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In the Old Testament Prophetic Literature

Martin G. Klingbeil

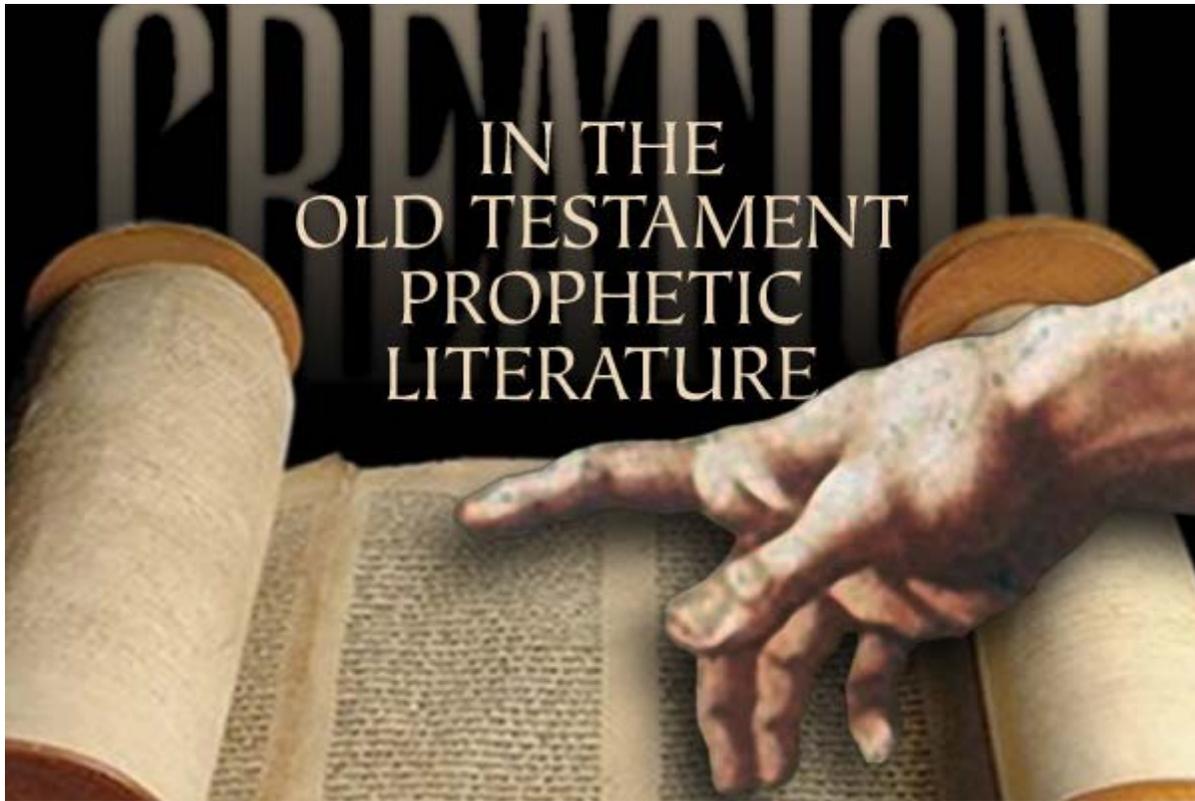
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The prophets of the Old Testament wrote their inspired messages from God based on a clear understanding of His role as Creator.

By Martin G. Klingbeil

“Creation,” writes Rolf Rendtorff, “to this day has been one of the ‘proverbial step-children’ in the recent discipline of Old Testament theology.”¹ Brueggemann refers the responsibility for the peripheral position of creation in theology to the dichotomy between the Israelite faith and Canaanite religion, or history and myth, that found its way into biblical theology during the earlier part of the past century.

A number of scholars did recognize the prominence of creation in the theological thinking of the Old Testament, both in terms of position and content. Some placed creation in history

through its expression in myth and ritual. Thus it is the primeval event, and the stories told about and enacted upon it, are part of the universal traditions of humankind. The biblical authors were seen to adapt these stories theologically for Israel and to identify them as part of God's work of blessing.

But the doctrine has also been described as the horizon of biblical theology, relating creation to world order and arriving at the conclusion that history is the realization of this order. "Only within this horizon could Israel understand its special experiences with God in history."²

Nevertheless, it appears that in most cases the dating of texts lies at the bottom of the question as to where to position creation within the framework of Old Testament theology. Though the Bible begins with creation, biblical theologies mostly do not. Traditional critical approaches to Old Testament texts do not allow for an early dating of Genesis 1–11. Most scholarship has rather taken Isaiah 40–55, the so-called Deutero-Isaiah, dated by literary criticism to post-exilic times, as a chronologically secure paradigm for creation in the Old Testament against which other texts, amongst them Genesis 1–3, are then benchmarked. This leads inevitably to the conclusion that creation is a late addition to the theological thinking of the Old Testament. Implicit in this approach is the danger of circular reasoning, since creation texts are being dated on the basis of religious historical paradigms as late and are then used to date other creation passages accordingly: "It is obviously somewhat paralyzing to realize that we form a picture of Israel's religious history in part on the basis of certain texts which, in turn, with the help of the picture obtained by historical research, we subsequently judge with respect to 'authenticity' and historical truth."³

Recognizing the unsatisfying results of such a dating scheme, an approach to the topic of creation in the Old

Testament should depart from a contextual reading of the texts in question in the various bodies of Old Testament literature.

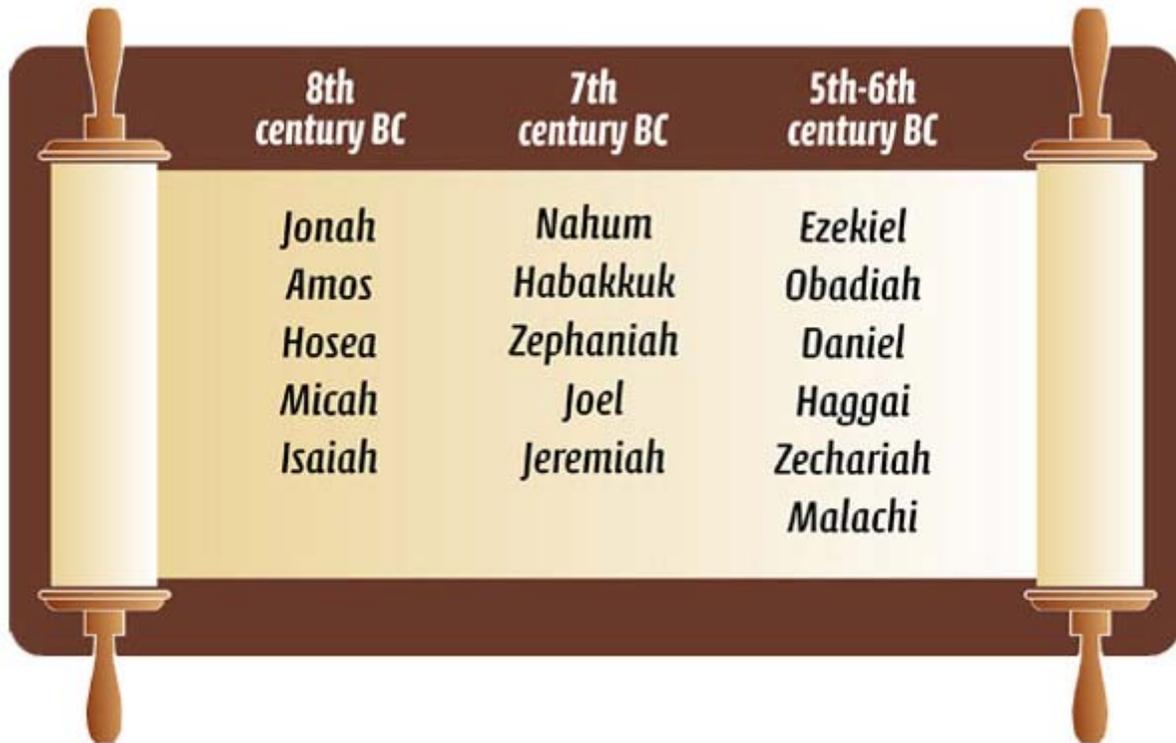
The prophetic literature of the Old Testament provides a rich tapestry for such a reading since the implicit nature of prophecy in the Old Testament is reformatory in nature. It refers back to the historic deeds of Yahweh in the past (creation, exodus, conquest, etc.) and thus motivates a return to Him in the respective present.

Methodological Questions

Two points need attention before evaluating the evidence of creation from the Old Testament prophets. The first is the question of intertextuality. Much of the prophets' messages are evocative of earlier texts, creating points of reference to events in the course of Israel's history, but at the same time applying them to their present contexts. The second issue grows somewhat out of the first and refers to the question of how to identify references to creation in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament.

Intertextuality has recently come into focus in biblical scholarship. For the sake of this article, intertextuality may be broadly defined as references between texts that can occur on multiple levels. It networks texts in a way that creates new contexts—and new meanings of old texts. It also arranges various texts on a sometimes complicated timeline and thus gives rise to chronological considerations that have been out of focus in previous biblical studies.

Among the prophets of the Old Testament, the following timeline will serve as the chronological framework in which the usage of creation texts in the prophets will to be addressed. They are grouped broadly according to centuries.



8th century BC	7th century BC	5th-6th century BC
<i>Jonah</i>	<i>Nahum</i>	<i>Ezekiel</i>
<i>Amos</i>	<i>Habakkuk</i>	<i>Obadiah</i>
<i>Hosea</i>	<i>Zephaniah</i>	<i>Daniel</i>
<i>Micah</i>	<i>Joel</i>	<i>Haggai</i>
<i>Isaiah</i>	<i>Jeremiah</i>	<i>Zechariah</i>
		<i>Malachi</i>

This rough timeline is intended to help demonstrate how the theological thinking during the period was reflected in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. It also implies that the prophetic literature of the Old Testament is subsequent to Genesis 1–11, a point that can be argued both on a literary and historical level, but that will hopefully become even more apparent when it can be demonstrated how the prophets were constantly “looking back” at creation. Thus, the events of Genesis 1–3 become the point of reference to which the prophets return when they employ creation terminology and motifs.

Eighth-century Prophets

These would include Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah, which in itself is an impressive mix of messengers and messages. Jonah, of course, directed his prophecies toward the international arena, while Amos and Hosea addressed the Northern Kingdom, and Micah and Isaiah prophesied in Judah before or until after the fall of Samaria. The geographic spread

should indicate the pervasiveness of creation thought during this century.

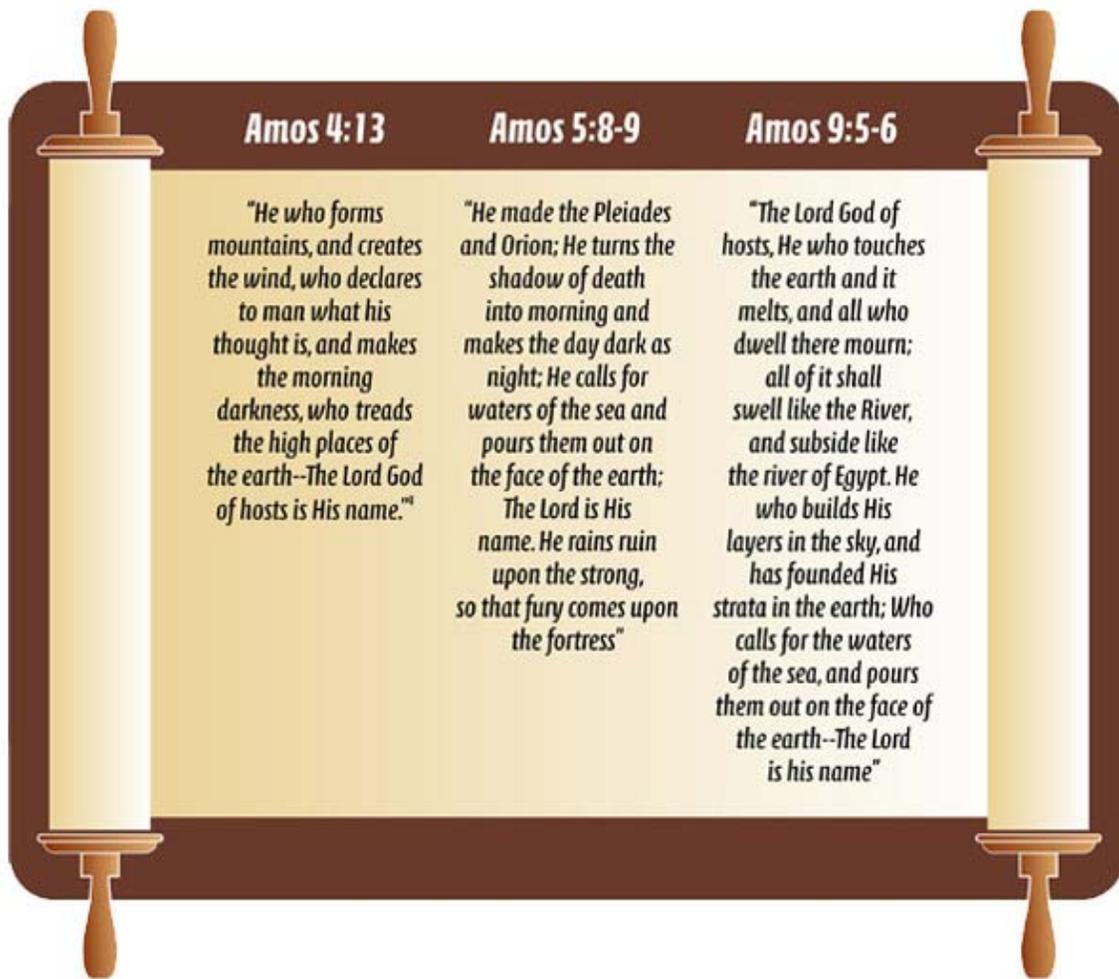
Jonah. Jonah's message is full of ecological content and as such allusive of creation. In outing himself to the sailors, Jonah defines himself as a follower of the Creator God in a language that is reminiscent of creation and the Decalogue: "Yahveh, God of heaven, I worship/fear who made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9, my translation). One cannot help noticing the somewhat problematic but very emphatic sentence structure in which the predicate ("worship/fear") is inserted between the object ("Yahveh") and its qualifying relative clause ("who made the sea and the dry land"). Jonah sees himself surrounded by Yahweh the God of creation, although ironically he is not quite sure if he should worship or fear Him.

The progressive descent to the depths of the ocean in Jonah's psalm (Jonah 2:2-9) indicated by the verbal root dry, "to descend" (vs. 6), can be related to Genesis 1-3. According to the ancient Near Eastern and also to some extent Old Testament cosmologies, there is a spatial dimension of above and below, i.e., the Earth is resting on pillars in waters under which the realm of Sheol was to be found. All these elements appear in Jonah's poem: He finds himself cast into the "heart of the sea" (Jonah 2:3/Gen. 1:10) and cast out of God's presence (Jonah 2:5) as Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden (Gen. 3:24); he passes through the chaotic waters (Jonah 2:5/Gen. 1:2) and finally descends to Sheol (Jonah 2:2] or the pit (Jonah 2:6). Jonah is sinking toward darkness and death, away from light and creation, a process that is equivalent to de-creation.

In the whole book, obedient creation is in juxtaposition to disobedient humanity, and the Creator is portrayed as continually being involved in His creation by throwing a storm at Jonah (Jonah 1:4), appointing a fish to his double rescue by letting it swallow the disobedient prophet (vs. 17) as well as vomiting him

onto solid ground (2:10). He furthermore prepares a plant (4:6), a worm (vs. 7), and an east wind (vs. 8) in order to bring His despondent servant to his senses. Creation is not just an event of the past, but recurs through Yahweh's permanent involvement in His creation and with His creatures. But foremost, all creation is geared toward Yahweh's salvation acts toward humanity, and the question that concludes the Book of Jonah finds its answer in the book's presence in the canon, reiterating Jonah's belief in the supreme Creator-God as initially ironically stated in his confession to the heathen sailors (1:9).

Amos. Creation in Amos is an analogy of history, presenting Yahweh as Creator continuously interacting with His creation, and more specifically in this prophetic book, in a context of threatening judgment but also salvation. Creation terminology appears predominantly in the three hymns (Amos 4:13; 5:8, 9; 9:5, 6) that have a structuring influence in the overall outlay of the book.



Creation language is predominant in these five verses, and a number of lexical creation markers appear: "to create," "to form," and "to make." Interestingly, all these markers are participles, a syntactic peculiarity that can be found throughout the Book of Amos. Nevertheless, God's creative activity in each instance is brought into relationship with the human sphere, indicating how creation touches on human life.

One can perceive a certain progression among the three hymns in terms of how God's intervention impacts upon humanity. In Amos 4:13, God reveals His judgment intentions to humankind; Amos 5:8 and 9 describes the destructive aspect of

God's judgment; Amos 9:5 and 6 finally describes the human reaction to the divine judgment.

The startling aspect of Amos's presentation of creation is that it is intrinsically linked to judgment, almost in such a way that creation forms the explanation for destruction. What starts as a hymn of praise for Yahweh the Creator becomes a threatening description of Yahweh the Judge. This apparent contradiction has startled a number of scholars and most probably, and more deliberately, also Amos's audience. The position of inherent security based on belief in the Creator-God is challenged by Amos, and what has provided a basis for a false religious auto-sufficiency becomes now the rationale for judgment, reversing the original function of the hymns.

By means of the hymns, Amos makes it clear that Yahweh is not a God who could simply be controlled. He challenged certain positions of presupposed rights—by means of which the people presumed the right of existence—from the broader perspective of God's creation. Thus, creation can be contextually oriented toward both comfort and judgment, whereas in Amos it is mostly directed toward judgment.

To accept Yahweh as the Creator also implies the acceptance of His power to de-create. On first sight, creation used in this way, is disassociated from salvation, but when judgment is understood as preliminary and partial to salvation, than de-creation becomes a necessary precursor for re-creation. Amos drives this point home by the formulaic usage of the expression "the Lord is his name" (Amos 4:13; 5:8; 9:6), indicating that this is also and remains to be God, He "is not only the God who creates, but He also destroys."⁵

The Book of Amos concludes with a glorious perspective on restoration after judgment (9:11-15) introduced by the eschatological charged phrase "on that day." The passage alludes to the creation theme by employing building terminology ("to

build,” vss. 11, 14) and the metaphor of Yahweh as King. Thus within the theological thinking of Amos, the correct understanding of creation becomes a prerequisite to the comprehension of re-creation.

Hosea. Creation in Hosea is closely linked to the theme of the creation of Israel as a nation, again as with Amos in a context of pending judgment. Creation is not only analogous to history, but is history itself.

Hosea begins to develop his creation theology with an allusive description of de-creation in Hosea 4:1-3, in which an interesting reversal of the order of creation as presented in Genesis 1 takes place. God is having a “controversy, case” with or against Israel (Hosea 4:1), which in the relationship-focused context of Hosea could be better understood as a quarrel between husband and wife that also constitutes the underlying metaphor of the book. Based on Israel’s sins (vs. 2), Hosea 4:3 invokes judgment by introducing the creation, viz. the anti-creation theme: “Therefore the land will mourn, and all who live in it will waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea will be extinguished” (my translation). The three groups of animals represent the three spheres in which life is found on Earth, and the reversal of their order as known from creation in Genesis 1 invokes the idea of judgment as de-creation, where creation just shrivels up when confronted with and abused by sin.

The affinity between Hosea 6:2 and Deuteronomy 32:39 can hardly be overlooked in this context and constitutes another creation motif in Hosea, and the reference to Yahweh as the one who puts to death but also resurrects is pointing to the God of Creation, which is a theme strongly developed in the Song of Moses. Hosea 8:14 picks up on the same motif, again establishing a relationship with the Pentateuch in using the divine creation epithet “Maker,” which also occurs repeatedly in the Song of

Moses (Deut. 32:6, 15, 18). However, “the notion of creation leads toward indictment and sentence, not toward praise.”⁶

Possibly the strongest creation text in Hosea is found in 11:1, and it synthesizes the passages mentioned above into the metaphor of Yahweh as the Creator and Procreator of Israel: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.” This verse connects to Hosea 1:10 (“They will be called “children of the living God”” (NIV), and to the Exodus, which is described in creation terminology.

Thus, the creation of Israel as a nation during the historic events connected with the exodus from Egypt becomes part of God’s creation. Whom God elects, He also creates, and with that an intimate and eternal bond is created like that between a father and his son. Beyond reiterating and enhancing creation theology, the metaphor is pedagogic in its rhetoric: “By means of this theme of Israel’s creation it is not so much the intention of Hosea to nuance the view that the people had of Yhwh but, rather, to confront them with their own behavior. They are faithless sons.”⁷

Micah. Affinities and intertextual issues between the messages of Micah and Isaiah are numerous and have been pointed out repeatedly by various scholars. The most often quoted passage in this context is the almost identical parallel found in Micah 4:1-3, 5 and Isaiah 2:2-5. Though the passage can be taken as an argument for a common prophetic message of the two prophets, for the purpose of this study, the focus rests on the creation imagery transmitted in an eschatological setting via the metaphor of Mount Zion. According to Old Testament cosmology, Zion lies at the center of the created world, and Micah points to the establishment of it in terms of creation terminology (“to establish” [Micah 4:1]). Creation in Micah is focused on destruction and consequent re-creation in the context of the “day of the Lord” with its eschatological implications. The prophet builds a theological bridge between creation in the beginning and

in the end around the presence of God as symbolized by the Mount Zion metaphor.

Isaiah. As mentioned above, Deutero-Isaiah was the point of departure for many scholars in establishing an Old Testament theology of creation, based on the assumption that Isaiah 40–55 could be dated in the post-exilic period. Nevertheless, recent studies that focus on the literary unity of Isaiah—though few scholars would take the argument to its logical conclusion, i.e., unity of authorship—show that creation theology is present throughout the whole book. In view of the wealth of creation material in Isaiah, a selection of creation texts and motifs demonstrate the main lines of the prophet’s theological thinking on creation. The examples are taken deliberately from across the three divisions proposed by critical scholarship.

Taking Isaiah’s temple vision as a chronological departure point, Isaiah 6:1 describes Yahweh along the lines of the heavenly king metaphor identified earlier as allusive to creation. The Song of the Vineyard in the preceding chapter presents an important aspect of creation in demonstrating the interconnection of God’s creation and His intervention in history, placing it in the context of Israel’s election. Isaiah 5:12 provides a further insight into Isaiah’s creation theology: Sin is in reality not acknowledging God’s deeds in creation.

In Isaiah 17:7, the prophet takes up the theme developed by Hosea of Yahweh as the “Maker” of humankind. The image of Yahweh as the potter of Isaiah 29:16 has already been identified above as creation terminology and occurs in all three divisions of the book (41:25; 45:9; 64:8). Creation in Isaiah focuses primarily on God’s sovereignty over His creation and humankind’s failure to recognize His proper position within this world order.

Isaiah 40–55 has been called the center of Isaiah’s theology; whereas Isaiah 36–39 fulfills a bridging role carefully linking the previous chapters to the remainder of the book. It has

been argued that the so-called Deutero-Isaiah introduces creation as a new theological topic to the book, but the preceding observations show that the theme is “deeply continuous with the Isaian tradition.”⁸ Though creation terminology abounds in the whole book, creation occurs in Isaiah 40–55 in connection with the Exodus and conquest (41:17-20; 42:13-17; 43:16-21; 49:8-12), placing creation in history. Furthermore, creation is positioned alongside redemption (44:24) pointing to the theological significance of the motif in introducing Cyrus as the agent of God’s redemption. In this way, the Exodus serves as a typological guarantee for the future redemption from the Babylonian exile through Cyrus (vs. 28). The theocentric manifestation that God forms light and creates darkness as much as peace and evil (45:7) serves as an introduction to God as a potter metaphor (vss. 9-13), which illustrates the absolute sovereignty of God within the realms of human history. (The view of God also being responsible for the creation of evil fits well within the theocentric Hebrew worldview and forestalls any notions of dualism.)

The final division of the Book of Isaiah (chaps. 56–66) focuses on the creation of Zion with Isaiah 60–62 at the center of the section describing the glorious city. The book’s grand finale in chapters 65–66 adds an eschatological dimension to creation theology in Isaiah describing renewal and restoration in terms of creation. But creation in these last chapters refers not only to Zion as a place, but foremost to its inhabitants, who need re-creation and transformation: “Be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy” (65:18, NIV).

Summarizing Isaian creation theology, the following becomes apparent. Creation in Isaiah 1–39 is focused on God’s sovereignty over His creation and the establishment of a personal relationship with humanity, exemplified by the usage of the

potter metaphor, which points back to Genesis 2. In Isaiah 40–55, the theme focuses on the creation of Israel as a nation in history by connecting creation with the Exodus and theologically with salvation. In Isaiah 56–66, creation is centered on the future re-creation of Zion and its people in response to the failure of a pre-exilic Israel. Thus, we have a sequential development of creation theology in the Book of Isaiah that follows a natural progression of thought.

Seventh-century Prophets

A new century in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament is overshadowed by the sobering perspective of the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.) and an increasing urgency for the prophetic message to be heard as the Babylonian exile is approaching. As during the eighth century, the prophetic word is inaugurated by an international message, issued by Nahum against the Assyrians. Habakkuk enters with God into a dialogue about His people, while Zephaniah and Joel enlarge upon the eschatological meaning of the “day of the Lord” motif. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, finally fails with his message to avert the Babylonian exile.

Nahum. Creation in Nahum is connected to the “day of the Lord,” and the description of its characteristics is reminiscent of creation terminology: “He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither, and the flower of Lebanon wilts. The mountains quake before Him, the hills melt, and the earth heaves at His presence, Yes, the world and all who dwell in it” (Nahum 1:4, 5). Again there is a context of de-creation driven by cosmological imagery. In the judgment theophany, the created order is impacted by its own Creator in a way that is reminiscent of the Ancient Near Eastern *Chaoskampf* motif whereas, there is a polemic reworking of the motif with Yahweh depicted as sovereign over all the common Ancient Near

Eastern power symbols, such as the sea, the mountains, and earth.

Habakkuk. Habakkuk offers a similar perspective on creation as Nahum in using creation imagery in the context of de-creation during the theophany in the “day of the Lord”: “He stood and measured the earth; He looked and startled the nations. And the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills bowed. His ways are everlasting” (Hab. 3:6). In the following verses, Habakkuk describes the impact of Yahweh’s appearance on creation (vss. 7-12). However, through the destructive power of de-creation, salvation is accomplished: “You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with Your Anointed” (vs. 13). Along the same lines, creation imagery also serves as a point of reference for recognition of the Creator: “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, As the waters cover the sea” (2:14).

Zephaniah. As observed above, Zephaniah 1:3 introduces a reversal of creation by listing the animals in a reversed order as they were originally mentioned in the creation account from Genesis 1. He furthermore uses the familiar word-play in the original language between *man* and *ground* known from Genesis 2:7. The reversal of creation order, however, transmits a strong theological message: “In Gen. ii . . . the pun is used to indicate man’s dependence on that from whence he came, whereas Zephaniah uses it to show man’s separation from his creator, Yahweh. A situation that involves a return to the age before creation can result only in man’s destruction.”⁹ Zephaniah is depicting the progressive loss of dominion over creation by humanity and its resulting de-creation.

Aside from the obvious creation allusions, Zephaniah also refers to another event of the Urgeschichte, i.e., the Flood, by using the phrase “from the face of the earth” as an *inclusion* for the passage in Zephaniah 1:1-3 (cf. Gen. 6:7; 7:4; 8:8). Within

the prophet's message of judgment, the Flood serves as an example of present impending doom.

Joel. Within the "day of the Lord" imagery, Joel employs creation imagery in order to describe the impact of Yahweh's theophany on creation as part of that judgment day: "The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel" (Joel 3:15, 16). "Heavens and earth" serves as a creation indicator, but again, within a negative context of judgment. The theophanic event is always connected to the experience of God in nature and the impact of His appearance on creation.

The final verses of Joel, however, return to the topic of re-creation describing the future of Zion in paradisiacal terms: "In that day . . . the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord and water the Valley of Acacias" (vs. 18). The Garden of Eden mentioned earlier (2:3), which had been destroyed by the locust plague, is thus being re-created. Again, a linear motion from creation to de-creation and finally re-creation can be observed with creation being the overall paradigm that underlies history.

Jeremiah. Creation in Jeremiah is so extensive that a number of key passages will have to suffice. The book begins with reference to the creation of the prophet in his mother's womb (Jer. 1:5) using the lexical creation marker "to form, fashion," which can be found in Genesis 2:7. The creation of humankind as part of the creation week is repeated in each new creation of new human life.

A survey of creation in Jeremiah has to include Jeremiah 4:23-26, which connects with strong linguistic markers to the creation account as found in Genesis 1. The doom-oracle presents

possibly the most faithful account of de-creation, or the reversal of creation, when compared to Genesis 1:2–2:4a. The following table adapted from Fishbane shows the progression:¹⁰

Detail	Jeremiah	Genesis
Pre-Creation	"formless and empty" (Jer. 4:23, NIV)	"formless and empty" (Gen. 1:2, NIV)
First day	"there light was gone" (Jer. 4:23, NIV)	"there was light" (Gen 1:3, NIV)
Second day	"heavens" (Jer. 4:23, NIV)	"heavens" (Gen. 1:8, NIV)
Third day	"earth: mountains quaking and hills swaying" (Jer. 4:23, 24, NIV)	"earth: dry land" (Gen. 1:9, 10, NIV)
Fourth day		"lights" (Gen. 1:14, NIV)
Fifth day	"birds ... had fled" (Jer. 4:25, NIV)	"let birds fly" (Gen. 1:20, NIV)
Sixth day	"there were no people" (Jer. 4:25, NIV)	"let us make man" (Gen. 1:26, NIV)
Seventh day	towns destroyed "before his fierce anger" (Jer. 4:25, NIV)	"Sabbath" (Gen. 2:2, 3, NIV)

Though the Genesis account ends with a day of rest, the Sabbath, Jeremiah's de-creation account ends with a day of fury. The deconstruction of creation is taking place, and one can be sure that the listeners (and subsequent readers) of the prophet's message recognized the creation pattern. Creation becomes the paradigm for destruction and serves as the primeval point of departure for contemporary theology. "What acts and words could be more invested with power than those of creation?"¹¹

The antithesis to the doom-oracle is provided in Jeremiah 31:35-37, in which two short sayings conclude the Book of Comfort (30–31) and in creation-language point to the impossibility of Yahweh's destruction of Israel. Yet it is expressed

along the lines of remnant theology with reference to the “seed of Israel” and its future hope. Both apparent opposite expressions, Jeremiah 4:23-26 and 31:35-37, show the range of possible applications of creation theology within Jeremiah, but beyond that show that Israel needs to acknowledge Yahweh with regard to its future: “Thus both extremes of expression bear witness the theological claim that finally Israel must come to terms with Yahweh upon whom its future well-being solely depends.”¹²

Jeremiah 10:12-16 is a hymn that celebrates Yahweh’s creative power, and it is replenished with creation imagery: “He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens at His discretion. When He utters His voice, There is a multitude of waters in the heavens: ‘And He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of His treasures.’ Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge; every metalsmith is put to shame by an image; for his molded image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are futile, a work of errors; in the time of their punishment they shall perish. The Portion of Jacob is not like them, for He is the Maker of all things, and Israel is the tribe of His inheritance; the Lord of hosts is His name.”

Although most commentators point to the contrast between the true God and the idols, the emphasis is rather on a contrast between Yahweh as the creator of life (10:13) and humankind as (false) creator of life (vs. 14). The focus is not on the idol but on its human maker who is “shamed” by his inanimate image, since he is not able to provide the creature with the necessary breath of life, which is the distinguishing characteristic of Yahweh’s creation.

Idolatry is therefore a double sin. The worship of idols denies the reality of God’s complete control over the cosmos because it involves the acknowledgement of other divine powers.

And worse still is the pretense of creating life. In doing so, humankind lays claim to divine knowledge.

Sixth- and Fifth-century Prophets

The Babylonian exile and post-exilic period brought with it a change in the prophetic message, shifting its contents toward restoration or, speaking within the terminology of this article, to re-creation. Though Ezekiel and Obadiah witness the downfall of Jerusalem, and as such the ultimate fulfillment of the long-prophesied de-creation, Daniel brings an apocalyptic dimension to the topic. Re-creation becomes the prominent topic for post-exilic Haggai and Zechariah, and Malachi finalizes the canonical prophetic chorus of the Old Testament with the restorative message around the Second Elijah.

Ezekiel. Petersen comes to the conclusion that “creation traditions are not important for Ezekiel’s theological argument.”¹³ His argument, however, appears to be on the assumption of an exclusive positive reading of the creation account which, as has been seen, forms only one part of the theological panorama for which creation motifs were invoked. If understood in this way, Ezekiel “is not concerned with how the world itself came into existence, . . . but rather with re-forming a world gone awry.”¹⁴ As illustration, three passages outline Ezekiel’s theological usage of creation:

- Ezekiel 28:11-19 is a prophetic oracle that centers on a description of the king of Tyre as a type for the anarchic cherub, which has been interpreted since the times of the early Christian writers as pointing to the fall of Lucifer. A number of indicative creation linguistic markers are present, yet the context of the passage is focused on the description of the hubris of a fallen angel that is staining a perfect world. As with Jeremiah, creation language is employed as a powerful paradigm to describe the origin of sin.

- Ezekiel 31:1-18 transfers the same scenario into the realm of human history. The cosmic tree representing human kingship, a motif well-known from ancient Near Eastern iconography, is used as a metaphor for the downfall of the king of Assyria, which in turn serves as a warning for Egypt's future judgment. The chapter describes the glory of the tree within creation terminology and cosmology (e.g., Eze. 31:4/Gen. 7:11) and connects it with paradise (Eze. 31:8, 9, 16, 18). Creation terminology is employed to describe the downfall of two prominent nations, Assyria and Egypt. Thus not only paradise has been spoiled, but also human history.

Re-creation in Ezekiel and the reversal of de-creation as exemplified by the two previous passages can be found in Ezekiel 47:1-12 within the context of the vision of the future glory of the temple, which in itself serves as a creation motif. This time the trees are growing again, not in rebellion against but under Yahweh's power and provision of fertility (Eze. 47:12). The sustaining agents of God's power are the rivers of paradise that connect Ezekiel to the creation account in Genesis 2:10-14. Ezekiel deliberately merges temple/Zion with paradise imagery because the destruction of the earthly temple in Jerusalem and his own exile in Babylon has caused the place of God's presence to transcend to a heavenly realm, indicating that Yahweh's presence is continuous and does not depend on human realities.

As the connections between Ezekiel 47:1-12 and Genesis 2:10-14 reveal, Ezekiel understood the symbol of Zion in a new way. Free of explicit reference to the temporal, political realities of kingship, priesthood, and the earthly temple, the temple-mountain and river of Ezekiel's last great vision stand as timeless symbols of divine presence. For Ezekiel, the earthly Zion, with its city and temple, was a bitter disappointment.

Creation in Ezekiel is used to express his (and the divine) disappointment over angelic rebellion and consequent human

history, which replays that rebellion again and again, but he moves beyond that in stating that God is able to re-create something new and eternal from the shreds of human history. However, one should be cautious not to attribute an exclusive other-worldliness to the Ezekiel's prophecies. One should not forget the prophet's vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37 which employs creation terminology in the re-creation of the house of Israel.

Obadiah. There is no apparent creation terminology employed in the Book of Obadiah except for the usage of the Mount Zion motif (chap. 1:17, 21) which is in juxtaposition to the mountains of Edom (vss. 3, 4, 8, 9). The one who has made his "nest among the stars" (vs. 4) will be brought low because of human wisdom and understanding (vs. 8). Instead, the mountains of Esau will be governed from Mount Zion (vs. 21).

Daniel. There are few studies that engage the Book of Daniel with creation theology, and those who take up the task usually focus on the mythological *Chaoskampf* motif and its ancient Near Eastern counterparts as found in the description of the waters in Daniel 7:2, 3. According to Wilson, in contrast to Genesis 1, the waters described in Daniel 7 are presented as returning to chaos, and the animals that surface from the waters are composite creatures that do not correspond to the order of creation in Genesis 1. "The world has reverted to its pre-creation state and is clearly in need of re-creation."¹⁵ This re-creation is achieved in the vision of the Ancient One that constitutes the second part of the vision (Dan. 7:9-14) with the word *dominion* being the key word and appearing eight times in this chapter. The failure of human dominion over the earth in history as ordained in creation is replaced by God's dominion over the universe through an everlasting kingdom.

But aside from Daniel 7, there is more on creation in the

prophetic book, as Doukhan has shown. Some of the most outstanding allusions:

- In Daniel 1:12, the four young men opt for a menu that echoes the pre-Fall diet of Genesis 1:29, and the description of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2:38 invokes creation terminology applying the same attribute of dominion over the earth and all his creatures to the Babylonian king as Adam received in Genesis 1:28.

- Clay, which is part of the feet of the statue, is used throughout the Bible within contexts alluding to creation, indicating the religious aspect of the spiritual Rome (Isa. 29:16; Jer. 18:2; Lam. 4:2).

- The word-pair *darkness/light* in Daniel's benediction (Dan. 2:22) is resounding the creation account of Genesis 1:4, 5.

- Another creation word-pair (*heaven/earth*) is found in Nebuchadnezzar's prayer after he returns to his senses in Daniel 4:35.

- The usage of the cosmic tree motif in Daniel 4 points to the creation account (Gen. 2:9).

- The association of "evening-morning" in Daniel 8:14 is found in this sequence and meaning only in the creation story (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

In the concluding chapter of the book, Daniel evokes creation terminology by describing re-creation, which is taking place after the de-creation scenario of the previous chapter (Dan. 11). For the righteous ones there is a passage from sleeping in the dust (12:2) to shining like the stars (vs. 3) and for Daniel in particular from resting to standing up in the final day to receive his inheritance (12:13).

The apocalyptic themes of transformation of history and final return to an Edenic state that are so recurrent in the Book of Daniel are theologically grouped along a process from creation to de-creation and finally re-creation, a topic encountered

repeatedly in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament; whereas the timelines in Daniel are broader and informed by his apocalyptic perspective. Eschatology, which moves toward an end imperatively necessitates a beginning, and the theme of creation provides the theological rationale against which eschatology can take place.

Haggai. In Haggai 1:10, the prophet invokes the heaven/earth allusion, demonstrating how the post-exilic community's lack of faithfulness is causing nature's or creation's blessings to be interrupted. Further on, Haggai employs the same word-pair in order to describe how the created order is affected by the "day of the Lord," but this time from a Messianic perspective: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory," says the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:6, 7).

Zechariah. God as the continuous sustainer of creation is described by Zechariah: "Ask rain from the Lord in the season of the spring rain, from the Lord who makes the storm clouds, who gives showers of rain to you, the vegetation in the field to everyone" (Zech. 10:1, NRSV). The "vegetation in the field" connects with the "plant of the field" of Genesis 2:5. Springtime and fertility are caused by the ongoing process of "creating" the rain clouds. Zechariah's second oracle ("utterance, oracle," Zech. 9:1) is introduced by using a distinct creation terminology, however, with a significant rearranging of the various elements: "A prophecy: the word of the Lord concerning Israel. The Lord, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares . . ." (12:1, NIV). Though the stretching out of the heavens is not a direct linguistic creation marker, it nevertheless recaptures the action of Genesis 1:6, 7 and is found throughout the Old

Testament (Ps. 104:2; Job 9:8; Isa. 44:24). It is also interesting to note that the object of “to form” in Zechariah 12:1 is not man himself as in Genesis 2:7, but “the spirit of man.”

One has the sense that there is a traditional set of creation vocabulary, but that it could be arranged in various acceptable patterns. Heavens, earth, humanity, and spirit provide the crucial building blocks. Zechariah 12:1 combines them in an innovative and adroit manner.

Interestingly, Zechariah 12:1 serves within the given literary genre as a validation for the following oracle, which is a description of Israel’s new and victorious role among the nations, a new creation of the nation on the day of the Lord.

Malachi. Malachi concludes the cycle of Old Testament prophets with a rhetorical question that parallels God as the Creator with the metaphor of God as a father: “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another By profaning the covenant of the fathers?” (Mal. 2:10). Creation is here being transformed to the intimate level of a father-son relationship, viz. husband-wife (cf. Mal. 2:14, 15), which echoes the intimate creation account of Genesis 2. Creation in the final book of the Old Testament and in its final analysis is not centered on cosmogony but on a personal relationship between God and humankind as exemplified in the order of creation.

Summary

In establishing the broader lines of creation in the prophetic literature of the eighth century, it becomes apparent that creation is progressively anchored in history, theologically made relevant in salvation, and paradigmatically centered in the introduction of the triad of creation–de-creation–re-creation.

Creation in the prophetic literature of the seventh century is historically contextualized by the impending Babylonian exile;

whereas, the triad of creation–de-creation–re-creation becomes more and more prominent with the prophets beginning to look beyond the inevitable judgment toward restoration.

The usage of creation during the final two centuries of Old Testament prophetic literature is clearly future-oriented; whereas a theological abstraction has taken place that can be related to the disappearance of the physical temple and monarchy. Though creation is still the overarching paradigm that spans human history, the focus has moved toward the end of that arc which, as in the case of the Book of Daniel, takes on apocalyptic and also Messianic concepts.

Creation in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament is employed as a constant literary and theological reference which connects to a historical past, motivates the interpretation of the present, and moves toward a perspective for the future by means of a continuous contextualization of the topic via the triad creation–de-creation–re-creation. This reference point is anchored in the creation account as presented in Genesis 1–3.

The final authors of the Hebrew Bible understood creation not as one topic among others or even one of lower significance. For them, creation was the starting point because everything human beings can think and say about God and His relation to the world and to humankind depends on the fact that He created it all.

The intertextual markers that refer to creation in the prophets indicate that they saw it as a literal and historical given; whereas, reference is made indiscriminately to the creation account as presented in both Genesis 1 and 2. The movement of intertextuality indicates clearly that as much as creation forms the starting point of much of the prophetic theological discourse, all markers of creation as discussed here back to the creation model as presented in Genesis 1–3. Though it has not been the purpose of this article to reconstruct the cosmology of the Old

Testament prophets, it has become apparent that their worldview drew out of creation and explained and interpreted the world from this perspective. Any discussion of whether the prophets considered creation other than a historical event or even used it only for literary or theological purposes cannot be sustained from the textual data and would be projecting a 19th-century A.D. rationalist debate into a first millennium B.C. context in which it would have not existed otherwise.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

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