

# Revisiting Romans 13:1-7 in Times of Crisis

Reading Through a Cosmological Lens

*Melissa J. Barciela Mandala*

University of St Andrews

mb454@st-andrews.ac.uk

## Abstract

This article revisits Romans 13:1-7 through the lens of cosmology and demonstrates how Paul's political theology wields two key cosmological themes—order and justice—to establish the sovereignty of God above political rulers. Paul's argument has a fundamentally cosmological dimension insofar as it reframes the socio-political cosmos and reimagines how believers are to live within it. To make this point, the article first calls for an expansion of the term 'cosmology' in modern biblical scholarship. This term not only refers to the natural world, but also to social relationships and how they are variously ordered in the world. To do this, the article presents evidence from Paul's context to validate the expansion of the term cosmology to social realities and political relations. The context demonstrates that the cosmos and political rulers were fundamentally intertwined in various ancient worldviews. Second, it offers a re-reading of Romans 13:1-7, demonstrating that the cosmological themes of order and justice reframe the believer's relationship to ruling authorities. This reading both encourages peaceful submission and offers confidence that God is sovereign over the ruling authorities. Third, the article contends that such a cosmological reading provides hope to the modern Christian community in the midst of crisis.



## Introduction

In Romans 13:1-7, Paul admonishes the Roman community of believers to “submit to” and “honor” the ruling authorities that have been set in place by God “for your good” (13:4). This exhortation has sparked discussion and debate on the relationship between the divine, governing authorities, and the citizens, or inhabitants, that continues into modern times. In recent years, Romans 13:1-7 has been interpreted through a wide array of lenses, including postcolonial, literary, missiological, liberationist, imperial, and anti-imperial interpretive frameworks.<sup>1</sup> This text has also been wielded, over the course of history, as a sword of oppression and control. Some claim it was Paul’s reaction to the Roman community’s over-realized eschatology as applied to politics, where the arrival of the kingdom of God through the gospel allows for a dismissal of Roman authorities and law.<sup>2</sup> Others assert that it was an attempt to restrain disorder or anarchy in the community.<sup>3</sup> Suggested motives for submission include that the governing authorities are authorized by God, thus one ought to obey them to avoid the judgment of God. Others make a more general claim that God desires order.<sup>4</sup> It has also become a key passage in the debate over a potential counter-imperial theme in Paul. Yet, it seems that none of the proposed readings consider the passage as a cosmological argument or recognize the cosmological aspects of Paul’s political theology, that is to say, Paul’s vision for order and justice within the cosmos as a whole. So, is a cosmological framework helpful for thinking about Romans 13:1-7? If so, what is the function of cosmology in Romans 13:1-7?

This article argues that Romans 13:1-7 does indeed fit within a cosmological landscape in Pauline thought. When read through this lens, the key cosmological themes of order and justice legitimize the sovereignty of God and offer a framework for ancient believers to endure the reign of human rulers. This reading also offers a message of hope in God’s sovereignty, thereby helping the modern

---

<sup>1</sup> Neil Elliott, “Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda,” in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 184–204; S.U. Lim, “A Double-Voiced Reading of Romans 13:1–7 in Light of the Imperial Cult,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2015): 1–10; Tarcisius Mukuka, “Reading/Hearing Romans 13:1-7 Under an African Tree: Towards a Lection Postcolonica Contexta Africana,” *Neotestamentica* 46, no. 1 (2012): 105–38; Ishanesu S. Gusha, “Exegesis of Romans 13:1–7 and Its Appropriation to the New Dispensation of the Second Republic of Zimbabwe,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (2020); Philip H. Towner, “Romans 13:1-7 and Paul’s Missiological Perspective: A Call to Political Quietism or Transformation?,” in *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Sven Soderlund, Gordon D. Fee, and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 149–69.

<sup>2</sup> Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (London: SCM Press, 1952), 427.

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (London: SCM Press, 1982), 354–59; N.T. Wright, “Romans,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Acts - First Corinthians*, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 718-719.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 201–3.

interpreter in times of crisis. First, I examine the cosmological framework and how Paul's context invites interpreters to identify this background. Next, I explore the cosmological contours of Romans 13:1-7 and how such a reading may assist contemporary believers in times of crisis.

### Widening the Lens of Cosmology

In the modern context, the term 'cosmology,' from the Greek word κόσμος, or 'world,' refers to creation language and created beings.<sup>5</sup> It is interested in the stars, the sea, and even matters as obscure as how many angels can dance on the head of a pin.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars have claimed that limiting 'cosmology' to *only* this natural sense is a post-Enlightenment development, and one which limits 'cosmology' to an overly scientific explanation of the physical universe. For this reason, it is more helpful to think of cosmology as all structures of the universe, including community and culture.<sup>7</sup> With reference to Paul, Joel White makes this point:

The modern understanding of cosmology as a sort of 'anatomy and physiology' of the universe reflects the naturalistic paradigm of the post-Enlightenment West. From the perspective of the ancient world, however, questions concerning the structure and workings of the cosmos cannot be separated from questions concerning origin, and within an early Jewish world view, the question of the purpose of the cosmos must be considered paramount.<sup>8</sup>

This line of thought calls for an important shift in biblical scholarship to a more comprehensive understanding of cosmology and its appearance in Pauline texts. The cosmological lens in this piece stretches beyond explicit creation language to creation's ordering and function, including culture, community, and the socio-political sphere.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> David Wason Hollar Jr. and Richard R. Erickson, "Cosmology," in *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Science*, 2020, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=shib&db=ers&AN=88314216&site=eds-live>.

<sup>6</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.52.

<sup>7</sup> For a similar account, see Richard J. Clifford, "Cosmogonies in the Ugaritic Texts and in the Bible," *Orientalia: Nova Series*, 53, no. 2 (1984): 185–86; M. R. Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity*, Sciences of Antiquity (London: Routledge, 1995), 1–10; T. J. Lang, "Cosmology and Eschatology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Pauline Studies*, ed. Matthew V. Novenson and R. Barry Matlock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Joel White, "Paul's Cosmology: The Witness of Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, Library of New Testament Studies 355 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 90.

<sup>9</sup> For one instance of this in the early church, see the comparison of the cosmos above to the cosmos that is social reality below in 1 Clem. 20:1-12.

## Cosmology and Kingship in Paul's Context

Extending cosmology beyond explicit creation language into the sphere of sociological ordering invites one to consider how cosmology might be present in texts that may not immediately seem cosmological. Romans 13:1-7 is one such example. Reading Romans 13:1-7 through a cosmological lens suggests that the key motive for submission is the sovereignty of God, who sits above ruling authorities. This is demonstrated through the themes of order and justice. Before addressing this text, it is helpful to explore the relationship between kingship, or figures of governing authority, and cosmology in Paul's Greco-Roman context, including, of course, his Jewish context.

### *Cosmology and Kingship in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible*

Creation, order, and kingship are an inseparable triad in the cosmological fabric of the Hebrew Bible and its Ancient Near Eastern context. Nearly every Ancient Near Eastern cosmology places political rule at the center of how the cosmos is organized and how it moves along correctly. For instance, a Neo-Babylonian text of the creation of man in a myth in the *Atrahasis* tradition speaks of the king being created by a deity and assigned different divine attributes by the gods of the pantheon.<sup>10</sup> John van Seters notes that the "bestowal of physical endowments at birth and the regalia at the coronation have both been combined and then placed mythologically back into the time of creation itself as a way of expressing the inception of kingship."<sup>11</sup> The author presents the king as a sort of primordial first creation.<sup>12</sup>

Another instance of kingship in the fabric of Ancient Near Eastern cosmology is in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*.<sup>13</sup> Marduk is enthroned as the king of both humans and gods.<sup>14</sup> Richard Clifford highlights that the fifty names given to Marduk function to "glorify Marduk as the sustainer of order and life on earth as well as in heaven"; Marduk is the organizing center of society.<sup>15</sup> To this point, Clifford contends that ancient peoples recorded cosmologies to explain the organization and structure of society at large, not merely limited to the exploration of creation.<sup>16</sup> Further, the Ugaritic Baal Cycle (CTA 4) evidences a similar trend, where the king is set above both humans and gods, sovereignly ordering the cosmos. CTA 4 tells of a palace being built for Baal where a

---

<sup>10</sup> Werner R. Mayer, "Ein Mythos von Der Erschaffung Des Menschen Und Des Königs," *Orientalia: Nova Series*, 56, no. 1 (1987): 55–68.

<sup>11</sup> John van Seters, "The Creation of Man and the Creation of the King," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, no. 101 (1989): 338.

<sup>12</sup> van Seters, "Creation of Man," 337.

<sup>13</sup> Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others*, World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 233-277.

<sup>14</sup> The myth reads: "Elevated far above them [the gods], he was superior in every way." See Dalley, 235.

<sup>15</sup> Clifford, "Cosmogonies," 185.

<sup>16</sup> Clifford, "Cosmogonies," 187.

banquet for the gods is hosted. Baal orders himself above these gods, clearly asserting “I am the only one who rules over the gods, who fattens gods and men, who satiates the hordes of the earth.”<sup>17</sup>

The divine ordering of gods, humans, and kings is also central to cosmological speculation in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>18</sup> Three exemplary texts that display the connection between kingship and cosmology are Psalm 89, Ezekiel 28, and Daniel 7. Psalm 89 presents God as the sovereign creator, who created the north and the south, keeps chaos at bay, and “crushed Rahab” (Ps. 89:6-13).<sup>19</sup> The Davidic king is then tethered to this *Chaoskampf* (the combat versus chaos motif in Ancient Near Eastern literature): “I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers” (Ps. 89:25).<sup>20</sup> Water imagery is a classic motif for chaos in primordial creation myths. By using this language, the author positions the king as an agent of order who participates in restraining chaos, similar to other Ancient Near Eastern texts.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, the Davidic king is not the only royal figure to participate in cosmology. Ezekiel 28:1-19 presents a prophecy against the King of Tyre which describes his original establishment. The text describes him in terms similar to those of ancient Mesopotamian royal myth, claiming that he was “the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (Ez. 28:12) before corrupting both with hubris.<sup>22</sup> Further, the king is situated within a cosmological context: “you were in Eden, the garden of god” (Ez. 28:13). Similar to Adam and Eve, he was driven from his sacred dwelling upon his rebellion (Ez. 28:16).<sup>23</sup> It is significant to note that the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern texts share the motif of situating the king at the start of creation.

Yet, even when Israel does not have a king, the biblical writers find ways to weave kingship into cosmology because they still believed that certain royal activities were a fundamental part of cosmological speculation. For instance, the figure in Daniel 7 with royal associations is an angelic figure called “the Son of Man”, disassociated from David, but not from responsibilities that are

---

<sup>17</sup> Dennis Pardee, “The Ba’lu Myth,” in *The Context of Scripture, vol. 1, Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 263.

<sup>18</sup> Clifford, “Cosmogonies,” 201; Carly L. Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 15-32.

<sup>19</sup> All citations are from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed exploration of this motif, see Hermann Gunkel and Heinrich Zimmern, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12*, Repr. [der Ausg.] Göttingen 1895 (Breinigsville: Nabu Press, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Carly L. Crouch, “Made in the Image of God: The Creation of Adm, the Commissioning of the King and the Chaoskampf of YHWH,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 16, no. 1 (2016): 19.

<sup>22</sup> van Seters, “The Creation of Man and the Creation of the King,” 337–38.

<sup>23</sup> van Seters argues Ez. 28 is dependent on the aforementioned myth. Mayer, “Ein Mythos von Der Erschaffung Des Menschen Und Des Königs”.

fundamentally royal in nature (Dan. 7:14).<sup>24</sup> This data demonstrates that kingship was a key pillar of cosmological speculation not only with reference to the Davidic king (Psalm 89), but also into a time when there was no king at all (Daniel 7).<sup>25</sup> Political structures and kingship were intertwined with the structure of the universe.

### *Cosmology and Governing Authority in Roman Imperial Ideology*

The tie between cosmology and governing authorities is also present in Paul's context of Greco-Roman imperial ideology, and it is to this that we now turn. The close association within imperial ideology between the emperor and the divine finds its origins with Augustus.<sup>26</sup> When Rome was renewed under Augustus, the emperor was intimately tied to the gods.<sup>27</sup> Augustus was viewed as the one who saves the world from cosmic disarray, suffering, and the destruction of creation. The descriptions of Nero, the last representative of Rome's Julio-Claudian dynasty founded by Augustus, and his divinity exemplify this point. Beyond his political position, Nero held religious power, assuming the title *pontifex maximus*: the head of religious life in Rome. He was endowed with the title *Augustus*, meaning "the revered one," further connecting him to the gods and emphasizing his road to deification.<sup>28</sup> Some scholars also find evidence for this connection with the divine in the practice of imperial cult worship, where Nero and the imperial household were worshipped as divine figures.<sup>29</sup> Coin inscriptions, sacrifices, incense offered on behalf of the

---

<sup>24</sup> Gregory Goswell, "Where Is David in the Book of Daniel?," *Restoration Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2014): 209–21; John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*, 1st ed, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 191–195.

<sup>25</sup> See John Day and Oxford Old Testament Seminar, eds., *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2013); Shirley Lucass, *The Concept of the Messiah in the Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997); David Nystrom, "We Have No King but Caesar: Roman Imperial Ideology and the Imperial Cult," in *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies*, ed. Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 30–36; David Potter, *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1994); Karl Galinsky, *Augustus: Introduction to the Life of an Emperor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 22–24; Barbara Levick, *Augustus: Image and Substance* (London: Routledge, 2010), 288–318.

<sup>27</sup> Cicero, *Rep.* 1.12.

<sup>28</sup> Darja Šterbenc Erker, "Religion," in *A Companion to the Neronian Age*, ed. Emma Buckley and Martin T. Dinter, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 119.

<sup>29</sup> For more on imperial cult see, S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Horsley, *Paul and Empire*; Jeffrey Brodd and Jonathan L. Reed, eds., *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult*, Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series, v. 5 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011); N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 69–78. For a counter-

emperor and to the emperor's *Genius* at public festivals such as *comitia consularia* (the consular assembly), *comitia pontificalia* (the pontifical assembly), and *tribunicia potestas* (the festival of first taking on tribunicial power), and the invocation of the *Genius* when making oaths (Seneca, *Letters*, 1.12), all point to the emperor's close association with the divine.<sup>30</sup> The emperor was even viewed as a "cosmic benefactor" according to James R. Harrison.<sup>31</sup> Thus, within the world of imperial ideology—and the presence, albeit faint, of the imperial cult—the emperor Nero is clearly associated with the realm of the gods and even at times considered to be himself divine.

Yet, there is not just an association between the emperor and the divine, but also a strong connection between the divine emperor and the cosmos. In the case of Nero, cosmological language surrounds descriptions of his role and function. Seneca writes instructions to Nero in *De Clementia* 1.1-4:

and finally to commune with oneself thus: 'Have I of all mortals found favour with Heaven and been chosen to serve on earth as vicar of the gods? I am the arbiter of life and death for the nations; it rests in my power what each man's lot and state shall be; by my lips Fortune proclaims what gift she would bestow on each human being; from my utterance peoples and cities gather reasons for rejoicing; without my favour and grace no part of the wide world can prosper; [...] Today, if the immortal gods should require a reckoning from me, I am ready to give full tale of the human race.'<sup>32</sup>

Nero clearly acts here on behalf of the gods and participates in the divine act of ordering the cosmos. He controls life and death, pronounces Fortune's wishes, and possesses control over decisions for man, of which he will give an account.

Further, in the parodic poem *Apocolocyntosis*, often attributed to Seneca, Nero is described with cosmic imagery. This poem opens with Fate Clotho ending the thread of Claudius' life and spinning that of his successor Nero. Apollo acts as the god of prophecy, approving the Fates (Lachesis, Atropos, and Clotho) as they tell of Nero's coming reign:

'Fates, take nothing away' said Phoebus, 'let that one, who resembles me in looks and beauty, and no less in song and voice, surpass the duration of human life. He will provide for the weary people years of prosperity, and will break the silence imposed on the laws. Like the Morning Star rising and scattering the stars in flight, or like the Evening Star which rises with the stars' return, like the

---

argument, see Colin Miller, "The Imperial Cult in the Pauline Cities of Asia Minor and Greece," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72 (2010): 314–32.

<sup>30</sup> Šterbenc Erker, "Religion," 119–120.

<sup>31</sup> James R. Harrison, *Paul and the Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome: A Study in the Conflict of Ideology*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 273 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 125–27.

<sup>32</sup> Seneca the Younger, *Moral Essays: Volume I: De Providentia. De Constantia. De Ira. De Clementia.*, trans. John W. Basore, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928).

bright Sun which looks at the world and spurs on his first chariots from the starting gates, as soon as rosy Dawn has got rid of the shadows and leads in the day: such a Caesar is present, such a Nero Rome will now behold. His bright face blazes with gentle radiance, his neck graceful under the flowing hair.' (4.20-32)<sup>33</sup>

The Roman emperor Nero was clearly seen as the divine one who maintains political and religious order on behalf of the gods, thus ensuring the proper function of the cosmos. This evidence from the Ancient Near Eastern context, Hebrew Bible, and Roman imperial ideology traces a common thread of cosmological thought and demonstrates that ruling authorities were deeply embedded in the cosmological context of Paul's Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds.

### Reading Romans 13:1-7 Through a Cosmological Lens

The evidence suggests that there is a fundamentally cosmological nature to much ancient political speculation. Thus, in turning to Romans 13:1-7, it would be only natural to inquire *if* and, if so, *how* this cosmological context influenced Paul's thought. Yet the first cosmological threads appear in the historical and literary contexts of the passage.

#### *The Cosmological Scene of Romans 13:1-7*

Cosmological writings often arose against the background of tumultuous scenes of historical crisis and unrest.<sup>34</sup> Both biblical and non-biblical texts evidence this context. Kevin Mellish highlights how cosmological writings tell the social and political story of a people and its situation in history.<sup>35</sup> For instance, in Isaiah 40-55 the people are in exile, without a temple or a king, and the prophet uses cosmological imagery to establish the legitimacy of the Lord and to bring a message of hope that Israel will be restored (Isa. 40:12-31; 41:4-6, 17-20; 42:5; 43:24-28; 44:7-12; 45:18).<sup>36</sup> The Lord and, at times, the appointed king are presented as the ones who are able to order chaos (Isa. 45:28). Cosmological narratives often re-establish God's legitimacy and bring a message of hope in times of disorder or crisis. Turning to Romans 13:1-7, the historical setting is appropriate for a cosmological text. Paul writes sometime in the 50s, around the crisis of the Edict of Claudius, which saw some Jews and Jesus followers, such as Priscilla and Aquilla, expelled from Rome and

<sup>33</sup> Seneca the Younger, "Apocolocyntosis," trans. Gareth Schmeling (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020).

<sup>34</sup> The exilic background of Ps. 74, Ps. 89, Gen. 1, and Isa. 40-55 evidence this. Dan. 7 is written amidst the Hasmonean crisis.

<sup>35</sup> Kevin Mellish, "Creation as Social and Political Order in Ancient Thought and the Hebrew Bible," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 157-79.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Isa. 40:12, 15, 21-31; 41:5-6, 8-10, 17-20; 42:5-7; 43:1-21; 44:6, 23-28; 45:4-13, 18-19; 46:3-4, 8-11; 48:12-13; 49:1, 5, 13; 50:2-3; 51:1-3, 9-16; 54:16-17; 55:9-13.



later readmitted to the city (Acts 18:2). The Jewish-Christian community is in a diasporic state.<sup>37</sup> It is likely that Paul writes during socio-political unrest. This is the sort of setting in which one would expect cosmological themes and messaging to arise.

Further, the literary context of Romans 13:1-7 also invites a cosmological reading. In recent interpretations of the text, scholarship has highlighted cosmology at work in the letter to the Romans at large. From the letter's creation imagery (1:20, 8:27-29), reading sin as a cosmic power (5-7), interest in the cosmological self, Christ as the new Adam (5:12-20), and the cosmic powers in general (8:27-29), it has long been argued that Paul's words in Romans are set on a cosmological stage.<sup>38</sup> Of particular interest to the literary context of Romans 13:1-7 is the doxology in 11:33-36, which seems to pave the way for the following chapters. Romans 12:1-15:13 is commonly bracketed as a section on practices of Christian living.<sup>39</sup> Yet, little is said about its connection to the doxology of 11:33-36. Richard Longenecker notes that οὖν (therefore) in 12:1 is able to "reach back", and claims it connects with all that has been written about love, grace, and mercy in the middle of the letter, mainly in 5:1-8:39.<sup>40</sup> Leon Morris explicitly encourages readers not to tie 12:1-15:13 too closely to 11:33-36, but rather to the entire argument of Romans 1-11.<sup>41</sup> This point is valid, yet it seems to underestimate the value and function of the doxology. While οὖν (12:1) points backward, it is also the case that it points forward, and "creates close continuity with what precedes."<sup>42</sup> Thus, it appears Romans 11:33-36 stands as a hinge between Romans 1-11 and 12-15; it closes the argument of chapters 1-11 and opens chapters 12-15 with an image of God as

---

<sup>37</sup> N.T. Wright, "Romans," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Acts - First Corinthians*, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 718-19; Neil Elliott, "Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 185.

<sup>38</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Neither Height nor Depth: Discerning the Cosmology of Romans," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64, no. 3 (2011): 265-78; White, "Paul's Cosmology: The Witness of Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians"; Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, ed., *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed, The Anchor Bible, v. 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 637; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 744.

<sup>40</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 645-46. For a similar view, see James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, ed. Bruce M Metzger, David Allen Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 38B, Word Biblical Commentary (San Francisco: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2014), 708.

<sup>41</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 432.

<sup>42</sup> For more on this particle in light of discourse analysis, see Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 43-48.

all-knowing and all-powerful.<sup>43</sup> Longenecker writes: “Paul’s doxology of 11:33-36 closes with the declaration that everything that was created and exists has its *origin* in God, has its *support* from God, and has as its *goal, end, and purpose*, to praise God.”<sup>44</sup> This declaration of God’s power then sets the tone for chapters 12-15.

In addition, Romans 11:34 contains an allusion to God as the cosmological king in order to establish God’s power in this doxology. In verse 34, Paul alludes to Isaiah 40:13: “For who has known the mind of the Lord?” This verse is exalting YHWH as the one who delivered the Jewish people from exile.<sup>45</sup> The context of Isaiah 40:13 is heavily cosmological and highlights the sovereignty of God. It describes God as the one who measures the waters and the heavens (Is. 40:12), weighs the mountains (Is. 40:12), “sits above the circle of the earth” and “stretches out the heavens like a curtain” (Is. 40:22), calls forth the stars (Is. 40:26), and created all things (Is. 40:26). Kingship language then unsurprisingly appears in Isaiah 40:23-25, where the prophet declares that He is one “who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.” In the midst of these descriptions of God as sovereign over the cosmos in Isaiah 40, we find Paul’s scriptural referent: “Who has directed the spirit of the Lord, or as his counselor has instructed him?” (Is. 40:13). This is an instance of metalepsis, where the allusion evokes both Isaiah 40:13 and its context.<sup>46</sup> The resulting echo creates a new layer of significance and meaning, namely the designation of this powerful God as the God of the cosmos.<sup>47</sup>

Richard B. Hays puts forward seven criteria to identify metalepsis, which this example meets: availability, volume, recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, history of interpretation, and satisfaction.<sup>48</sup> The Septuagint text of Isaiah that Paul draws from was available to him and his readers; it is an explicit citation which also occurs in 1 Cor. 2:16, where the knowledge of God is elevated above that of the world; the allusion to God as cosmological ruler demonstrates thematic coherence with and strengthens the doxology; it is historically plausible that Paul would have alluded to the cosmos; other interpreters have recognized this citation (though not its cosmological aspects); and the proposed reading makes sense in context, providing further reason to glorify

---

<sup>43</sup> Craig S. Keener notes that chapters 9-11 establish the sovereignty of God. See Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene: Cascade, 2009), 153–54.

<sup>44</sup> Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 640.

<sup>45</sup> Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, 635.

<sup>46</sup> Richard B. Hays derives this term ‘metalepsis’ from John Hollander. See John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After*, Quantum Books (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 133-149.

<sup>47</sup> Hays writes that such an allusive echo “functions to suggest to the reader that text B should be understood in light of a broad interplay with text A, encompassing aspects of A beyond those explicitly echoed.” See Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 20.

<sup>48</sup> Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 29–31.

God.<sup>49</sup> It is with God as the all-powerful, implicit cosmological ruler in mind that readers then move into the exhortatory portion of the letter.

### *Romans 13:1-7 Revisited*

There are two key cosmological themes at work in Romans 13:1-7: order and justice. These two themes are interwoven to affirm God's sovereignty and provide hope to the early Christian community. This reading does not suggest that Paul's message primarily served a counter-imperial agenda, aiming to directly challenge or compete with the Roman empire.<sup>50</sup> Nor does it propose a positive view of empire.<sup>51</sup> Rather, it offers a framework for believers to endure imperial reign in the current age by elevating God's sovereignty. With respect to the theme of order, Paul describes the cosmological order of God and the human rulers in verses 1-2:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority *except by God* (εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ θεοῦ) and the authorities that exist have been *instituted by God* (αἱ δὲ οὖσαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσίν). Therefore, whoever resists the authority is resisting *the authority God has appointed* (τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ διαταγῇ) and the ones resisting will bring judgment on themselves.<sup>52</sup>

As evidenced above, it is clear that the divine ordering of the cosmos is not limited to its physical elements, but also entails its function; it includes the place and role of governing authorities.<sup>53</sup> Paul clearly orders the authorities beneath God, as being established by God (13:1-2).<sup>54</sup> Michael Bird highlights that in these seven verses, God (θεός) is referenced six times, elevating his authority over earthly rulers.<sup>55</sup> Many interpreters see the theme of the subordination of human rulers beneath God and the theme of order at work in the text, crediting it to Hellenistic ideas of citizen

---

<sup>49</sup> For more on metalepsis and Paul's use of Isaiah in Romans, see Richard B. Hays, " 'Who Has Believed Our Message?' Paul's Reading of Isaiah," *SBL Seminar Papers*, no. 37 Part 1 (1998): 205–225.

<sup>50</sup> For counter-imperial readings of Paul and this passage, see Wright, *Paul*, 69-78; Elliott, "Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propoganda," 184-204; Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 114–225. Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 146–147. For a compelling response to this view, see John M. G. Barclay, "Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul," in *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 363–88.

<sup>51</sup> Bruno Blumenfeld, *The Political Paul: Democracy and Kingship in Paul's Thought* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> This is my own translation and emphasis.

<sup>53</sup> The general scholarly consensus is that Paul is referring to the Roman governing authorities in this text, though he does not explicitly name them.

<sup>54</sup> John Barclay claims two rulers with the same rank may indicate that one is "supreme" while the other is "subordinate" without suggesting a subversive tone. See Barclay, "Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul," 378.

<sup>55</sup> Michael F. Bird, "'One Who Will Arise to Rule Over the Nations': Paul's Letter to the Romans and the Roman Empire," in *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies*, ed. Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 159.

and state or Jewish wisdom literature, but the cosmological context of this motif is often overlooked.<sup>56</sup> The assertion that YHWH had authority over Roman powers reorders the common Roman conception of governing authorities in the cosmological order.<sup>57</sup> As was demonstrated above, Roman emperors and authorities were traditionally viewed as figures either directly beneath the pantheon or themselves divine, endowed with power from the gods. There was even the possibility of the ruler being equal to the gods. Here, there is no such option.<sup>58</sup> The God who appears in Romans, who created the heavens and the earth, who faces the powers of sin and death, is above these rulers. Of course, the rulers themselves were not the implied audience, but these verses communicate to the community of believers that despite their supposed sources of power, God stands above them.<sup>59</sup> Thus, these verses challenge the standard Greco-Roman cosmological narrative by relocating the divine association of these authorities to the God of Israel, whom they do not worship, and further demoting them by placing them beneath God's reign.<sup>60</sup>

Additionally, the “one in authority” is also called God's “servant” or “minister” (διάκονός) (13:4), another subordinating movement. Beverly Gaventa highlights that just a few chapters earlier, a specific ruler arrives on the scene—Pharaoh (Rom. 9:17).<sup>61</sup> Gaventa argues that the rulers of Romans 13 are put in their subordinate place, similar to the way Pharaoh was, and that they are used by God, whether they realize it or not, for God's purposes and “good”.<sup>62</sup> As Justin Hardin

---

<sup>56</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 204; Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 359; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Short Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 170. James D. G. Dunn suggests a context of Jewish wisdom literature for the view that rulers obtain their power from God. See Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 770. Rather than grounding the theme in the ordering of creation in Genesis or Hellenistic ideals of the state and citizen, one finds strongest support for this theme in the early Jewish and the ancient Greco-Roman cosmological vision.

<sup>57</sup> See Wright, *Paul*, 78. Wright recognizes this severe demotion of the earthly rulers. He claims that its function is to confront the Roman empire. This reading suggests its primary function was not to directly challenge the empire, but to encourage believers. If Paul does challenge empire, it is a secondary by-product.

<sup>58</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier notes this relativizing yet does not recognize the essential divine aspect of Greco-Roman rulers. He writes: “Governments that claim for themselves divine prerogatives are hence no longer the kind of governments of which Paul speaks in this chapter.” Achtemeier, *Romans*, 205.

<sup>59</sup> For a similar idea, see Jewett, *Romans*, 170.

<sup>60</sup> The cosmological backdrop of this text rejects the suggestion that Paul is validating these authorities. For this view, see Seyoon Kim, *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 36. Additionally, for mention of God as the ultimate cosmic authority, see Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 280.

<sup>61</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “Reading Romans 13 with Simone Weil: Toward a More Generous Hermeneutic,” *Journal for Biblical Literature* 136, no. 1 (November 2016): 14–16.

<sup>62</sup> Gaventa, 16. See also Achtemeier, *Romans*, 204.

quips, rulers are mere “pawns”.<sup>63</sup> Thus, naming the rulers as God’s servants gives the hearers of the letter reason to obey these rulers in the present and simultaneously demotes the rulers to instruments. This use of foreign rulers by God as instruments of God’s ordering purposes is also seen in the Hebrew Bible. Pharaoh is used for God’s glory and purposes, Jeremiah’s servant language regards the Babylonian king as an agent of destruction (Jer. 25:9; 27:6; 43:10), and King Cyrus is a messianic figure that God anoints for God’s purposes (Is. 45), to name a few exemplary instances. These instruments were, as all kingly rulers were historically, subject to God’s judgment and will ultimately give account for their rule. In sum, one sees the clear cosmological theme of order in this text as the authorities are ordered beneath the power of the God of Israel. This theme of order characterizes the rulers as instruments of God for God’s purposes, known or unbeknownst to them. This cosmological motif strengthens the evidence for seeing subordination in this passage and offers the grid upon which the subordination takes place.

Above all, this divine ordering declares the sovereignty of God. The affirmation of a deity’s sovereignty vis-à-vis a cosmological trope is a common pattern in antiquity, dating back to various Ancient Near Eastern cosmologies from the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE.<sup>64</sup> In subjugating the rulers beneath the reign of God, Paul seems to be playing on this motif. He is highlighting, and perhaps legitimizing, the sovereignty of God before the church in Rome. In calling for obedience to the ruling authorities, he is conversely beckoning a greater trust in the sovereign God who stands over them. God is the one who determines right and wrong (13:3) and the one ultimately responsible for the punishment or reward of all people both now (13:4) and in the future (13:11-14). The governing authorities are simply moving the historical narrative along in this “present time” (13:11) because the eschatological “day is almost here” (13:12). God is in control over history and sets the ultimate moral standard and parameters (13:10). God is presented in this text as the one who sits sovereign over the design of the world and its function, despite the success or failure of human rulers.

This assertion of God’s sovereignty would have been an affront to the perceived sovereignty of Nero. For instance, in *On the Civil War* Lucan describes the chief end of Nero’s divine path, a time after his *apotheosis*, his glorification, and his *katasterismos*, when he becomes a constellation.<sup>65</sup> He writes:

---

<sup>63</sup> Justin K. Hardin, “Paul’s Neronian Nod (Rom 13:1-7): The Achilles’ Heel for a Counter-Imperial Apostle?” *Unpublished Version of a Paper Presented at the Evangelical Theological Society*. San Diego, CA., November 2019, 9.

<sup>64</sup> Debra Ballentine discusses this within the context of the conflict topos. See Debra Ballentine, *The Conflict Myth and Biblical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 22–42.

<sup>65</sup> The tone is unclear here i.e., whether Lucan is being sarcastic. But he nonetheless expresses a view held by his contemporaries.

When your watch on earth is over and you seek the stars at last, the celestial palace you prefer will welcome you, and the sky will be glad. Whether you choose to wield Jove's sceptre, or to mount the fiery chariot of Phoebus and circle earth with your moving flame—earth unterrified by the transference of the sun; every god will give place to you, and Nature will leave it to you to determine what deity you wish to be, and where to establish your universal throne.<sup>66</sup>

Lucan clearly envisions a future time when Nero will be sovereign over the world and all deities. A few lines later, he writes “to me you are divine already,” locating this power in the present.<sup>67</sup> Such were the ideas around Nero's power and the derivative power of his governing authorities. Paul rewrites the narrative for the early community of believers, claiming that God is the author of the world's story.

The second cosmological theme that bolsters God's sovereignty over rulers in this text is the ruler's role in upholding justice. The idea that the king is the one who maintains divine order through justice is a key piece of cosmological speculation in the Hebrew Bible. In Israelite cosmology, the king is viewed as the defender of the established order, continuing the fight against chaos, which Carly Crouch notes has primeval roots.<sup>68</sup> Peter Berger connects social disorder to these ancient ideas of cosmological chaos. He writes: “Just as religious legitimation interprets the order of society in terms of an all-embracing sacred order of the universe, so it relates the disorder that is the antithesis of all socially constructed *nomos* to that yawning abyss of chaos that is the oldest antagonist of the sacred.”<sup>69</sup> The king, as the cosmological defender of order, is responsible for bringing justice. Psalm 72 also demonstrates this belief about the ruling authority or king, situated around creation language (Ps. 72:3, 5-6, 8). Further, the divine warrior-king motif of the Ancient Near East, the one charged to bring order out of chaos, formed the foundation for Hellenistic emperor cult beliefs.<sup>70</sup> For example, it was written of Augustus: “It would be right for us to consider him equal to the Beginning (*arche*) of all things [...] for when everything was falling [into disorder] and tending toward dissolution, he restored it once more and gave to the whole world a new aspect.”<sup>71</sup>

Thus, when the governing authorities in Romans 13 execute justice by bearing the sword and bringing wrath on wrongdoers (13:4), Paul seems to be playing on the trope of rulers bringing order out of chaos in this present evil age.<sup>72</sup> It is also important to note that the ruler is called an

---

<sup>66</sup> Lucan, *On the Civil War*, 1.45-53.

<sup>67</sup> Lucan, 1.63.

<sup>68</sup> Crouch, *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East*, 28–30.

<sup>69</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 40.

<sup>70</sup> For more on this view, see Horsley, *Paul and Empire*, 14.

<sup>71</sup> Wilhelm Dittenberger, *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae: Supplementum Sylloges Inscriptionum Graecarum*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1905), no. 458, 50.

<sup>72</sup> Wright, “Romans,” 718.

“avenger of wrath” (ἔκδικος εἰς ὀργήν), often translated instead as “agent” or “servant” (13:4).<sup>73</sup> The only other time Paul uses the word ἔκδικος is in 1 Thessalonians 4:6 with reference to God punishing those who take advantage of brothers and sisters in the faith. It is interesting that only God and the kingly figure of Romans 13 are called ἔκδικος in Pauline literature, seeming to join forces to fight disorder, just as YHWH partnered with the king in certain Hebrew Bible texts (e.g., Pss. 18; 89; et al.). Thus, the governing authorities are called servants “for your good” (13:4).<sup>74</sup>

Yet, these Roman rulers clearly do not worship the God of Israel, recognize Jesus as Lord, or always do what is “good”. With respect to the times that they *do* successfully do what is good and fulfill this role to exercise justice, it is as servants of God.<sup>75</sup> When the ruling authorities manage to keep chaos or injustice at bay, whether their wrath refers to divine wrath or earthly wrath, “earthly punishment carries out God’s judgment,” as Ernst Käsemann writes.<sup>76</sup> This appears to be the case whether or not they recognize their place in God’s grand narrative. Yet, what if the rulers do *not* do “good”, which was quite frequent under the tyrannical reign of Roman emperors? Frederick Bruce says, “Paul does not deal with this question here.”<sup>77</sup> Though Paul may not explicitly deal with this question, the cosmological aspect of this passage reminds believers that God stands sovereign above these rulers. Note that this passage is followed by a call to love (13:8-10), beginning with the subversive phrase: “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another” (Μηδενὶ μηδὲν ὀφείλετε εἰ μὴ τὸ ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν).<sup>78</sup> After establishing that God is sovereign and in control, Paul elevates submission to God’s command to love as primary in light of the coming time of eschatological judgment (13:11-14). Surely the rulers are not exempt from this judgement and will, too, be accountable for any failure to love or clothe themselves in Jesus Christ (13:14).<sup>79</sup>

Paul then ends the passage with an exhortation to submit to the authorities by paying taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants (13:5-7).<sup>80</sup> The early community of believers is called to obey

<sup>73</sup> “Agent”: NIV (2011); “Servant”: NLT, CEB, NASB, NLT, NRSV; “Avenger”: ASV, ESV, NET.

<sup>74</sup> For an alternative reading of the “good” as referring to benefaction, see Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 26–38. For a broader reading of the “good” as Christian service to the community, see Ben Witherington and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 313–14.

<sup>75</sup> For more on this reading, see Gaventa, “Reading Romans 13 with Simone Weil,” 16.

<sup>76</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (Mifflintown: Sigler Press, 1996), 358. For support of the reading of this as divine judgment, see Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 762–63.

<sup>77</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 234.

<sup>78</sup> This is my own translation.

<sup>79</sup> For a similar view, see Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 770–71. God’s judgment is also described as the ultimate judgment in Romans 12:19.

<sup>80</sup> It is possible this reference to taxes was due to extremely high taxes in the Roman empire at the time of writing. For this view, see Stuhlmacher, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 200–201; Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 766.

on the basis of the revealed cosmological ordering, where the ruling authorities are subordinate to the sovereign God, charged to bring justice, and ultimately accountable for any failure to do so. Believers are invited to participate in maintaining order and keeping chaos at bay through obedience, especially to the highest command—to love. Paul says they ought to do so for the sake of “conscience” (συνείδησιν) (13:5). C. E. B. Cranfield claimed this refers to “the secret of the relation in which it [the state] stands to God and to Christ”; ultimately, the God of Israel and the crucified Messiah stand sovereign.<sup>81</sup>

Reading Romans 13:1-7 with a cosmological lens is not about re-reading Paul’s politics as a cosmology, but rather an acknowledgement that all political speculation is fundamentally cosmological. The challenge is to recognize the basic cosmological nature of Paul’s political theology. In this reading, one finds on Paul’s cosmological stage the sovereign God of Israel with Roman governing authorities subject beneath God. These authorities are charged with carrying out God’s divine justice and keeping the forces of chaos and injustice at bay. These rulers are relegated beneath the sovereign God’s unraveling of human history, as God pushes back chaos and invites the renewal of creation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, mentioned elsewhere in Romans (Rom. 1:1-6, 5:10, 6:5-7, 8:10-11, 8:18-25, et. al). As in other cosmologies, Paul’s message is simple: God is sovereign and just. Knowing the location of these rulers within the Jewish cosmological landscape, believers are called to submit, to honor, and to pay all debts. They are called to do this by a man who intimately knew the failures and oppression of the Roman government. Yet rather than inciting a coup or instigating violent riots, Paul’s words reassure and encourage these Roman believers. As they submit to these authorities, Paul encourages them to trust in God’s sovereignty to use these figures in God’s grand scheme of bringing about an ordered and just world, the same way God used Pharaoh to eventually bring the Israelites out from slavery in Egypt.

### *Implications for Times of Crisis*

In seeking Paul’s image of the cosmos in Romans 13:1-7, one finds that the meaning of this text can be seen in a new light; this text is grounds for neither a call for blind submission, nor an excuse for obstinate oppression.<sup>82</sup> These verses have been wielded for great harm over the course of history, right up to the modern time, during social and political crises. The interpreter should be extremely cautious in reading the entirety of Paul’s politics from these seven verses or being coerced by another into submission vis-à-vis their reading of this text. This is not Paul’s prescriptive mandate for all situations at all times; Paul’s point in writing this section was not to propose a

---

<sup>81</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans, a Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 324.

<sup>82</sup> T. J. Lang, “Cosmology and Eschatology,” 2.



universal, timeless, political theology nor to say all that could be said.<sup>83</sup> As Ernst Käsemann wrote with respect to Romans 13:1-7: “The basis of what he [Paul] demands is reduced to a minimum, while exegesis usually seeks to take from it a maximum.”<sup>84</sup> Perhaps it was Paul’s attempt to keep the community from rebellion against Rome or a means of keeping their focus on the mission to Spain.<sup>85</sup> At least one thing is clear in this reading—the cosmological scene offers a message of hope during times of crisis: that God is indeed sovereign over history and moving it towards order and justice. These rulers, whether saints or tyrants, whether they fulfill their role in the trope to keep chaos at bay and exact justice or not, are cosmological pawns at best and God will exact God’s justice (cf. Ez. 28).<sup>86</sup> In the face of unrest, this hope is central to Paul’s political thought and continues to encourage believers in the midst of modern crises. Whether the modern crisis is political in nature or not, the message of hope remains: God is sovereign over all types of chaos. It is in this truth that believers may find the resolve to carry on in the face of disorder.

This article set out to examine whether Romans 13:1-7 may be read through a cosmological lens and, if so, to assess how cosmology functions in the text. It explored Paul’s Greco-Roman context and the cosmological scene in Romans at large, and argued that Romans 13:1-7 can and should be read through this lens. Further, it argued that the cosmological themes of order and justice in this text serve to highlight God’s sovereignty and offer hope, especially in times of crisis. This research opens avenues for further inquiry regarding the expansion of the definition of cosmology outside of creation language in Paul, how Romans 13:8-14 fits into this cosmological interpretation, and how the cosmological trope also shapes community identity in this passage. Scholarship has only just begun its ventures into the Pauline cosmos.

## References

Achtmeier, Paul J. *Romans: Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985.

Ballentine, Debra Scoggins. *The Conflict Myth and Biblical Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

---

<sup>83</sup> Matthew G. Neufeld, “Submission to Governing Authorities: A Study of Romans 13:1-7,” *Biblical Interpretation* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 90.

<sup>84</sup> Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 354.

<sup>85</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 170–71.

<sup>86</sup> Another interesting comparison, beyond the scope of this study, may be made between Romans 13 and Revelation. See Jirí Mrázek, “Die Beziehung von Kirche Und Staat Im Neuen Testament,” *Communio Viatorum* 2 (2014): 197–210; James Leo Jr. Garrett, “Dialectic of Romans 13:1-7 and Revelation 13,” *Journal of Church and State* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1977): 5–20; Johannes Koch-Mehrin, “Die Stellung Des Christen Zum Staat Nach Röm 13 Und Apok 13,” *Evangelische Theologie* 7, no. 11–12 (June 1948): 378–401.

Barclay, John M. G. "Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul." In *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews*, 363–88. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.

Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York: Anchor Books, 1990.

Bird, Michael F. "'One Who Will Arise to Rule Over the Nations': Paul's Letter to the Romans and the Roman Empire." In *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies*, edited by Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica, 146–65. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Blumenfeld, Bruno. *The Political Paul: Democracy and Kingship in Paul's Thought*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003. <http://qut.eblib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=742546>.

Brodd, Jeffrey, and Jonathan L. Reed, eds. *Rome and Religion: A Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue on the Imperial Cult*. Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series, v. 5. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011.

Bruce, F.F. *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*. The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1977.

Clifford, Richard J. "Cosmogonies in the Ugaritic Texts and in the Bible," *Orientalia: Nova Series*, 53, no. 2 (1984): 183–201.

Collins, John J. *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible Reference Library. New York: Doubleday, 1995.

Cranfield, C. E. B. *Romans, a Shorter Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.

Crouch, Carly L. "Made in the Image of God: The Creation of Adm, the Commissioning of the King and the Chaokampf of YHWH." *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 16, no. 1 (2016): 1–21.

Crouch, Carly L. *War and Ethics in the Ancient Near East: Military Violence in Light of Cosmology and History*. Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.

Dalley, Stephanie. *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others*. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Day, John and Oxford Old Testament Seminar, eds. *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*. London: Sheffield Academic, 2013.

Dittenberger, Wilhelm. *Oriens Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae: Supplementum Sylloges Inscriptionum Graecarum, Vol. 2*. Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1905.

Dunn, James D. G. *Romans 9-16*. Edited by Bruce M Metzger, David Allen Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker. Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 38B. San Francisco: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2014.

Elliott, Neil. *Liberating Paul*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.

Elliott, Neil. "Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda." In *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, edited by Richard A. Horsley, 184–204. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997.

Engberg-Pedersen, Troels. *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A., ed. *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible, v. 33. New York: Doubleday, 1993.

Galinsky, Karl. *Augustus: Introduction to the Life of an Emperor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Garrett, James Leo Jr. "Dialectic of Romans 13:1-7 and Revelation 13." *Journal of Church and State* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1977): 5–20.

Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. "Neither Height nor Depth: Discerning the Cosmology of Romans." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64, no. 3 (August 2011): 265–78.

Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. "Reading Romans 13 with Simone Weil: Toward a More Generous Hermeneutic." *Journal for Biblical Literature* 136, no. 1 (November 2016): 7–22.

Goswell, Gregory. "Where Is David in the Book of Daniel?" *Restoration Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2014): 209–21.

Gunkel, Hermann, and Heinrich Zimmern. *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12*. Repr. [der Ausg.] Göttingen 1895. Breinigsville: Nabu Press, 2011.

Gusha, Ishanesu S. "Exegesis of Romans 13:1–7 and Its Appropriation to the New Dispensation of the Second Republic of Zimbabwe." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (2020).

Hardin, Justin K. "Paul's Neronian Nod (Rom 13:1-7): The Achilles' Heel for a Counter-Imperial Apostle?" *Unpublished Version of a Paper Presented at the Evangelical Theological Society*. San Diego, CA., November 2019.

Harrison, James R. *Paul and the Imperial Authorities at Thessalonica and Rome: A Study in the Conflict of Ideology*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 273. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011.

Hays, Richard B. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Hays, Richard B. "Who Has Believed Our Message? Paul's Reading of Isaiah." *SBL Seminar Papers*, no. 37 Part 1 (1998): 205–25.

Hollander, John. *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After*. Quantum Books. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Hollar, David Wason Jr., and Richard R. Erickson. "Cosmology." In *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Science*, 6, 2020. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=shib&db=ers&AN=88314216&site=eds-live>.

Horsley, Richard A., ed. *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997.

Jewett, Robert. *Romans*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.

Käsemann, Ernst. *Commentary on Romans*. London: SCM Press, 1982.

Käsemann, Ernst. *Perspectives On Paul*. Mifflintown: Sigler Press, 1996.

Keener, Craig S. *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*. New Covenant Commentary Series. Eugene: Cascade, 2009.

Kim, Seyoon. *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Koch-Mehrin, Johannes. "Die Stellung Des Christen Zum Staat Nach Röm 13 Und Apok 13." *Evangelische Theologie* 7, no. 11–12 (June 1948): 378–401.

Lang, T. J. "Cosmology and Eschatology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Pauline Studies*, edited by Matthew V. Novenson and R. Barry Matlock. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Levick, Barbara. *Augustus: Image and Substance*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Lim, S.U. "A Double-Voiced Reading of Romans 13:1–7 in Light of the Imperial Cult." *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2015): 1–10.

Longenecker, Richard N. *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.

Lucass, Shirley. *The Concept of the Messiah in the Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity*. London: T&T Clark, 2011.

Malina, Bruce J., and John J. Pilch. *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.

Mayer, Werner R. "Ein Mythos von Der Erschaffung Des Menschen Und Des Königs." *Orientalia*, Nova Series, 56, no. 1 (1987): 55–68.

Mellish, Kevin. "Creation as Social and Political Order in Ancient Thought and the Hebrew Bible." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 157–79.

Miller, Colin. "The Imperial Cult in the Pauline Cities of Asia Minor and Greece." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72 (2010): 314–32.

Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

Morris, Leon. *The Epistle to the Romans*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.

Mrázek, Jirí. "Die Beziehung von Kirche Und Staat Im Neuen Testament." *Communio Viatorum* 2 (2014): 197–210.

Mukuka, Tarcisius. "Reading/Hearing Romans 13:1-7 Under an African Tree: Towards a Lektion Postcolonica Contexta Africana." *Neotestamentica* 46, no. 1 (2012): 105–38.

Neufeld, Matthew G. "Submission to Governing Authorities: A Study of Romans 13:1-7." *Biblical Interpretation* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 90–97.

Nygren, Anders. *Commentary on Romans*. Translated by Carl C. Rasmussen. London: SCM Press, 1952.

Nystrom, David. "We Have No King but Caesar: Roman Imperial Ideology and the Imperial Cult." In *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies*, edited by Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica, 23–37. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Pardee, Dennis. "The Ba'lu Myth." In *The Context of Scripture*, 1:241–74. Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World. Leiden: Brill, 1997.

Potter, David. *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Price, S. R. F. *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Runge, Steven E. *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*. Lexham Bible Reference Series. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010.

Seneca. *Moral Essays: Volume I: De Providentia. De Constantia. De Ira. De Clementia*. Translated by John W. Basore. Loeb Classical Library, LCL, Vol. 1. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928.

Seneca the Younger. "Apocolocyntosis." Translated by Gareth Schmeling. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020.

Seters, John van. "The Creation of Man and the Creation of the King." *ZAW*, no. 101 (1989): 333–42.

Šterbenc Erker, Darja. "Religion." In *A Companion to the Neronian Age*, edited by Emma Buckley and Martin T. Dinter, 118–33. Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Stuhlmacher, Peter. *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.

Towner, Philip H. "Romans 13:1-7 and Paul's Missiological Perspective: A Call to Political Quietism or Transformation?" In *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, edited by Sven Soderlund, Gordon D. Fee, and N. T. Wright, 149–69. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

White, Joel. "Paul's Cosmology: The Witness of Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians." In *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, edited by Jonathan T. Pennington and Sean M. McDonough, 90–106. Library of New Testament Studies 355. London: T&T Clark, 2008.

Winter, Bruce W. *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

Witherington, Ben, and Darlene Hyatt. *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Wright, M. R. *Cosmology in Antiquity*. Sciences of Antiquity. London: Routledge, 1995.

Wright, N. T. *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

Wright, N. T. "Romans." In *The New Interpreter's Bible: Acts - First Corinthians, Vol. 10*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002.