

Addis Ababa Bible Training Institute Report

The Chaos Monster and The Windermere Children



As the students of the AABTI approach the “end” of their Bible training (at least in the classroom setting we have enjoyed together for the past 20 months), it is appropriate to be somewhat reflective regarding both the world of the Scriptural record, and the world as it is and has been in the recent history of our day and time. Ethiopia has seen profoundly dysfunctional and traumatic events that reveal the impact of evil on human cultures. Those of us that seek to prepare these men for this world need to emphasize the painful traumas which leave deep seated scars such as the Nazis ghastly treatment of the Jews during WWII. Ethiopians have within their own memories similar atrocities perpetrated against their people during the Communist “Derg” regime under Mengistu from 1974 to 1991.

The movie portrayed in the picture above, “The Windermere Children,” is an amazing and touching effort to revisit the traumas inflicted by the Nazis on the Jews and, in the movie, a cohort of some 700 children who survived and were brought to England and Scotland for some efforts at rehabilitation in the post WWII period. Based on true life, and true characters, some of whom share their recollections at the end of the movie, this is a portrayal that reminds all who view it of the “Chaos” that was inflicted upon millions during the WWII, and prior, events. God’s people need to be aware of and prepared for the “Chaos” that comes from a world afflicted by rebellion against God. That is a major part of the Biblical narrative from Genesis through Revelation.

The Old Testament portrays creation as God’s heroic act of imposing order on a primordial chaos. In Genesis 1, we read that the earth was “formless and empty,” with darkness covering “the deep”—a picture not of nothingness, but of a chaotic, unstructured state over which God’s Spirit moves. In speaking creation into existence, God divides light from darkness, separates the waters, and sets boundaries to formerly undifferentiated material. This reordering is not just physical but carries deep theological meaning—it demonstrates that what appears as raw, uncontrolled chaos is brought under divine sovereignty and design.

This motif of ordering chaos resonates with ancient Near Eastern traditions that depicted creation as a cosmic battle between order and chaos. Many of these cultures featured a "Chaoskampf" (struggle against chaos) narrative—that being a struggle between a deity and a chaos monster (or sea dragon). Although the Genesis account does not depict a literal battle, it carries the echoes of these cultural beliefs. For example, in Isaiah 27:1 God is portrayed in a dramatic future act of judgment against Leviathan, described as a twisting serpent or sea dragon, symbolizing chaotic forces that threaten cosmic order. Similarly, the poetic descriptions in Job 41 of Leviathan serve as a potent reminder that even the mightiest chaos creatures ultimately fall under God's absolute power. These images use the symbolism of dragons and monstrous sea creatures to emphasize that chaos, however fearsome, is neither independent nor eternal—it is subdued by the Creator's authoritative word.

The symbolism behind these creatures goes beyond aesthetics—it communicates a profound theological truth. The initial chaotic state in Genesis (often rendered as "tohu wabohu," meaning "formless and void") is not an accident but the very substrate upon which God establishes a purposeful, orderly cosmos. The chaos dragon imagery also appears in contexts that hint at the ongoing struggle between divine order and the disruptive forces of sin. For instance, when the serpent in Genesis 3 tempts humanity, it introduces an element of rebellion akin to the chaos represented by Leviathan; yet even here, God's promise of eventual redemption points to a time when all disorder will be finally vanquished. In this way, the recurring imagery of sea monsters and dragons in various OT passages underscores that the battle against chaos is both a cosmic and a moral struggle—a battle in which God always triumphs, reinforcing the hope that His order will ultimately prevail over all forms of discord.

This ancient vision of creation—beginning in a state of chaos and being transformed through divine decree—invites us to see our own lives as arenas where order can be restored. Whether it's overcoming personal turmoil or addressing societal disorder, the message is clear: no matter how formidable the chaos may seem (or how monstrous its imagery), the sovereign power of God is greater. Such themes not only shaped the worldview of the biblical authors but continue to offer a hopeful paradigm for addressing chaos in our own times.

Pray that the students of the AABTI will truly carry this powerful message expressed through the restorative power of Jesus' submission to His death by crucifixion that brings the assured restoration of "Eden's true Shalom."

Jim Wilson and the Students of the AABTI