**Devotional #3 Creation in the Old Testament II**

“Hearing God’s Heart: Creation in the Old Testament—Crises Call Us Back to Basics”

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**Slide 1:**

When crises hit, instinct often takes over. Adrenaline starts pumping and we begin to function in auto-mode. Have you ever experienced an earthquake of a 7.0 magnitude on the Richter scale? I remember my first earthquake in Peru when I saw our tiled floor in our living room become fluid and making waves. The rumble was terrifying and last for only 30 seconds—even though it felt like 30 minutes.

**Slide 2:**

Have you lived through war, famine, or major health epidemics? I am sure there are a number of you here this morning who can say, “yes”, “yes”, and “yes.”

**Slide 3:**

Prophets were God’s loudspeaker in the Bible. They were called by God for a specific purpose and spoke to His people and the larger world about current events, ethical choices, idolatry—and also about the future. Prophets communicated by using familiar ideas and concepts and applying them to the message the Lord had given to them. Jesus employed a similar strategy. He used familiar stories in His parables.

**Slide 4:**

What do you think when you see this picture? If you have ever seen pictures of the skyline of New York, and particularly Manhattan, you will know that this is the Empire State Building.

**Slide 5:**

If you ever visited Germany you may have seen this picture. That’s one of the must-see sites that every tourist should visit, located in southern Germany. Neuschwanstein castle was built by Bavarian king Ludwig II and was only completed towards the end of the nineteenth century. It looks like a fairytale castle—and, truly, a strange fairytale monarch lived in it for some years.

**Slide 6:**

So why do we look at pictures of Manhattan and Germany when we want to talk about creation in the Old Testament? Pictures and memories call out associations that speak to us and can move us. Creation memory is one of the most important theological memories and motifs in the Old Testament and the larger Bible. Let’s carefully unearth it as we spend some time with the prophets.

**Slide 7:**

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| **8th century B.C.** | **7th century B.C.** | **6th/5th century B.C.** |
| Jonah  Amos  Hosea  Micah  Isaiah | Nahum  Habakkuk  Zephaniah  Joel  Jeremiah | Ezekiel  Obadiah  Daniel  Haggai  Zechariah  Malachi |

The eighth century B.C. was marked by periods of relative peace (the first half) when the Neo-Assyrian Empire was preoccupied with itself and did not bother with its vassals in Syria-Palestine. The end of the eighth century B.C. coincides with the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. and the resulting exile of northern Israel. Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah minister in this period in Israel and Judah, while Jonah’s ministry is outward focused. The seventh century B.C. is marked by many changes. Assyria extends its reach and finally subjugated Egypt in 664 B.C., even though Assyrian control over Egypt did not last long. Three important kings represent the strength of the Assyrian Empire, Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.), Essarhaddon (681-669 B.C.) and Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.). Judah finds itself in constant conflict with the Assyrian overlords. The last quarter of the century is marked by constant rebellions throughout the empire and the rise of Babylonian power. By 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar was standing before the gates of Jerusalem and took some hostages as part of the vassal treaty with Judah. Twenty years later, in 586 B.C. following several revolts, the Babylonian king finally destroyed the city and its temple and took Judah’s population (or better, a large part of Judah’s population) into Babylonian exile. Ezekiel and Daniel minister during this period before and during the exile in Babylon. Haggai and Zechariah were called by God to encourage the leaders of the small group returning from Babylon after 70 years in exile. Malachi’ prophetic ministry concludes our Old Testament canon.

**Slide 8:**

Creation Markers in the Prophets

1. Semantic field linked to creation (*bara’*, “to create;” *yasar*, “to form;” *‘asah*, “to make;” *pa‘al*, “to produce”)
2. Word pairs (e.g., heaven and earth, darkness and light)
3. Quotes: Ezek 36:11 uses an inverted order of verbs found in Gen 1:28, highlighting the link between creation and re-creation after exile.
4. Allusions: An allusion is an incomplete or fragmented reference to another text and thus is less easily recognizable and more prone to misinterpretation. Example for allusion: Zeph 1:3: “I will sweep away both men and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea,” the allusion to creation is made through reversing the order of creatures as they have been listed in Gen 1, making a theologically significant statement of reversal of creation and separation from our Creator.

**Slide 9:**

We don’t’ have enough time to systematically go through the prophets, something you can read in my brother Martin’s chapter in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015), 257-289. Let’s focus on the main features and contours and the bird’s eyes view and then conclude with one specific example from the prophet Jeremiah. I will not include many Bible references as they will clutter the big picture. Specific references and many footnotes can be found in my brother’s chapter.

**Slide 10:**

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| **Eighth Century B.C. Prophets** | |
| Jonah | * Focus on ecology * Jonah’s progressive descent reflects a movement away from creation, from life towards death * Obedient creation opposite disobedient humanity * Reoccurring creation is geared towards salvation |
| Amos | * Creation is analogous to history * Creation becomes a paradigm for judgment (de-creation) and salvation (re-creation) * Correct understanding of creation is prerequisite for re-creation |
| Hosea | * Creation is historical * Reversal of creation order is used to portray anti-creation * Creation of Israel during exodus becomes part of original creation * Election equals creation |

**Slide 11:**

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| **Eighth Century B.C. Prophets (continued)** | |
| Micah | * Creation focuses on de- and subsequent eschatological re-creation * Mount Zion metaphor as a theological bridge between creation and re-creation |
| Isaiah | * Creation is present throughout the whole book * Creation metaphors like “maker,” “potter,” establish a personal relationship * Creation in history serves as a guarantee for redemption * Future re-creation flows out from redemption |

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.

**Slide 12:**

The historical context changes dramatically in the seventh century B.C. Israel has disappeared and Judah was under constant threat from outside powers. God’s people had not heard the earnestness of eighth century B.C. prophets calling for a complete turnaround. A tidal wave was coming their way.

**Slide 13:**

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| **Seventh Century B.C. Prophets** | |
| Nahum | * Creation terminology is used to describe the “day of the LORD” = judgment * God’s sovereignty as Creator over ANE power symbols |
| Habakkuk | * Creation as de-creation during the “day of the LORD” * De-creation is intended to accomplish salvation and recognition of the Creator |
| Zephaniah | * Reversal of creation indicates separation between Creator and creature * Progressive de-creation results in loss of dominion over creation * Flood as a type for de-creation |

**Slide 14:**

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| **Seventh Century B.C. Prophets (continued)** | |
| Joel | * Eschatological de-creation, but redemption for His people * Re-creation is described in terms of the lost paradise * Triad: creation—de-creation—re-creation |
| Jeremiah | * Strongest account of reversal of creation in prophetic literature * Creation becomes the paradigm for destruction * Remnant theology connects to creation * Contrast between true Creator (YHWH) and false Creator (idolater) |

Creation in the prophetic literature of the seventh century B.C. 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 towards restoration.

**Slide 15:**

The events of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. were incredibly traumatic for God’s people. Imagine the questions in your mind if you would see the Babylonian armies plundering Jerusalem and destroying God’s temple on Mount Zion. How can God allow something like this? Where will the journey go now? We cannot see beyond the next bend in life’s journey—and neither could they.

**Slide 16:**

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| **Sixth/Fifth Century B.C. Prophets** | |
| Ezekiel | * Focus on reforming a de-created world * De-creation is foreshadowed in the fall of Lucifer * Paradise and human history is stained by the primeval event * Ezekiel’s future temple serves in itself as a creation motif * The idealistic character of the future temple transcends the shortcomings of human (Israelite) history |
| Obadiah | * No explicit creation theology |
| Daniel | * Creation terminology is present throughout the book * Apocalyptic transformation of history in terms of creation * Eschatology (re-creation) is dependent on protology (creation) |

**Slide 17**

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| **Sixth/Fifth Century B.C. Prophets (continued)** | |
| Haggai | * “Day of the LORD” motif with messianic perspective along creation terminology (important link between Messiah and creation) |
| Zechariah | * Ongoing creation by sustaining of life through fertility and rain * Creative re-arranging of creation terminology building blocks in order to describe the re-creation of the nation |
| Malachi | * Creation transformed onto an intimate personal relationship-level * Creation not based on cosmogony but relationship |

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. While creation is still the overarching paradigm that spans human history, the focus has moved towards the end of that arch which, as in the case of the book of Daniel, takes on apocalyptic and also Messianic notions.

**Slide 18**

Creation is omnipresent in Jeremiah. It starts with 1:5 and the description how the prophet had been “formed” (*yasar*) in his mother’s womb. *Yasar* echoes creation terminology. Let’s focus on a representative section in Jer 4:23-26. It’s a section that contains one of the closest linguistic links to Genesis 1-3. The oracle of doom presents possibly the most faithful account of de-creation, or the reversal of creation, when compared to Gen 1:2–2:4a.

**Slide 19**

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| **Detail** | **Jeremiah** | **Genesis** |
| Pre-creation | “formless and void” (*tohû wābōhû*, Jer 4:23) | “formless and void” (*tohû wābōhû*,Gen 1:2) |
| First day | there was no light (*ʾôr*, Jer 4:23) | there was light (*ʾôr*, Gen 1:3) |
| Second day | heavens (*šāmayim*, Jer 4:23) | heavens (*šāmayim*, Gen 1:8) |
| Third day | earth: mountains quaking and hills swaying (*ʾereṣ*, Jer 4:23, 24) | earth: dry land (*ʾereṣ*, Gen 1:9, 10) |
| Fourth day |  | lights (*mĕʾōrōt*, Gen 1:14) |
| Fifth day | birds had fled (*ʿôf*, Jer 4:25) | let birds fly (*ʿôf*, Gen 1:20) |
| Sixth day | there were no people (*ʾādām*, Jer 4:25) | let us make man (*ʾādām*, Gen 1:26) |
| Seventh day | cities destroyed before his fierce anger (*ḥǎrôm ʾappô*, Jer 4:26) | Sabbath (*šabbāt*, Gen 2:2, 3) |

While the Genesis account ends with 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. De-creation and judgment are sure because of the historicity and surety of the original creation. God’s people are in the midst of an existential crisis—where can help come from?

**Slide 20**

In times of hardship, unimaginable pain and loss we run to what we know. Israel knew that creation was a given, that their Creator was YHWH, the covenant God who had not only made the world in seven literal days and celebrated creation with Sabbath rest, but was also the One who had called in the Garden: Adam, Eve, humanity, where are you?

The image shows a young boy sitting on the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, reminding Germans and those visiting Berlin of the unspeakable crimes and pain of the Holocaust.

For Israel’s prophets creation was a constant theological and literary connector to their past and a pattern and paradigm for a reimagined future. It became the lens through which their current realities were viewed. Their worldview was shaped by creation and the Creator God who lovingly bend down to shape humanity out of clay and breathe in His own breath. In the midst of judgment and catastrophe, the look back to creation and history’s beginning gave them the courage to look forward and imagine a new future. Messiah’s coming was an integral part of the new creation. It is also an integral part of an Adventist worldview that awaits a soon-coming Saviour—this time not as a baby in a rickety manger, but as the King of kings and Lord of lords who will make all things right.

**In preparing for this presentation I have enormously benefitted from Martin G. Klingbeil, “Creation in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament: An Intertextual Approach,” in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberation in the Old Testament*, ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015), 257-289.**