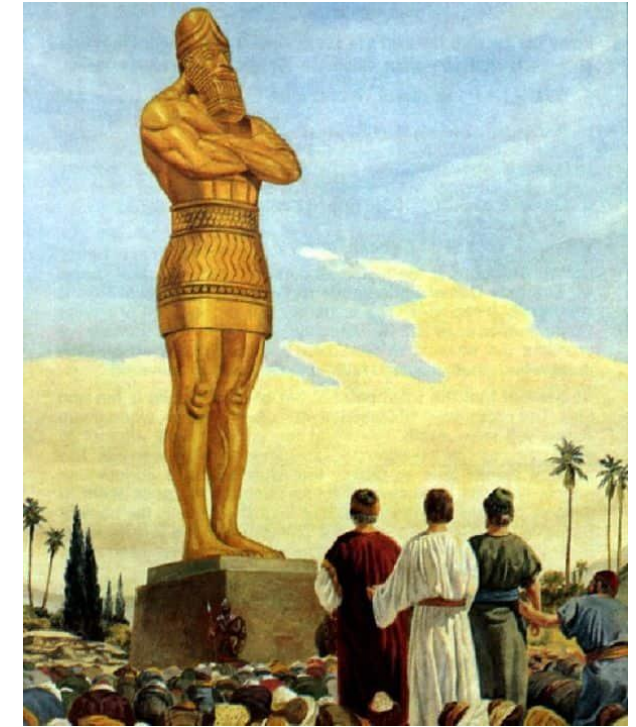


# Ambiguity – *Why does it look like God is not in Control?*

- The exile and the victory of the Babylonian God Marduk lead to deep questions.
- There were 2 typical answers in the ancient world:

1) Nation cults tied military success to the stature of their deity. Maybe Israel's God is not powerful or had abandoned them.

2) The gnostic solution: The gnostics disassociated pure deity from the material universe.



# A Third Option

- Hanson points out that both Nation Cults and Gnosticism died out.
- Isaiah's 3<sup>rd</sup> option has stood the test of time:



God is involved in the events of history but not guided by a nationalistic agenda. **The divine purpose is universal justice** and even this pagan conqueror, Cyrus, is going to serve God's purpose.

*“The moral norms that Israel extrapolated from its perception of God’s interaction with human beings were norms that transcended the self interests of any clan or nation. The Hebrew slaves were delivered, not because God loved Hebrews and hated Egyptians, but because God loved justice and hated oppression. From that experience the religious leaders of Israel inferred laws protecting the weak and poor and opposing exploitation and claims of special privilege” (Hanson).*

# Two Similar Views Today

- Instead of seeing a sovereign God with a universal purpose, I focus on:
  1. God's individual agenda for me or for a particular religion

OR

  2. A gnostic type view of a distant and uninvolved God





# Assertions of Sovereignty

- *“I am the Lord who makes all things.”*
- *“Does the clay say to the potter ‘What are you making?’”*
- *“This is what the Lord says, your redeemer, who formed you in the womb.”*
- *“(He) says of Cyrus ‘He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem ‘let it be rebuilt’ and of the temple ‘Let its foundations be laid.’*
- *“I am the Lord and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster. I the Lord do all these things.”*



## **I find the assertions of God’s sovereignty and divine purpose difficult to hold:**

From appearances, it can seem that Israel is formed and destroyed by random forces in history. It does not look like it is formed in the womb or by a potter at the wheel.

I see randomness in my individual life. History and evolution, in particular, look random as well. **Is God’s sovereignty really at work?**

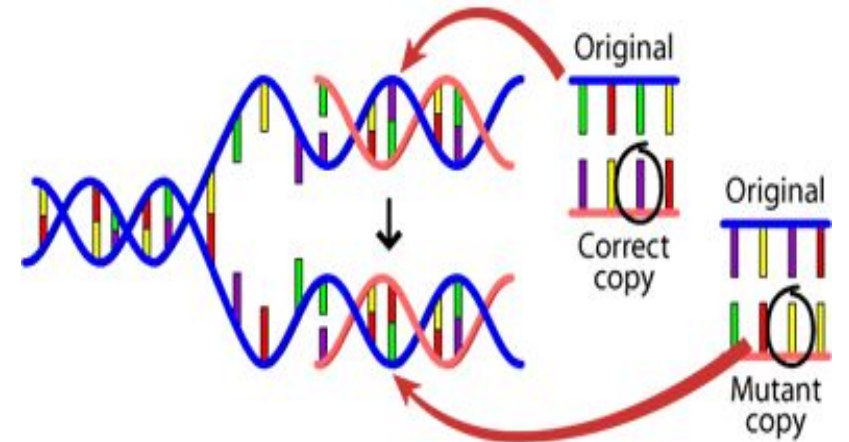
# Evolution: A Chaotic Beginning

- The topics of randomness and sovereignty connect with what I have been reading about evolution:

*The Greatest Show on Earth* (Dawkins),  
*The Love and Quasars* (Wallace),  
*The Unbearable Wholeness of Being* (Delio)

*The Language of God* (Collins),  
*God after Darwin* (Haught)

- I was startled when I delved into the mechanisms of how evolution works and the apparent random mistakes involved which very rarely provide a survival advantage.
- I was further thrown for a loop when I had genetics test this summer that showed I have a genetic deletion (a spelling mistake!) that prevents my body from manufacturing sperm.

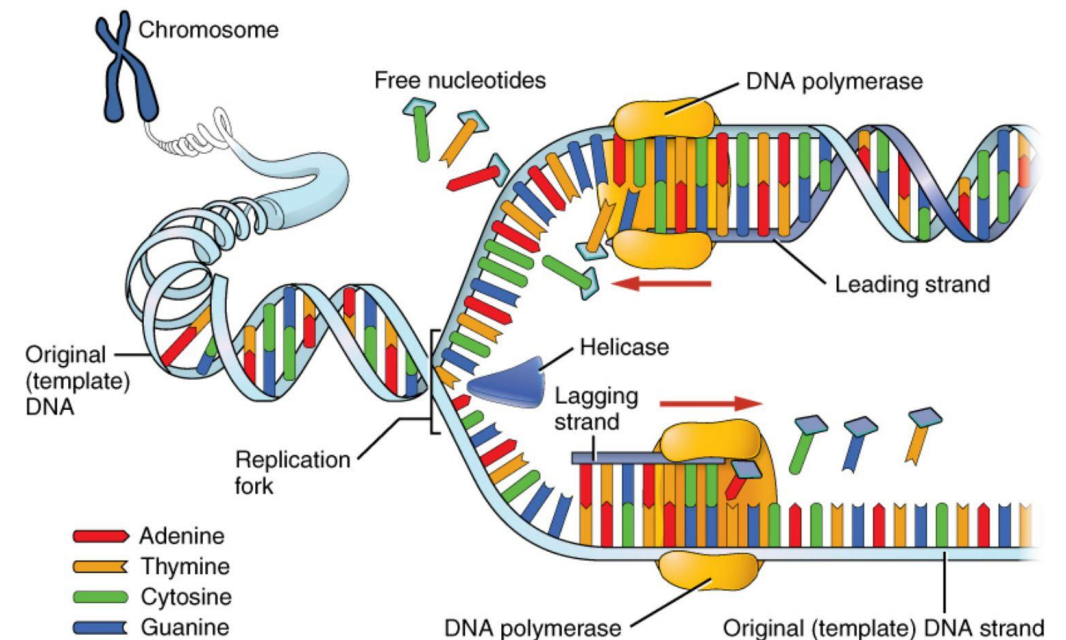


# Is it Impersonal, Random, Wasteful?

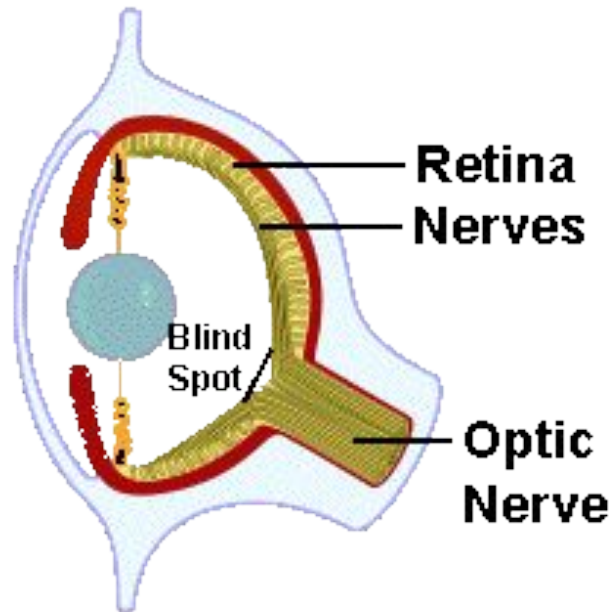
– From Francis Collins (*The Language of God*):

*“We can now see that the variation [Darwin] postulated is supported by naturally occurring mutations in DNA. These are estimated to occur at a rate of about one error every 100 million base pairs per generation. (That means, by the way, that since we all have two genomes of 3 billion base pairs each, one from our mother and one from our father, we all have roughly 60 new mutations that were not present in either of our parents.)”*

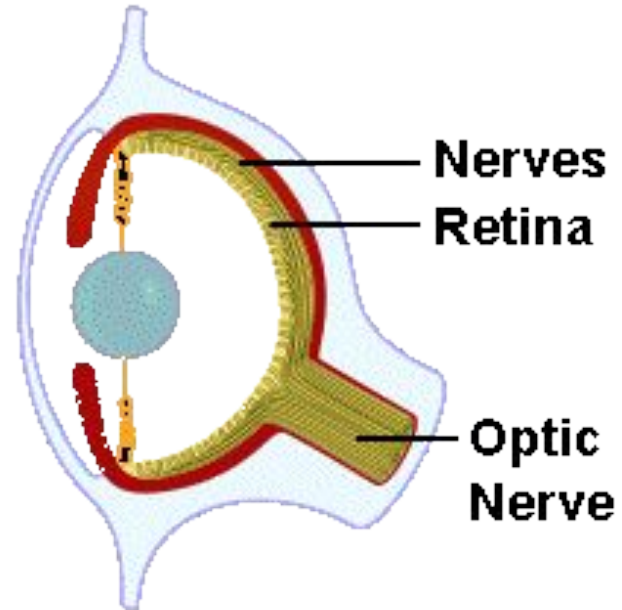
*“Most of those mutations occur in parts of the genome that are not essential, and therefore they have little or no consequence. The ones that fall in the more vulnerable parts of the genome are generally harmful, and are thus rapidly culled out of the population because they reduce reproductive fitness. But on rare occasions, a mutation will arise by chance that offers a slight degree of selective advantage.”*



# Illustration: *Is the eye designed...*



**Vertebrate**



**Cephalopod**



*...or did it  
come about  
randomly?*

For me, **randomness and trial and error are the Cyrus I don't like.**  
It seems ungodly, it seems to me that God can do better than that.



# A matter



# of perspective

## A cynical, materialistic lens:

P.Z. Myers

“You don’t have a heavenly father at all. You’re a mediocre product of a wasteful and entirely impersonal process. We’ve done the paternity tests. We are apes and the descendants of apes, who were the descendants of rat like primates, who were the children of reptiles, who were the spawn of amphibians, who were the terrestrial progeny of fish, who came from worms, who were assembled from single celled microorganisms, who were the products of chemistry. Your daddy was a film of chemical slime on a Hadean rock, and he didn’t care about you-he was only obeying the laws of thermodynamics.”

## A faith-based lens:

Paul Wallace (Author of ‘Love and Quasars’)

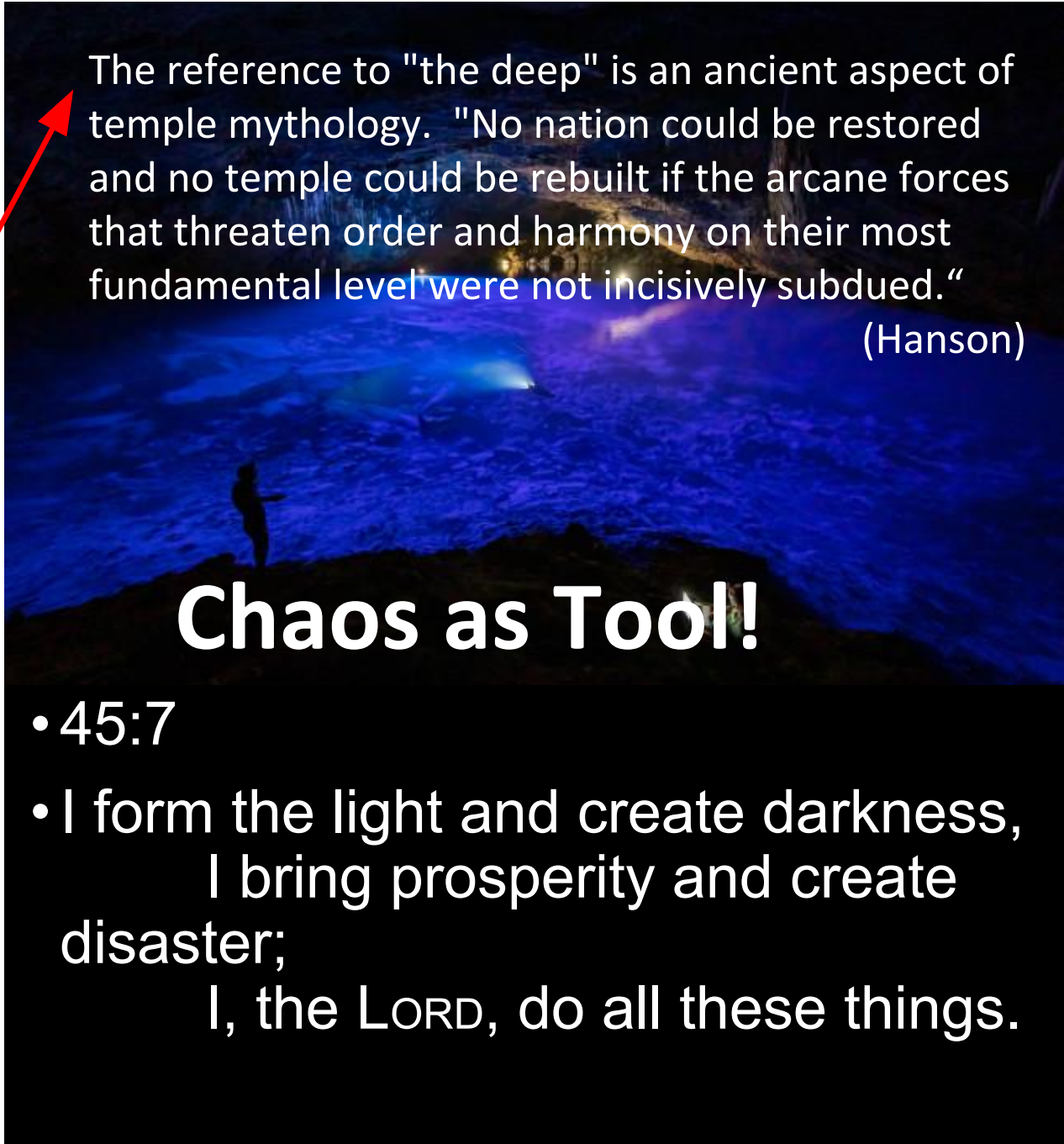
You have a heavenly father. You’re an amazing product of his ongoing creation project. We’ve discovered a lot about that project, which has been going on for billions of years. We are human beings, the descendants of apes, who were drawn from earlier smaller primates. Our lineage also includes reptiles and amphibians and fish and worms and even single-celled organisms. Like a flower that grows from the dirt yet is not itself dirt, we have been gradually assembled out of chaotic and disorganized elements. You were formed from the dust of the ground, given the breath of life, and carry the image of a loving and creative Father who is crazy about you.”

**No scientific experiment or observation can distinguish between these scenarios.**

**These statements differ only in what is not scientific about them. (Paul Wallace)**

# Chaos as an Enemy!

- “This is what the LORD says—  
your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb:
- I am the LORD,  
the Maker of all things,  
who stretches out the heavens,  
who spreads out the earth by myself,  
<sup>25</sup> who foils the signs of false prophets  
and makes fools of diviners,  
who overthrows the learning of the wise  
and turns it into nonsense,  
<sup>26</sup> who carries out the words of his servants  
and fulfills the predictions of his messengers,
- who says of Jerusalem, ‘It shall be inhabited,’  
of the towns of Judah, ‘They shall be rebuilt,’  
and of their ruins, ‘I will restore them,’  
<sup>27</sup> **who says to the watery deep, ‘Be dry,  
and I will dry up your streams,’**  
<sup>28</sup> who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd  
and will accomplish all that I please;  
he will say of Jerusalem, “Let it be rebuilt,”  
and of the temple, “Let its foundations be laid.”’



The reference to "the deep" is an ancient aspect of temple mythology. "No nation could be restored and no temple could be rebuilt if the arcane forces that threaten order and harmony on their most fundamental level were not incisively subdued."

(Hanson)

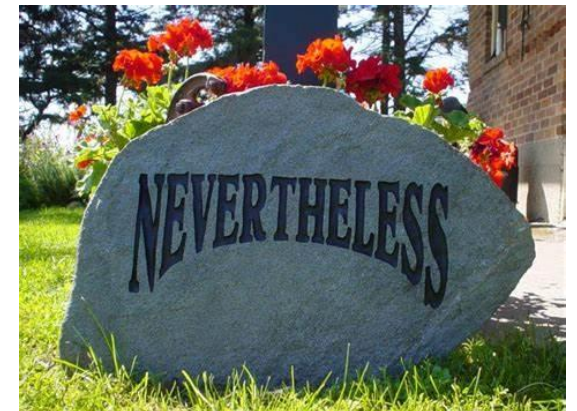
## Chaos as Tool!

- 45:7
- I form the light and create darkness,  
I bring prosperity and create  
disaster;  
I, the LORD, do all these things.

# Could it be Both?

- “Taken out of context, the claim of this verse is problematic, for it is affirmed that *Yahweh creates evil*, a statement sure to vex and puzzle. Taken in context, however, the doxological claim wants to eliminate all rival claims, either about the power of the Babylonian gods or the autonomy of Cyrus or the voice of Israel in its dissenting mistrust. None of these count: Babylonian Gods have no voice in the future of Babylon. Cyrus has no clout in the rise of his empire. Israel has no vote on its destiny. Everything is settled on Yahweh’s terms, for Yahweh is without rival, advisor, competitor, or aide.” (WB)

- Second Isaiah, witness to the destruction of Zion before pagan hosts, was not one to offer facile explanations for the persistence of evil. His view of reality was complex enough to include a vision of God as dragon slayer (51:9b) and of "the deep" as something requiring decisive divine action. Isaiah 45:7, far from denying the contradictions of life, hold up to them a defiant ***nevertheless.***” (Hanson)





# Defiantly Hopeful

- *“[Nevertheless] is a proclamation that plays a more important function than explaining the past; it becomes a creative element in creating a future, a future not subject to the changing whims of blind fates but directed by the God of justice and compassion who addresses each heart yearning for wholeness with a defiantly hopeful word” (Hanson).*

'I form light create and create darkness,  
I make weal and create woe;  
I the Lord do all these things.'



# Discuss:

- Isaiah 45:9 says *“Woe to you who strive with your Maker, earthen vessels with the potter! Does the clay say to the one who fashions it, “What are you making”? or “Your work has no handles”?* When you see yourself and creation as the clay and God as the potter:
  - Do you feel trust or feel powerless?
  - Do you feel humble or indignant?
  - Do you feel hopeful or out of control?
  - Do you feel grateful or entitled?
- Is there a metaphor (for God’s action in your life) other than Potter and clay that connects better with you?



# Another Metaphor:

## *Conductor and the Orchestra*

- The conductor doesn't always give us a piece of music that we like.
- We will not grow and become better musicians unless we play some pieces we don't like.
- The piece of music we have been given to play will be different from our neighbour.
- If all played the same piece, we would not be a band.
- Our role is to watch the conductor, listen to our neighbours, stay in tune, and play the piece we have been given the best that we can.





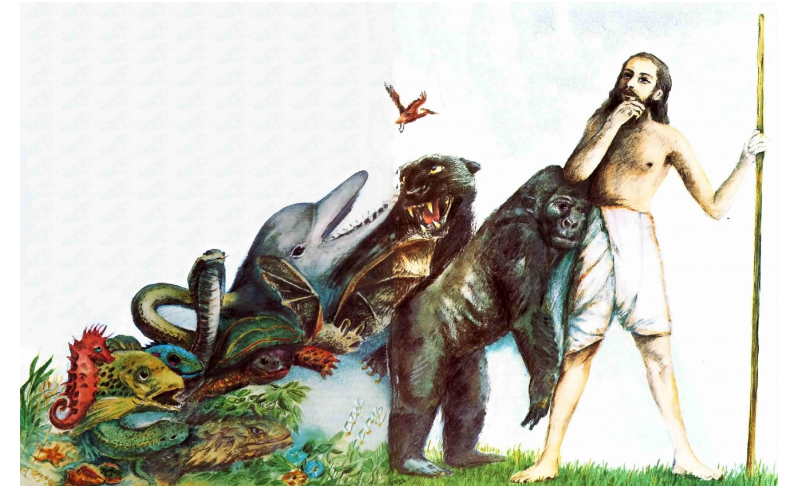
# Discuss:

- How do you react to God's sovereignty? Is it a positive feeling?
- Does it change if we say love is sovereign?



# Love is Sovereign

- Could it be that sovereignty means that over the long run, all forces including chaos and randomness bend their knee to God’s purposes. Could we say that love is sovereign?



*“If love is the principal energy of life, the whole within every whole, and evolution has direction in the unfolding of consciousness, then it is not difficult to see that evolution is the movement toward greater wholeness and consciousness, that is the rise of love. Love undergirds the union of elements center to center; as wholes unite with wholes, they differentiate and personalize through unity.” (Delio).*

