

CREATOR & CREATION



Chapter Six

In the End

The Eschatological Myths

The Beginning in the End

Both the J and the P creation myths present the human situation in positive terms. Humans have cultural knowledge, or humans are made in the image of God and are thus given dominion over the earth. Humans are like God. But the reality of the human situation is not so positive. Rarely are humans content simply to be *like* God; rarely have humans lived in dependence upon God their creator. Rather, humans have used cultural knowledge and exercised dominion to achieve their own desires. They have attempted to *become* God. According to the Priestly writer, humans have disregarded the order of creation, and so have corrupted it. According to the Yahwist, humans have an evil inclination with the result that they murdered other humans and had sexual relations with divine beings. In both cases, however, the Yahwist and the Priestly writer are not describing human deeds of the distant past. The creation myths are about the present, and so also are the tales of human rebellion against God and the created order. Human abuse of cultural knowledge and dominion is the present reality for the Yahwist and the Priestly writer.

The flood myths similarly are about the present rather than some primordial catastrophe. Both myths attest to the inevitable consequences of the present hubris of humans, but the J and the P myths differ on their emphasis. For the Yahwist, the flood myth underscores God's preservation of creation despite the evil inclination of humans. This is in accord with the Yahwist's own positive orientation toward human history: Despite human failure and rejection of God, Yahweh repeatedly redeems his people. If the Yahwist wrote during the early years of the Davidic empire, as traditionally argued, then his epic probably reflect the optimism of the Davidic court. David had united the diverse peasant groups of Palestine, and organized them into a powerful kingdom. He had conquered the peoples of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Aram, and established diplomatic ties with Phoenicia and Philistia. Trade and tribute brought prosperity to the region. Israel prospered under David despite humankind's evil propensity. If the Yahwist wrote during the exile as some recent studies suggest, then his epic bears witness to a confidence in Yahweh's inevitable redemption of his people: Just as Yahweh repeatedly redeemed his people in the past, so Yahweh will redeem

his people from exile and return them to their land. In either case, the Yahwist stresses the stability of creation. God recognizes that humans are *inherently* inclined toward evil, and so God promises to preserve the creation lest he regret again that he created them.

In contrast to the J flood myth, the Priestly flood myth accentuates the connection between violence – the consequence of the perversion of human dominion – and the corruption of creation. Because humans are part of the order of creation, human actions affect the created order. Humans pollute the creation when they do not exercise dominion within the constraints of creation. Eventually, the order of creation is unable to withstand the continual human assault against it. The creation itself succumbs to the pollution caused by humans and must be recreated or cleansed in order for it to sustain life. The Priestly writer emphasizes this connection between human actions and collapse of creation because, unlike the Yahwist, this was the Priestly writer's present experience. The author of P wrote during the Babylonian exile, or shortly thereafter. The people of Judah had just experienced the collapse of creation as they knew it: Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, king Jehoiachin was stripped of his crown and sent into exile (king Zedekiah was butchered along with his family), and many of the people were forcibly taken from their homes and exiled to Babylon. The Priestly flood myth, then, served as a paradigm of the people's experience of exile. The created order collapsed because the people of Judah rebelled against God and so polluted the land (Frymer-Kensky, 1983: 409–10). But like the flood, the exile did not mark the end of creation. Rather, the exile was the means by which God cleansed the people and the land, and thereby restored the order of creation. Life was possible beyond exile because God was establishing a new creation that would be guaranteed by covenant.

Despite different emphases, the Yahwist and the Priestly writer present the same essential myth following the pattern: catastrophe and new creation.¹ This mythic pattern is not unique to the biblical tradition. It can be found throughout the ancient Near East and Mediterranean and around the world. This ubiquitous myth attests to a fundamental insight of pre-modern humans that the creation of a new world entails the destruction of the present world. The present world with its corruption and evil cannot simply be fixed. The world must be dismantled so that a new unblemished world can be built in its place (Eliade, 1963: 54–74). For the Yahwist and the Priestly writer, this myth is projected back to the beginning, and so is combined with a creation myth, in order to explain and give meaning to their present situation. For the prophets, on the other hand, this myth is projected into the future. They envision the destruction of the present order due to the sins of Israel and the nations. Human rebellion against God has polluted their world beyond restoration. But the creation will not end in destruction. The prophets also envision the creation of a new world,

¹ The catastrophe/new-creation myth corresponds in metaphor and structure to the ubiquitous ancient Near Eastern conflict myth. Specifically, the catastrophe/new-creation myth is a particular development and elaboration of the conflict myth with a distinct emphasis. Whereas the conflict myth focuses on the of a world, and employs metaphors of order and differentiation, the catastrophe/new-creation myth stresses the from one age or world to the next, and uses metaphors of pollution and cleansing. The conflict myth is generally oriented toward the divine realm and focuses on the status of Yahweh's kingship. The catastrophe/new-creation myth, on the other hand, tends to focus on the state of the creation. It is terrestrially oriented and underscores the effect of humans on the creation. This distinct emphasis of the catastrophe/new-creation myth, however, should not obscure its affinities with the conflict myth.

free from human sin and its consequences. The present order will be destroyed so that the creation can be remade into the world that God intended.

The prophets never articulate this eschatological myth in narrative form like the biblical creation and flood myths. The urgency of their messages precludes such a possibility. Their writings consist primarily of oracles – speeches given in the name of Yahweh – that intend to communicate a divine word to both people and king. Nevertheless, by examining selected metaphors and the underlying structures of the prophetic oracles, the myth of catastrophe and new creation can be detected. This myth serves as the paradigm for many of the prophets' oracles. It forms the fundamental perception of reality from which the prophets are able to discern God's judgment on the present world and to herald the coming of a glorious new world.

Many of the prophets reflect the catastrophe/new-creation myth in varying degrees. This myth itself does not determine the content or the focus of their message, but rather provides the metaphors and the structure of their message. The content of the prophetic oracles is determined by the specific social situation of each prophet. In particular, the preexilic prophets (Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah) tend to focus on God's judgment of Israel and Judah. The people of Israel and Judah have rebelled against God. They have rejected the covenant and have trusted in their own ways. As a result, according to these prophets, the people through their corruption have polluted the land. Yet these prophets are not without hope for the people. The people will indeed experience the collapse of creation. But the prophets also offer a vision of a new creation, the corollary to catastrophe – the people and the land will be cleansed from pollution. The exilic prophets (Ezekiel, Second Isaiah), on the other hand, tend to address their oracles to a people who have already suffered the consequences of their sins. They have already experienced the collapse of the created order. The exilic prophets, then, prepare the people to experience God's new creation. The message of the postexilic prophets (Obadiah, Joel, and a number of anonymous oracles) tends to be more complex, reflecting both aspects of the myth. God has redeemed his people by returning them to their homeland in Palestine, but the people are not experiencing the effects of God's new creation. The people are still subject to foreign rulers; they suffer from economic depression; and there is bitter strife within the community of God's people (Hanson). Therefore, the postexilic prophets predict the advent of a new cosmic catastrophe. Although the catastrophe will be directed toward the nations, Israel itself will not remain unscathed. Only after the eclipse of this final catastrophe will God's new creation dawn.

Before we turn to examine the prophets' use of the catastrophe/new-creation myth, two notes about the language of the prophets must be made. First, the prophets consistently mix historic/realistic language with metaphorical language. For example, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians is described in terms of the collapse of creation itself. Such metaphorical language is not simply hyperbole. Rather, the prophets employ numerous cosmic metaphors to underscore the significance of the historical events that occasion their oracles. Through metaphors they give meaning to these events. Second, the prophets use ingroup/outgroup distinctions to refer to the creation which correspond to the horizontal model of sacred space discussed in Chapter Four. Jerusalem and the land of Israel are symbolically placed at the center of the world, and the nations at the periphery. The center,

the land of the ingroup, is the land of creation. The world was created at the center. The periphery, on the other hand, is the land of the outgroup and remains chaotic and life-threatening. The catastrophe that results from Israel's sins, then, occurs at the center. Their sins corrupt the creation that is characteristic of the center. The center reverts to chaos as it is consumed by the periphery. Similarly, the new creation that is anticipated by the prophets stems from the center. It is only the center that will be transformed into the garden of Eden, and only the ingroup people at the center who will experience the new creation. The nations at the periphery will benefit from the new creation only as they are related to the center.

The Preexilic Prophets

Amos

In the book of Amos, the first of the so-called classical prophets, the catastrophe/new-creation myth is reflected primarily in the cluster of metaphors associated with the expression, "the day of Yahweh" – "the day of the LORD" in most English translations of the Bible. According to Amos's oracle, the people of Israel long for the day of Yahweh. They think that the day of Yahweh will bring them prosperity and victory over all their enemies. But because the people of Israel, specifically the rich in Israel, have oppressed the poor in the land (2:6–8; 8:4–6), the day of Yahweh will bring only destruction to Israel:

¹⁸Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD!
Why do you want the day of the LORD?
It is darkness, not light;
¹⁹as if someone fled from a lion,
and was met by a bear;
or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,
and was bitten by a snake.
²⁰Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?

(Amos 5:18–20)

Few topics have generated more discussion and debate among biblical scholars than the subject of the day of Yahweh. Yet despite the vast amount of literature on the subject (see the bibliography in Loretz: 77–79), the quest for the origin and meaning of this expression has failed to produce a consensus. The day of Yahweh has been interpreted variously as the day of Yahweh's enthronement (Mowinckel, 1922; 1958; 1992: I.106–92), the day of Yahweh's war (von Rad, 1959), the day of Yahweh's theophany (Weiss; Hoffmann), and the day of Yahweh's execution of the covenantal curses (Fensham, 1966). Although each of these interpretations has accurately focused on a particular aspect of the day of Yahweh tradition, none has proved to be sufficient – none can fully account for the prophetic use of this expression. Specifically, the day of Yahweh² generally refers to a forthcoming event,

² In addition to the expression, "the day of Yahweh," the concept of the day of Yahweh is represented by a number of related locutions such as: "a day of Yahweh," "the day of Yahweh's vengeance," "the day of Yahweh's wrath," "the day of Yahweh's anger," "a day of Yahweh's tumult, trampling, and confusion," "the day of Yahweh's sacrifice," "the day of Yahweh's feast," and "on that day."

though in several passages it refers to a past event (Everson). It is associated with metaphors of war, kingship, judgment, and cosmic upheaval, and the effects of the day are directed against Israel and on different occasions against the nations. Without addressing the origin of this concept (though see Cross, 1973: 91–111), the diverse metaphors associated with the day of Yahweh are best explained in reference to the conflict myth. Only the broad background of the conflict myth can adequately account for all the features of the day of Yahweh tradition (Simkins, 1991: 243–55).³ In other words, the day of Yahweh refers to the day of Yahweh's cosmogonic battle against chaos. On that day Yahweh will appear to judge and to destroy his enemies who pose a threat to his kingship over creation. On that day Yahweh will defeat chaos and be enthroned anew in his temple-palace. On that day Yahweh will restore order to creation and cleanse the earth from the pollution that defiled it. The day of Yahweh encapsulates the catastrophe/new-creation myth.

In the book of Amos, the day of Yahweh is directed against the people of Israel. Through their cultic acts and celebration of Yahweh's victory over chaos, the people hope that God will come and judge the nations around them, that God will increase their prosperity and peace at the expense of the nations. They long for the day when Yahweh will extend the order of creation into the periphery, and so enlarge Israel's domain. Indeed, the nations are guilty of violent crimes against their neighbors and deserve God's judgment (1:3–2:3), but Israel, for its part, has transgressed God's covenant. Through corruption and oppression of the poor, Israel has polluted the land. Therefore, Amos proclaims that the day of Yahweh will be against Israel. By their own deeds, the people of Israel have hastened the collapse of the created order; they have made the center like the periphery:

⁸Shall not the land tremble on this account,
and everyone mourn who lives in it,
and all of it rise like the Nile,
and be tossed about and sink again like the Nile of Egypt?
⁹On that day, says the Lord God,
I will make the sun go down at noon,
and darken the earth in broad daylight,
¹⁰I will turn your feasts into mourning,
and all your songs into lamentation;
I will bring sackcloth on all loins,
and baldness on every head;
I will make it like the mourning for an only son,
and the end of it like a bitter day.

(Amos 8:8–10)

This text reflects the basic presupposition that “anyone in Israel who tampers with the just orders of life draws the earth and its inhabitants into perdition at the same time” (Wolff, 1977: 329). Israel's rejection of God's covenant affects both the terrestrial and celestial realms. All creation will be destroyed because Israel has violated the order of creation. No

³ The day of Yahweh tradition includes the variety of themes and images that occur in association with the specific expressions that denote the concept of the day of Yahweh (see note 2).

longer will creation be celebrated through festival and song;⁴ only mourning and lamentation is possible because of the coming catastrophe.

According to Amos, the people of Israel stand on the brink of catastrophe. God who created the earth and established order out of chaos (5:8–9; 9:5–6) will also destroy the world that has been corrupted by his people. The catastrophe/new-creation myth serves as the paradigm by which Amos proclaims God's judgment on Israel's sins. For this reason, the book of Amos begins with a short oracle heralding the Divine Warrior's march to battle:

The LORD roars from Zion,
and utters his voice from Jerusalem;
the pastures of the shepherds wither,
and the top of Carmel dries up.

(Amos 1:2)

Yahweh is the Divine Warrior who must fight in a new cosmogonic battle of creation against his own people. This oracle sets the tone for the entire book, and most of the oracles reinforce this message. Nevertheless, the creation will not end in catastrophe. The book of Amos ends in a salvation oracle that proclaims the dawn of a new creation:

¹³The time is surely coming, says the LORD,
when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps,
and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed;
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and all the hills shall flow with it.
¹⁴I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.
¹⁵I will plant them upon their land,
and they shall never again be plucked
out of the land that I have given them.

(Amos 9:13–15)

From the perspective of the Yahwist creation myth, the garden of Eden is not the natural habitat of humans. It is the garden of *God*, and so the human couple are driven from the garden once they gain cultural knowledge lest they eat of the tree of life and become immortal. Humans are created to till the ground and plant their own gardens. Human access to the garden of Eden is barred forever by God. The rest of the biblical tradition, however, found a way past the cherubim and the flaming sword that guard Eden. In the new creation the whole land will be transformed into a garden like Eden. Amos thus proclaims that in the new creation the earth will be a fertile paradise with the result that the land will produce so much abundance that the gathering of one crop will not be completed before it is time to plant the next crop. The earth will be cleansed so that the land will freely bear its produce

⁴ The connection with the day of Yahweh suggests that the feasts refer to the New Year festival, during which God's creation of the world was celebrated.

without toil and sweat (Cornelius: 49). Moreover, humans will not be mere exploiters of this garden, demanding of its produce and offering little in return. Rather, the prophet likens Israel itself to a garden. Just as God planted his garden in Eden, so God will plant his people in the land. Through agricultural metaphors, Amos emphasizes the essential unity between humans and the natural world. Israel and the natural world will be harmoniously redeemed. The center will flourish in a new creation.

Hosea

Along with Amos, Hosea prophesies against the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. But whereas Amos prophesies during the height of his reign when the elite in Israel experience unmatched prosperity, Hosea prophesies at the end of his reign and during the years that follow. These are turbulent years. Assyria is on the rise, and Israel's monarchy is subject to repeated coups. The final downfall of Israel is inevitable. For the prophet Hosea these events signal God's judgment on Israel. Using a variety of metaphors, Hosea announces God's judgment on the land and the people: The land of Israel will become desolate (5:9); the people will eat but not be satisfied (4:10); the women will be unable to conceive and bear children (9:11–12, 14); and Israel will suffer war and exile from the land (8:14; 9:3; 10:10, 14–15). These punishments, however, are not mere local events. They are cosmic in scope because the sins of Israel are cosmic in their effect:

¹Here the word of the LORD, O people of Israel;
for the LORD has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.
There is no faithfulness or loyalty,
and no knowledge of God in the land.
²Swearing, lying, and murder,
and stealing and adultery break out;
bloodshed follows bloodshed.
³Therefore the land [withers],⁵
and all who live in it [fade away];
together with the wild animals
and the birds of the air,
even the fish of the sea are perishing.

(Hosea 4:1–3)

Israel's sins against God have corrupted the creation so that a drought ravages the land. But this drought is unlike ordinary droughts, for it affects even the fish of the sea. It is a cosmic drought that returns the earth to its dry and barren primordial condition as described in the Yahwist creation myth (compare De Roche, 1981). The sterile desert of the periphery is consuming the creation of the center. Moreover, there appears to be an allusion in this passage to the flood myth. All animals and birds outside the ark perished during the flood, but the fish for obvious reasons survived. But in this new catastrophe, even the fish will be destroyed (Wolff, 1974b: 68).

⁵ The text of the NRSV has been altered to reflect more accurately the drought imagery in this verse (Wolff, 1974b: 65; Andersen and Freedman: 339-40).

It is uncertain whether or not the people of Israel were actually experiencing a drought during Hosea's time. The language of the text is ambiguous. It could refer to a present or a forthcoming drought. In any case, we should be cautious about lifting historical data from a metaphorical text. Hosea's intention is to communicate to Israel the significance of its sins, and to this end he employs drought metaphors.

In conjunction with drought metaphors, Hosea also uses agricultural metaphors to describe Israel. Israel is likened to both a plant and the one who plants. As a farmer, Israel has reaped what it has sown; as a plant, Israel suffers from the drought that consumes the land:

For they sow the wind,
and they shall reap the whirlwind.
The standing grain has no heads,
it shall yield no meal;
if it were to yield,
foreigners would devour it.

(Hosea 8:7)

Israel has been plowing wickedness and reaping injustice (10:13), and suffering desiccation as a result. Israel's own deeds have corrupted the created order. But Hosea also offers a message of hope. If Israel will follow the commands of God, then life on the barren earth will become possible. Hosea implores the people:

Sow for yourselves righteousness;
reap steadfast love;
break up your fallow ground;
for it is time to seek the LORD,
that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

(Hosea 10:12)

If the people return to God, God will come "like the spring rains that water the earth" (6:3). God will provide the water that is necessary to sustain vegetation so that Israel, like a plant, will flourish in the land.

⁶His shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive tree,
and his fragrance like that of Lebanon.
⁷They shall again live beneath my shadow,
they shall flourish as a garden;
they shall blossom like the vine,
their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

(Hosea 14:6–7)

According to Hosea, the people are integrally linked to the natural world. The creation will sustain life only if Israel follows the ways of God. Otherwise, Israel will wither away with the rest of creation.

The message of Hosea is difficult to interpret. On the one hand, Hosea proclaims God's imminent and inevitable judgment on Israel. Because the people have rejected God's commands, they will suffer the catastrophe that they have initiated. On the other hand, Hosea repeatedly offers hope to the people. The people can prosper and flourish in the land if they return to Yahweh. Even God appears to vacillate on what he will do, unable to decide whether to destroy or redeem Israel (11:8–9). Does this suggest that the people's sins do not inflict damage to the creation, or that such damage is not irreversible? Many scholars have noted the irregularity of Hosea's oracles. Indeed, the Hebrew text of some of the oracles has been corrupted beyond repair. But equally important, the oracles do not appear to be in a finished state. They are more characteristic of preliminary reflections or soliloquies (Andersen and Freedman: 45). The exception are the oracles in Hosea 1–3.

In Hosea 1–3 Israel is compared to an adulterous wife, whose relationship to Yahweh is likened to the prophet's relationship with his own wife. In the form of an allegory, Hosea 1 presents God's summons for Hosea to marry a prostitute and to have children of prostitution. Like Hosea's wife, Israel has forsaken her husband Yahweh to prostitute herself by worshipping other gods and forming political alliances with the nations around her. Although Yahweh loves and cares for Israel and bestows upon her all the abundance of the earth, Israel chooses to pursue other lovers. Therefore, just as Hosea pleads with his wife and threatens her with divorce, Yahweh initiates divorce proceedings against Israel (2:1–13). He will take back all the produce that he has given to her and strip her naked. Israel and the land will be devastated.

Following the oracle of divorce, the attitude of Yahweh changes. No mention is made of whether or not the divorce is finalized. No mention is made of whether or not Israel changes heart and returns to Yahweh. Nevertheless, Yahweh will approach Israel like a man who courts a woman. Yahweh will allure her and speak tenderly to her, and she will respond in kind (2:14–15). Yahweh will again be Israel's husband, and he will take her for his wife forever (2:16, 19–20). The creation itself will celebrate the remarriage of Yahweh to Israel, for through the redemption of Israel, the natural world is also redeemed (Levenson, 1985: 77–80):

¹⁸I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety...

²¹On that day I will answer, says the LORD,
I will answer the heavens
and they shall answer the earth;

²²and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel;

²³and I will sow her⁶ for myself in the land.

⁶ Most translations emend the Hebrew text to read "him," referring to Israel, but the feminine pronoun is appropriate in this context, for Israel has been likened to a wife. Batto suggests that the feminine pronoun refers to the eschatological conditions mentioned in the preceding verses--that is, God will sow peace in the land (1987a: 202). This interpretation is possible, though not conclusive.

(Hosea 2:18, 21–23)

This covenant between humans and the animal world – the listing of the animals suggests that they are representative of all non-human living beings (De Roche, 1981: 404–5) – is unprecedented elsewhere in the Bible. It can be compared with God’s covenant with Noah which also includes the animals, but that covenant is between God and the animals. Moreover, the Noahic covenant does not reconcile the enmity between humans and animals. This new covenant, however, will bring peace to both humans and animals. The original harmony of Eden will be restored. Bernard Batto has identified this covenant as a covenant of peace, a common ancient Near Eastern motif that signals the cessation of a deity’s hostility toward humans caused by their revolt at creation (Batto, 1987a; Fensham, 1965). In the context of Hosea, however, God’s hostility does not stem from humankind’s revolt at the *dawn* of creation. God will bring destruction on Israel because Israel has transgressed the *present* order of creation by rejecting God’s commands. Therefore, God’s redemption of Israel must also entail the renewal of creation because Israel’s sins have corrupted the created order.

God’s restoration of creation, or new creation, is most clearly articulated in vv. 21–23. God will reestablish the ecological web that unites his own creative activities with both the natural world and humankind (Koch, 1979: 47). God is the agent of creation; God is the one who will initiate the creation (“answer” has the connotation of “respond to”), and God is the one who will plant Israel in the land. The creation will respond in like fashion. In contrast to the drought that is consuming Israel, the heavens will water the earth so that it will shoot forth its produce and provide the sustenance for Israel to live in the land.

The repeated references to “on that day” (2:16, 18, 21) give this redemption an eschatological tone. God’s redemption of Israel and the land is a new creation, not simply the repair of the existing order of creation. The relationship between Hosea’s oracles of judgment and oracles of salvation corresponds to the structure of the catastrophe/new-creation myth. The emphasis of the prophet for the people to return to Yahweh does not qualify the inevitability of the coming catastrophe. Rather, the prophet simply models for Israel the appropriate response to God’s promised, though not inevitable, new creation. This interpretation is confirmed by the prophet’s allegorical understanding of his own redeeming actions on behalf of his adulterous wife:

⁴For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. ⁵Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

(Hosea 3:4–5)

The Israelites will experience the collapse of creation that their sins have hastened upon them, but then God will redeem them through a new creation.

Isaiah of Jerusalem

Although Isaiah does not explicitly refer to the Sinai covenant, he stands in the same tradition as Amos in condemning the rulers and elite of Judah for oppressing the common people in their quest for wealth and power. The source material for his judgment against Judah is the royal theology, which is the theological reflection of the royal ideology discussed in Chapter Four. The royal theology proclaims Zion to be the dwelling of God and the center of creation, and thus a city of righteousness, and the Davidic rulers to be God's earthly executors of peace and justice (Gottwald: 377–78). But reality did not correspond to this theology. Jerusalem had become a city of injustice, and the king did not walk in the ways of God.

Isaiah's preference for the royal theology rather than the Sinai tradition for the source material of his oracles might reflect his own social standing. He appears to have been from a noble Jerusalem family, and possibly even a temple priest. In any case, he had access to both the king and the chief priests. But Isaiah might also have preferred the royal theology because the people's understanding of this theology served as a catalyst for their sins. In other words, Isaiah might have used the royal theology against the rulers and elite of Judah in order to correct their misappropriation of that theology.

The royal theology was dangerous because it elevated the importance of humans, and especially the king. The king was considered to be the adopted son of God. He was supreme over all creatures, and able to act like God in this world. Eventually, this unique position of the king was democratized so that all humans were viewed as kings (Ps 8). (Traces of this lofty view of humans can be detected in both the J and the P creation myths.) As long as humans recognize that they are subordinate to God and the order of creation, such a theology is not problematic. However, the rulers and elite of Judah had usurped God's position. In their haughtiness, they viewed the world as their exclusive domain and all its riches as their plunder. The royal theology was distorted to give legitimation to humankind's basic sin: Human self-exaltation over God. Therefore, Isaiah used the same royal theology to condemn Judah, and thereby herald the coming destruction of the people and the land.

In a spectacular vision in which Yahweh is enthroned in his heavenly temple surrounded by seraphs, Isaiah is privy to the deliberations of the divine assembly (6:1–13). The divine assembly has declared judgment on Judah, but the assembly needs a messenger to proclaim God's judgment to the people. Isaiah volunteers. God then gives Isaiah a message of irreversible doom to prophesy. When Isaiah asks how long he should proclaim this message, Yahweh responds:

¹¹Until cities lie waste
without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is utterly desolate;
¹²until the LORD sends everyone far away,
and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.

(Isaiah 6:11–12)

Isaiah offers no hope for the people of Judah in this world. Their sins have so corrupted the creation that the present order will inevitably be destroyed.

Some of the specific sins of Judah are listed in an elaborate oracle centering around the day of Yahweh. The people have turned to divination and soothsaying, and have bowed down to idols of their own making (2:6, 8). The emphasis here is not on the people worshipping other gods, but rather exalting themselves above God (Watts: 35). They also have hoarded silver and gold and have amassed a large army (2:7). They hunger for wealth and power, a further indication of their self-exaltation. The rulers and the elite of Judah have exalted themselves over God, but God will humble them. Their pride and arrogance will shrink before the glory and majesty of God. Isaiah then uses the cosmic metaphors of the day of Yahweh to describe the coming catastrophe on Judah:

- ¹²For the LORD of hosts has a day
 against all that is proud and lofty,
 against all that is lifted up and high;
¹³against all the cedars of Lebanon,
 lofty and lifted up;
 and against all the oaks of Bashan;
¹⁴against all the high mountains,
 and against all the lofty hills;
¹⁵against every high tower,
 and against every fortified wall;
¹⁶against all the ships of Tarshish,
 and against all the beautiful craft.
¹⁷The haughtiness of people shall be humbled,
 and the pride of everyone shall be brought low;
 and the LORD alone will be exalted on that day.

(Isaiah 2:12–17)

The rulers and elite of Judah have corrupted the order of creation by usurping the position of God. Therefore, the creation itself will be destroyed. Specifically, Isaiah describes the destruction of all that is high and lofty in the creation or that might impress humans with its greatness (Kaiser, 1972: 36). But this text also speaks of the essential unity of creation. Humans, as created beings, are representative of all creation in their arrogant assault against God's rule of the creation. All creation suffers as a result. In the end, only Yahweh will be exalted.

Most of Isaiah's oracles announce God's judgment on the people of Judah. They detail the crimes of the people and herald the coming catastrophe. Nevertheless, like the prophets before him, Isaiah also presents a beacon of hope. The coming catastrophe is but the prelude to a new creation when the people will live in peace according to justice and righteousness – that is, according to the order of creation (Schmid, 1984: 107). Some of these oracles of salvation have been added by later writers wanting to buffer and qualify

Isaiah's harsh sentence on the people, but some undoubtedly stem from Isaiah himself.⁷ Likewise, Isaiah 32:9–20 and 10:33–11:9, two oracles in which the coming catastrophe and the new creation are juxtaposed, are probably from the prophet himself.

In the former oracle, Isaiah addresses the elite women of Jerusalem. He calls them from the complacency of their luxuriant lifestyle to lament, for soon the fruit crops will be destroyed and the fields will be overgrown with thorns and briars. Isaiah states no specific cause for the agricultural catastrophe. Some commentators have assumed, based on v. 14, that the devastation of the crops is caused by war (Kaiser, 1974: 330), but it could also be the result of natural causes such as drought. Regardless of the cause, such a catastrophe will have severe consequences for the people of Jerusalem. But the catastrophe will not be limited to just the agriculture. Even Jerusalem itself will be devastated.

For the palace will be forsaken,
the populous city deserted;
the hill and the watchtower
will become dens forever,
the joy of the wild asses,
a pasture for flocks.

(Isaiah 32:14)

The images that Isaiah marshals are those reminiscent of the Yahwist's creation myth. The land will become a barren wilderness with only thorns and briars like the land outside the garden of Eden that was deprived of rain. Its only inhabitants will be wild animals,⁸ demonic and symbolic of chaos (Talmon: 43). The center of creation that is the land of Israel will be consumed by the chaos of the periphery.

The collapse of the created order, however, will only be temporary. The world will remain barren only

¹⁵until a spirit from on high is poured out on us,
and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.
¹⁶Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.
¹⁷The effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.
¹⁸My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.

(Isaiah 32:15–18)

⁷ Determining which parts of the book of Isaiah preserve the words of Isaiah of Jerusalem is a difficult task. Everywhere in the first part of the book (chaps. 1-39) his words have been mixed with the words of later prophets and editors. Nevertheless, many of the additions appear to be further expansions and elaborations of Isaiah's own words.

⁸ The term translated by the NRSV as "flocks" refers literally to a group of animals. The type of animal in the flock or herd is not specified. In the context of this oracle, it appears to refer to a herd of wild asses.

The wilderness that results from the catastrophe will be transformed by a new creation. In this new creation the people of God will live securely in peace, and their actions will be characterized by justice and righteousness. Justice and righteousness should not be equated with mere human conduct. They refer to a sphere of activity that emanates from God (Koch, 1982: 57–60; Berquist: 59–61). It is God alone who is just and righteous, and the creation is the manifestation of God’s justice and righteousness (see Pss 33:4–7; 89:9–14; and the discussion by Levenson, 1988: 104–6). Humans are just and righteous only when they live in accord with creation, only when their actions correspond to the ways of God. This will be the mark of the new creation. Because the people of God will live according to God’s righteousness and justice, the creation will remain secure. Human faithfulness to God will safeguard the creation forever.

In the second oracle Isaiah likens the coming catastrophe to the deforestation of the august cedar forests of Lebanon:

- ³³Look, the Sovereign, the LORD of hosts,
will lop the boughs with terrifying power;
the tallest trees will be cut down,
and the lofty will be brought low.
³⁴He will hack down the thickets of the forest with an ax,
and Lebanon with its majestic trees will fall.

(Isaiah 10:33–34)

Isaiah’s metaphor in this passage is transparent: God will destroy the people because of their haughty pride. Isaiah’s focus in this oracle, however, is not on the inevitable catastrophe that is coming upon Judah but on the hope of a new creation. Reference to the coming catastrophe is made in order to set the stage for God’s new act of creation.

Although the people will be destroyed like the felling of trees, God will bring new life to the stump that was the lineage of David. God will cause the stump to shoot out new branches; a new king will arise to govern God’s people. Unlike the previous kings of Jerusalem who rejected the imperatives of the royal theology, this new Davidide will reign with justice and righteousness. He will truly be a son of God and God’s regent over creation (11:1–5).

As in the message proclaimed by Hosea, Isaiah envisions that the new creation will also entail a transformed relationship between humans and animals. Because God’s righteousness will prevail on the earth, the whole creation will be reconstituted as God intended it. No longer will there be enmity between humans and animals:

- ⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
⁷The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,

and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
⁹They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

(Isaiah 11:6–9)

Isaiah's vision of an idyllic harmony within the animal world is troublesome for many ecologically informed readers. Is not the natural world *inherently* violent? The balance of nature is dependent upon one species preying off another. Nature is "red in tooth and claw," yet without violence it would cease to sustain itself. Therefore, commentators have commonly acknowledged the utopian character of this vision.

Despite its unrealistic vision, this text can nevertheless offer realistic values. According to one commentator, what concerns Isaiah in this passage "is violence of any kind, even in the animals world, for he cannot accept that as being a rightful part of God's good world, and so he dreams of a day when there will no longer be any need for any living thing to kill another (Gowan: 104)" But although human violence is indeed an assault on the order of creation, there is no evidence to suggest that violence among animals was deemed contrary to the created order. For the ancient Israelites, all life belonged to God. Every act of taking life, whether it be human or animal life, was problematic, *but only for humans*. The Bible places no concern in violence within the animal world. Violence is indeed the concern of this oracle – not violence of any kind, but rather violence that occurs between the human and the animal world (Kaiser, 1972: 160–61). Notice that there are two types of animals listed in this oracle: domestic animals raised by humans (lamb, goat, cow) and wild animals that prey on humans and their domestic herds (wolf, leopard, lion, bear). Domestic animals are part of the human world. They are ingroup members with humans in contrast to wild animals which make up the outgroup; they are representative of culture rather than nature. They are raised by humans for humans. An attack against them by wild animals is an attack on the human world. Thus, the domestic animals serve as the key for understanding Isaiah's oracle. This oracle is not envisioning the cessation of violence among wild animals but between the animal world and the human world. In the new creation the ingroup/outgroup enmity between humans and wild animals will be reconciled.

In verse 8 Isaiah makes an allusion to either the Yahwist creation myth, or the traditional source material which the Yahwist used to write his myth (the date of both the Yahwist and this oracle is problematic). There he proclaims that the child will not be harmed by the snake, explicitly undoing the enmity that resulted from the human couple's actions in the garden. According to J, the woman's offspring will strike the head of the serpent's offspring, and the serpent will strike his heel. But in the new creation, the child and the snake will peacefully coexist. The child will play over the snake rather than strike it, and the snake will not attack the child.

One final comment should be made about Isaiah's oracle of the new creation. It is proclaimed from a human point of view. The violence that will be eliminated in the new creation is violence that is directed at the human world. No mention is made about whether, for example, humans will become vegetarians, no longer using animals for food. This might

be inferred from the text, but it is not explicitly stated, nor should it be expected. Isaiah was prophesying to humans, and so addressed human concerns. Nevertheless, his vision of a new creation has implications beyond its human orientation.

Zephaniah

Isaiah predicts that the Assyrian empire will serve as God's agents of judgment against Judah (10:5–6). Indeed, during Isaiah's own life the Assyrians under Sennacherib invade and devastate much of the land of Judah. Jerusalem barely survives, according to Isaiah, because of Hezekiah's faithfulness. Roughly a century later, the prophet Zephaniah prophesies the destruction of the Assyrian empire and its capital Nineveh. But Zephaniah does not focus solely on Assyria. He also proclaims God's judgment on the Phoenicians, the Philistines, the Moabites, the Ammonites, and on the people of Judah. The book of Zephaniah begins with an oracle announcing God's destruction of the whole world:

²I will utterly sweep away everything
from the face of the earth, says the LORD.
³I will sweep away humans and animals;
I will sweep away the birds of the air
and the fish of the sea.
I will make the wicked stumble.⁹
I will cut off humanity
from the face of the earth, says the LORD.

(Zephaniah 1:2–3)

This oracle of judgment is universal in scope. The whole world will be destroyed – all human and animal life. The oracle itself uses language similar to the creation and the flood myths. The listing of humans, animals, birds of the air, and fish of the sea reflects the Priestly writer's enumeration of creatures that God created, but in reverse order (De Roche, 1980: 106). The repeated reference to the "face of the earth" is reminiscent of the flood myth. This oracle employs the pun *'adam-'adama* – God will cut off *'adam*, "humanity," from the face of the *'adama*, "earth" – in the same manner as the Yahwist creation myth. Whether Zephaniah makes explicit reference to the P and the J myths or simply reflects a common creation-flood tradition is uncertain. Nevertheless, these metaphors serve to give cosmic significance to the coming destruction.

Zephaniah identifies the coming catastrophe as the day of Yahweh. It will be a day of sacrifice and a day of wrath. God's fury will be against both Judah and the nations because of the violence done by the peoples and because of their haughtiness. The whole creation will be destroyed so that all the inhabitants of the earth will be annihilated. Yet despite the totality of the day of Yahweh, Zephaniah offers hope to the people of Judah:

⁹ De Roche suggests that this line is an intrusion into the text that was added by a scribe who could not accept the universal scope of Zephaniah's oracle. The oracle was thus reduced to a judgment oracle against the wicked (1980: 107-8). This interpretation, however, is not necessary. Rather than diminish the scope of this oracle, this line is given universal scope. All creation is declared to be wicked and subject to God's judgment.

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land,
who do his commands;
seek righteousness, seek humility;
perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the LORD's wrath.

(Zephaniah 2:3)

Despite the universal scope of the catastrophe, a remnant of Judah may survive. In fact, Zephaniah seems to assume that some will survive, for he claims that to them God will give the land of Philistia, Moab, and Ammon (2:4–10). Moreover, Yahweh will cleanse Jerusalem which he accuses of being a “soiled, defiled, oppressing city” (3:1). Although Yahweh will consume all the earth, he will redeem Jerusalem:

¹¹On that day you shall not be put to shame
because of all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me;
for then I will remove from your midst
your proudly exultant ones,
and you shall no longer be haughty
in my holy mountain.

¹²For I will leave in the midst of you
a people humble and lowly.
They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD –
¹³the remnant of Israel;
they shall do no wrong
and utter no lies,
nor shall a deceitful tongue
be found in their mouths.

Then they will pasture and lie down,
and no one shall make them afraid.

(Zephaniah 3:11–13)

How shall we understand this incongruity in the message of Zephaniah? Does Zephaniah's hope of a remnant undercut his threat of universal catastrophe? Will the day of Yahweh be less destructive than Zephaniah first proclaimed? As with the preceding prophets that we have examined, the message of Zephaniah too should be interpreted in reference to the catastrophe/new-creation myth. Because the earth has been corrupted by human violence and haughtiness, Zephaniah heralds the inevitable destruction of creation. But the world cannot end in catastrophe; the myth also entails a new creation that will emerge out of the destruction of the old. Therefore, Zephaniah also proclaims the survival of a remnant, and although these people are “left over” from the old creation, they are transformed in the new creation. They will become a humble people, doing no wrong, and uttering no lies. The people will be transformed so that their actions will no longer corrupt the earth.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah prophesies during the final years of the kingdom of Judah. Repeatedly, he condemns Jerusalem and Judah for the multitude of sins that the people have wantonly

committed against God. The people have refused to serve God and follow his commands, and so have polluted the land by their transgressions. In a similar fashion to Hosea, Jeremiah uses the metaphor of an adulterous wife to describe the people's rejection of Yahweh:

¹If a man divorces his wife
and she goes from him
and becomes another man's wife,
will he return to her?
Would not such a land be greatly polluted?
You have played the whore with many lovers;
and would you return to me? says the LORD.
²Look up to the bare heights, and see!
Where have you not been lain with?
By the waysides you have sat waiting for lovers,
like a nomad in the wilderness.
You have polluted the land
with your whoring and wickedness.
³Therefore the showers have been withheld,
and the spring rain has not come;
yet you have the forehead of a whore,
you refuse to be ashamed.

(Jeremiah 3:1–3)

In the surrounding context of this oracle, Jeremiah accuses the people of quickly changing their ways, of claiming to be innocent of infidelity yet seeking other lovers (2:33–37). Behind this text we might image a situation in which the people repeatedly repent of their sins and return to Yahweh, but without a change of heart. Their repentance is superficial, lacking real intent to keep God's covenant (Thompson: 190). In order to illustrate the gravity of the people's situation, Jeremiah draws upon legal material concerning divorce. According to Deuteronomy 24:1–4, if a man divorces his wife and she later marries another, under no circumstances can she return to her first husband as a wife. If she does remarry her first husband, this act is an abomination to God and it pollutes the land. For Jeremiah, the people of God are in a similar situation to the divorced wife. They have prostituted themselves to other lovers, yet repeatedly return to Yahweh. Their actions have thus polluted the land, bringing drought upon them. Here Jeremiah's analogy of Judah's plight with the Deuteronomic law breaks down. From the perspective of the law, the woman's *return* to her first husband pollutes the land. With regard to the people of Judah, however, their *abandonment* of Yahweh in favor of other lovers is the source of the land's pollution.

Although Jeremiah and Hosea share the same metaphors to describe the relationship between Yahweh and his people, they use the metaphors toward different ends. Hosea uses the metaphor to illustrate God's redemption: Just as Hosea redeems Gomer out of prostitution and restores her as his wife, God will redeem an unfaithful Israel (Hos 3:1–5). Jeremiah, on the other hand, uses this metaphor to describe the impossibility of the people

returning to God. If a remarried woman cannot return to her first husband, how much more impossible is it for Israel to return to Yahweh after affairs with other lovers (Holladay: 113).

As the prophets that preceded him, Jeremiah presumes a causal connection between the actions of the people and the condition of creation. Human sin corrupts the creation and has effects on the natural world. Specifically, Jeremiah claims that because the people have turned away from Yahweh, the earth is consumed by a great conflagration. The pastures are dried up (23:10), the grass withers (12:4), and the seasonal rains have not fallen (3:3). The land suffers from a curse (23:10; reflecting a similar tradition as the Yahwist creation myth), and the animals and the birds have disappeared (12:4). For Jeremiah, the natural catastrophe that the people of Judah are experiencing (14:1 explicitly states that the people are experiencing a drought) is a certain indication of God's judgment on them:

¹⁰Take up weeping and wailing for the mountains,
and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness,
because they are laid waste so that no one passes through,
and the lowing of cattle is not heard;
both the birds of the air and the animals
have fled and are gone.
¹¹I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins,
a lair of jackals;
and I will make the towns of Judah a desolation,
without inhabitant.

(Jeremiah 9:10–11)

The connection between Judah's sins and the catastrophe is made explicit in the following verses: The life-giving land is being turned into a wilderness because the people have forsaken the law of God and have followed their own desires (9:12–14).

Judah's present natural catastrophe, however, serves also as a harbinger of a catastrophe that is to come. This catastrophe will be cosmic in scope; it will encompass the whole creation. The people's pollution of the land makes the coming catastrophe inevitable. Jeremiah thus proclaims the approach of the enemy from the north who will bring God's judgment on the people. On a historic level, this cryptic designation undoubtedly refers to the Babylonians (Hyatt; Holladay: 42–43). In order to circumvent the vast Syrian desert that spanned the distance between Babylon and Judah, the Babylonian army would travel north along the Euphrates river and then south along the Mediterranean coast, attacking Judah from the north. The historic interpretation of the enemy from the north, however, does not fully account for its meaning, for Jeremiah declares that the Babylonians themselves will be attacked by this enemy (chaps. 50–51). This agent of God's judgment also has mythical overtones (Childs, 1959; Reimer). In the biblical and Canaanite traditions, "north" does not always refer to a northern geographical location. Often it refers to a mountain peak or pinnacle that is thought to be the dwelling place of a deity (Eissfeldt). The temple on Mount Zion, for example, is located in the "north" (Ps 48:2), though it is in the south of Palestine

geographically. Furthermore, the enemy from the north is associated with chaos.¹⁰ Its assault causes the creation itself to quake and crumble. On a mythic level, then, the enemy from the north designates the chaotic foe that is sent by Yahweh from his own dwelling. The enemy from the north signals the return of primordial chaos and the disintegration of the created order. Therefore, when Jeremiah proclaims the coming of the enemy from the north against Judah, he heralds the dawn of a cosmic catastrophe. The people's sins have so polluted the earth that the whole creation must be destroyed. By sending the enemy from the north, Yahweh simply hastens the collapse of the creation.

The people's refusal to change their ways stirs Jeremiah deeply. Although he is the divinely called envoy of God's words of judgment, he agonizes over their repercussions: "My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart!" (4:19). He cannot remain indifferent, for he has seen in a vision the devastating effects of the coming catastrophe:

23I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;

and to the heavens, and they had no light.

24I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,

and all the hills moved to and fro.

25I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,

and all the birds of the air had fled.

26I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,

and all its cities were laid in ruins

before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

(Jeremiah 4:23–26)

Jeremiah employs the creation traditions underlying both the Priestly and the Yahwist creation myth to herald the reversal of creation (Fishbane: 151–53). Like the unleashing of Leviathan, the enemy from the north will dismantle the boundaries of creation. The world will revert to its undifferentiated and empty primordial state. All inhabitants of the earth will perish, and the land will be reduced to a barren desert.

Jeremiah offers little hope to the people of his day. God's judgment on the people is final, the coming catastrophe inevitable. Nevertheless, the book of Jeremiah does contain numerous passages that describe God's redemption of his people. Although many of these passages do not stem from Jeremiah himself (they were likely inserted by later scribes in order to ameliorate Jeremiah's otherwise ominous message), Jeremiah did envision a new creation emerging out of the catastrophe that the people of God would experience.

Jeremiah describes this new creation as a new covenant:

31The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32It will not be like

¹⁰ Childs first made this connection based on the association of the enemy from the north with the Hebrew term, "to tremble, quake," a technical term of the chaos tradition (1959). But for Childs, this term did not denote chaos and was not associated with the enemy from the north tradition until after Jeremiah. More recent studies, however, have shown that was always associated with primordial chaos and was used in conjunction with Jeremiah's enemy from the north (Reimer: 226).

the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

(Jeremiah 31:31–34)

After the catastrophe, Jeremiah declares, God will make a new covenant with his people. Unlike the old covenant that was written on tablets of stone, this new covenant will be written on the human heart. According to Jeremiah, the old covenant is ineffectual. Despite all that God has done on behalf of Israel, the people continually break the covenant. The failure of the old covenant, however, is not due to the nature of the covenant per se, but to humankind. Israel repeatedly rejects God’s laws. In the tradition of the Yahwist, Jeremiah recognizes that humans are bent on evil, that they have an evil inclination. In contrast to the old covenant, the new covenant signals not a new set of laws that will be easier to keep, but a new humanity that will be inclined towards following God. Through the coming catastrophe, the evil inclination of humans will be purged. The new creation that ensues from the catastrophe will include a transformed humankind whose very nature will correspond to the law of God (compare the similar prophecy in Ezek 36:26–28).

The Exilic Prophets

For the preexilic prophets, God’s judgment on the people’s sins is experienced through the present disintegration of creation, though the most grievous consequences of God’s judgment still lay in the near future. The pollution of the earth caused by human sin makes the total collapse of creation inevitable, but the reality of it is not yet fully known. A coming catastrophe looms on the horizon; the day of Yahweh is at hand. For the prophets of the sixth century, however, the catastrophe has arrived. The destruction of Jerusalem including Yahweh’s temple on Zion and the exile of the people to Babylon is interpreted by these prophets to be the historical manifestation of God’s judgment. The metaphors of cosmic catastrophe serve as appropriate images for understanding the people’s experience: The creation has ceased to be life-sustaining; the earth is characterized by chaos rather than order; Yahweh has engaged in a cosmogonic battle against his own people. The people’s sins against God and the created order have hastened and brought upon them the destruction of creation itself.

Ezekiel

Because the people have already experienced God’s judgment through war and exile, the prophets of the exile herald the dawn of God’s new creation – the redemption of Israel and the natural world. This transition in the prophetic message is best illustrated by the prophecies of Ezekiel. Ezekiel is called to prophesy against Judah during his fifth year in

exile (chaps. 1–3). As a temple priest in Jerusalem, Ezekiel was sent into exile in the first deportation in 597 B.C.E. Jerusalem had just been conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, but was not yet destroyed. In Babylon Ezekiel proclaims judgment on Jerusalem and Judah as Jeremiah continues to do in Jerusalem. The people are still rejecting Yahweh, and so are going to suffer further at the hands of the Babylonians. After Jerusalem is destroyed in 587 B.C.E., however, Ezekiel turns from oracles of judgment to salvation oracles. God's judgment has occurred; the order of creation has unraveled. With the catastrophe past, God is about to redeem his people through a new creation

Ezekiel describes the coming redemption as a covenant of peace:

²⁵I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild animals from the land, so that they may live in the wild and sleep in the woods securely. ²⁶I will make them and the region around my hill a blessing; and I will send down showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. ²⁷The trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase. They shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and save them from the hands of those who enslaved them. ²⁸They shall no more be plunder for the nations, nor shall the animals of the land devour them; they shall live in safety, and no one shall make them afraid. ²⁹I will provide for them a splendid vegetation so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the insults of the nations.

(Ezekiel 34:25–29)

The covenant of peace, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is the prophetic designation of a common ancient Near Eastern motif associated with creation (Batto, 1987a). At the time of creation, humans revolted against the gods, disrupting the created order and forcing the gods to destroy humankind through a cosmic catastrophe. In some traditions the gods destroy humankind with a flood, in other traditions a goddess attempts to slay humankind in a violent rampage. The hostility of the gods towards humans in both cases, however, is reconciled by a covenant. This covenant of peace is established by the head god, and signals the end of divine hostility and the return of creation to its original condition.

In applying the covenant of peace to Israel's situation, Ezekiel declares that the events that culminated in Jerusalem's destruction and the exile of the people marked the end of God's hostility toward them. The people's sins against God had brought upon them God's wrath, but now God will make a covenant of peace with them. As a result, the earth will be transformed in a new creation so that it will be like the garden of Eden. In another oracle Ezekiel explicitly associates the new creation of the land with the garden of Eden: "And they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined towns are now inhabited and fortified'" (36:35). The creation will be restored to its primordial splendor before human rebellion against God corrupted it. The land of Israel which was polluted by sin and devastated by invading armies will become a fertile garden, freely giving up its produce. The people will be free from the threat of wild animals and the nations, and will live securely in the land. The reference to animals in this context probably includes only those animals, such as the lion, the bear, or the jackal, that

are a threat to humans or domestic animals. These wild animals are in the same category as the nations: They are the outgroup in relation to Israel. They are creatures of the periphery and thus symbolic of chaos.

Although Ezekiel's primary focus is on the redemption of Israel, his vision of God's redemption also includes the natural world (limited to the nature of Israel's domain). Because the land of Israel has been defiled from the people's sins, it too needs to be redeemed through a new creation. The land needs to be cleansed from its pollution. Therefore, Ezekiel proclaims God's coming redemption to the land itself:

⁸But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot out your branches, and yield your fruit to my people Israel; for they shall soon come home. ⁹See now, I am for you; I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown; ¹⁰and I will multiply your population, the whole house of Israel, all of it; the towns shall be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt; ¹¹and I will multiply human beings and animals upon you. They shall increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and will do more good to you than ever before. Then you shall know that I am the LORD.

(Ezekiel 36:8–11)

Clearly, Israel will profit from the restoration of the land, but this new creation is not simply for the benefit of humans (contra Gowan: 101–2). The direct address to the land suggests that God will redeem the land for its own sake (DeGuglielmo: 308). All God's redeeming actions, described in this oracle, are on behalf of the land. Because the land has a purpose within creation – to bear and sustain life – the redemption of the land will include the increase of humans and animals on the land. Humans in this context serve the benefit of the land rather than the reverse. Through the new creation, the land will fulfill its life-giving tasks that the corruption of human sin has undermined.

In a final vision of the recreation of the land, Ezekiel employs metaphors from both the horizontal and vertical models of sacred space in order to describe the transformation of the barren wilderness of Judah into a paradise like the garden of Eden. Out of Mount Zion, below the threshold of the rebuilt temple, Ezekiel sees a mighty river flowing to the east that will be too deep to cross (47:1–6). This river will water the sterile dry desert and bring life to the Dead Sea:

⁷As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on the one side and on the other. ⁸He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. ⁹Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes. ¹⁰People will stand fishing beside the sea from En-gedi to En-glaim; it will be a place for the spreading of nets; its fish will be a great many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. ¹²On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the

water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”

(Ezekiel 47:7–10, 12)¹¹

In this vision, Mount Zion is both the center of creation and the cosmic mountain from which the divine waters flow. Through the life-giving river that will emanate from the temple and stream into the wilderness, the center, which has been engulfed by the sterile periphery, will again flourish with the fertility of creation. Although the text refers specifically to the land east of Jerusalem – the wilderness of Judah and the Dead Sea – this land is symbolic of the whole land of Israel. The whole land will be turned into a paradise that will be dependent upon the life that issues from Yahweh’s dwelling on Zion.

Drawing upon traditions of the old royal theology, which also attest to a life-giving stream flowing out of the temple mount (Pss 36:8–9; 46:4; Isa 8:6), Ezekiel identifies Mount Zion throughout his oracles with the garden of Eden (Levenson, 1976: 25–36). It is the place from which creation originated, the center of all life. The garden of Eden, however, has been corrupted by human sin. Rather than a life-giving paradise, it has become a polluted wasteland that is unable to support life. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians is thus likened to the collapse of creation. But in God’s coming redemption Zion will be recreated like the garden of Eden, and the river that will flow from the temple will be like the river of Eden. As the river in Eden sustained the vegetation of the garden, so also the river from Zion will cause the desolate ground to shoot forth abundant fruit trees. Its fertilizing waters will even bring life to the sterile waters of the Dead Sea so that it will teem with fish. Everywhere the river goes will abound with life.

Second Isaiah

The themes of redemption and new creation which are prominent in Ezekiel form the central focus of the anonymous prophet who has come to be known as Second Isaiah.¹² Nowhere in his oracles does this prophet issue a word of judgment against the people of God. He offers only a message of comfort and redemption. According to Second Isaiah, the people of Judah who were defeated and exiled by the Babylonians have already suffered sufficiently for their sins (40:2). Therefore, Second Isaiah proclaims Yahweh’s imminent redemption of Israel from exile. Yahweh has anointed Cyrus, king of Persia, to conquer Babylon (45:1). By Yahweh’s command he will be victorious, and will allow the people in exile to return to their homeland and to rebuild Zion. However, Yahweh’s coming redemption of his people will not take place solely on the plane of human history. Redemption encompasses also the natural world. Because the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people entailed the collapse of the creation, God’s redemption of the people will only be possible through a new creation.

¹¹ V. 11 is commonly recognized to be a later insertion (Zimmerli: 508).

¹² The oracles of Second Isaiah have traditionally been recognized in Isaiah 40–55, but chaps. 34–35 should also be included in this corpus.

For the people suffering in exile, Yahweh's ability to redeem them is questionable. Did not the Babylonians destroy Yahweh's temple? Are not the people under domination in a foreign land? If Yahweh remains king, over what does he rule? According to Second Isaiah, Yahweh's coming redemption is certain because Yahweh is the creator, the king over the creation.

²¹Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
²²It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to live in;
²³who brings princes to naught,
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

(Isaiah 40:21–23)

Yahweh is no mere local god! As the creator, he rules over all creation. Jerusalem was destroyed by his will. The people were sent into exile by his will. Similarly, Yahweh has called Cyrus to redeem his people (Ollenburger, 64–66):

I made the earth,
and created humankind upon it;
it was my hands that stretched out the heavens,
and I commanded all their hosts.
I have aroused Cyrus in righteousness,
and I will make all his paths straight;
he shall build my city
and set my exiles free,
not for price or reward,
says the LORD of hosts.

(Isaiah 45:12–13)

Because Yahweh is the creator, Yahweh will achieve his purposes for his people and for his creation.

In a message similar to that of Ezekiel, Second Isaiah declares that Zion will be transformed into a fertile paradise like the garden of Eden:

For the LORD will comfort Zion;
he will comfort all her waste places,
and will make her wilderness like Eden,
her desert like the garden of the LORD;
joy and gladness will be found in her,
thanksgiving and the voice of song.

(Isaiah 51:3)

At the mundane level, Second Isaiah would merely be claiming that the deserted and fallow environs surrounding Jerusalem would again be tilled and planted in the wake of the devastation caused by the Babylonian army. But God's redemption is never mundane! Because God is the creator, God's redemption is through a new creation. Zion will not simply be replanted. It will be created anew, cleansed from all human pollution. For Second Isaiah, this will be a cosmic event because it will be the creator who will do it.

The goal of Second Isaiah's message to the exiles is not just to comfort them with the certain hope of God's coming redemption, but also to encourage them to participate in this redemption by returning to Zion. Despite the fact that the people were forcibly removed from their homeland and settled in a foreign land, the people appear to have been reluctant to leave Babylon. Babylon had become their home, and the many born in Babylon knew no other homeland. Moreover, the return journey to Palestine would be long and arduous. Some would undoubtedly die on the trip; others would suffer attacks from bandits and wild animals. All would make the journey by sacrificing the familiarity and security of Babylon for an uncertain future in Palestine. Therefore, Second Isaiah gives little direct attention to God's redemption of Zion. Rather, he focuses on the incompatibility of Yahweh and Babylon and on the people's triumphal procession back to Zion.

Drawing upon the early epic traditions of Israel, Second Isaiah likens Babylon to Egypt. Just as Egypt was the land of death at the periphery, so also is Babylon. And just as Yahweh delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, so also God is about to deliver his people from Babylon in a new exodus. However, unlike the old exodus, the people will not have to cross the barren desert to reach Zion, the center of creation, for Yahweh is going to transform the periphery. The desert will be watered so that it will flourish like the center. Every mountain will be lowered and every valley will be raised so that no obstacle will block the people's return (40:4). In order to further ease the journey, Yahweh will build a highway through the wilderness on which the people will travel to Zion (35:8).

¹⁶Thus says the LORD,
 who makes a way in the sea,
 a path in the mighty waters,
¹⁷who brings out chariot and horse,
 army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
 they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
¹⁸Do not remember the former things,
 or consider the things of old,
¹⁹I am about to do a new thing;
 now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
 and rivers in the desert.
²⁰The wild animals will honor me,
 the jackals and the ostriches;
for I will give water in the wilderness,
 rivers in the desert,

to give drink to my chosen people,
²¹the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

(Isaiah 43:16–21)

In this oracle the new exodus is compared and contrasted with the first exodus of God's people. Just as God was victorious in the first exodus by defeating the Egyptians and by making a way for the Israelites to cross the sea (vv. 16–17), so also is his deliverance of Israel from Babylon certain (compare 51:9–11). The Israelites' exodus out of Egypt had been the central theme of their confession to Yahweh. Yahweh was known as the God who brought Israel "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:2). But no longer. Israel's first exodus will pale in comparison to the new exodus that Yahweh is about to perform for them, for Yahweh will bring life to the wilderness:

I will open rivers on the bare heights,
and fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
and the dry land springs of water.
I will put in the wilderness the cedar,
the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive;
I will set in the desert the cypress,
the plane and the pine together.

(Isaiah 41:18–19)

The desert in the periphery will experience the fruits of God's new creation. It will be transformed into a garden like the garden of Eden at the center. As a result, the new exodus will not be arduous. The people will not grow faint nor weary on the journey. There will be an abundance of food and drink so that the people can return to Zion in a triumphal procession:

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

(Isaiah 35:10)

Second Isaiah also likens the coming redemption of the people in exile to God's redemption of Noah:

⁹This is like the days of Noah to me:
Just as I swore that the waters of Noah
would never again go over the earth,
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you
and will not rebuke you.
¹⁰For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,

but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

(Isaiah 54:9–10)

Just as Noah was spared in Yahweh's destruction of creation and was granted a covenant of peace, so also Yahweh will now grant his entire people a covenant of peace. Yahweh's hostility toward his people has come to an end (compare 54:7–8), and the earth will be restored through a new creation. Whereas the rainbow was the sign of the Noahic covenant, the new creation itself will attest to God's eternal covenant of peace (compare 55:13). But even if the new creation crumbles (which, of course, it will not), God's covenant with the people will remain secure.

The Postexilic Prophets

Although both Ezekiel and Second Isaiah placed God's coming redemption in a cosmic perspective, it was tied up with historical events, namely, the release of the exiles from Babylon and the restoration of Zion. These historical events did happen. Freed by Cyrus's edict, many of the people returned to Palestine (though more remained in Babylon). The temple was rebuilt, the priesthood was reestablished, and an heir to the throne of David was appointed governor of the province of Judah. Nevertheless, God's glorious redemption, prophesied by Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, failed to materialize. No new creation had taken place. Rather, the people suffered natural disasters and economic depression. Life in a restored Palestine was worse than in Babylon.

For many of the postexilic prophets (most of whom remain anonymous, for they simply appended their oracles to existing works), the hard times of this period meant that the destruction of Jerusalem had not been the fullness of the cosmic catastrophe predicted by earlier prophets, that the exile had not fully cleansed the creation from pollution, that the total collapse of creation still lay ahead for the people. For example, in a series of oracles that have come to be known as the Isaianic Apocalypse (Isa 24–27), a prophet announces that Yahweh is about to lay waste the whole earth and scatter its inhabitants because the earth remains polluted from human sin:

⁴The earth dries and withers,
the world languishes and withers;
the heavens languish together with the earth.

⁵The earth lies polluted
under its inhabitants;
for they have transgressed laws,
violated the statutes,
broken the ancient covenant.¹³

¹³ The text of the NRSV reads "everlasting covenant" which suggests the Noahic covenant, but it is difficult to understand how this covenant would be broken since the obligation of this covenant is on Yahweh. The Hebrew text can also be rendered "ancient covenant," which leaves unspecified the nature of the covenant (Levenson, 1988: 28).

⁶Therefore a curse devours the earth,
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;
therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled,
and few people are left.

(Isaiah 24:4–6)

The destruction of Jerusalem and the exile had only affected Israel; this catastrophe did not bring God's judgment on the nations. Therefore, these postexilic prophets proclaim the imminent dawn of a new cosmic catastrophe for which the present calamities serve as harbingers. But unlike the earlier catastrophe, this new catastrophe will be directed at and encompass all the nations. The whole creation will be devastated. Although Israel will not remain unscathed in the coming catastrophe, these prophets also herald the final redemption of God's people: The nations will be destroyed, never to oppress Israel again; Israel will live in peace and God will dwell on Zion; and the earth will be recreated as a paradisiacal garden. According to the prophet of the Isaianic Apocalypse, God will take away the shame of his people (25:8), restore Jerusalem as a city of righteousness (26:1–15), swallow up death (25:7) and finally eliminate chaos by killing Leviathan (27:1).

That the nations too had to be judged through a cosmic catastrophe was already anticipated by both Ezekiel and Second Isaiah. Drawing upon the enemy from the north tradition, Ezekiel prophesies that Yahweh will bring Gog and all his allies from the distant north against the land of Israel and the people of God who have been restored to the land (38:1–16).¹⁴ Numerous attempts have been made to identify the Gog of this prophecy. Gyges of Lydia has been the most popular suggestion. But Gog is not an historical individual. Ezekiel uses the name Gog – derived from the name “Magog,” a known northern territory (cf. Gen 10:2) – precisely because it has no historical referent and can easily be associated with the enemy from the north (Ezek 38:17 makes an explicit reference to Jeremiah's enemy from the north prophecies). Shrouded in mythic images, Gog is simply a cipher to represent the eschatological enemy of Yahweh. Moreover, Gog is also representative of the nations. In addition to his northern allies, Ezekiel allies him with Persia, Ethiopia, and Put (Libya) – that is, with a nation from the East, South, and West respectively. Gog's allies include nations from all four corners of the earth, and so represent all nations.

Although Yahweh will bring Gog against his own people, Yahweh's purpose will not be to judge Israel but to destroy Gog and the nations:

¹⁸On that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel, says the Lord GOD, my wrath shall be aroused. ¹⁹For in my jealousy and in my blazing wrath I declare: On that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; ²⁰the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and the animals of the field, and all creeping things that creep on the ground, and all human beings that are on the face of the earth, shall quake at my presence, and the

¹⁴ Many scholars have attributed Ezekiel 38-39 to a later, postexilic, scribe. This interpretation is plausible, but the style and content of this passage are compatible with the rest of the book of Ezekiel.

mountains shall be thrown down, and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground. ²¹I will summon the sword against Gog in all my mountains, says the Lord GOD; the swords of all will be against their comrades. ²²With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgment with him; and I will pour down torrential rains and hailstones, fire and sulfur, upon him and his troops and many peoples that are with him.

(Ezekiel 38:18–22)

Yahweh's defeat of Gog will entail the collapse of the whole creation. The reference to the "great shaking" signals the return of chaos (Childs, 1959: 196). The nations in their repeated assaults on the people of God have arrogantly challenged Yahweh's kingship over creation. Yahweh will thus march out to fight Gog in a new cosmogonic battle. With the typical weapons of the storm-god, Yahweh will defeat the nations by bringing about the reversal of creation. Their dead bodies will then be the main course for a great sacrificial banquet. The birds and wild animals will eat their flesh and drink their blood (39:17–20). Finally, the land of Israel will be cleansed of the bones and the discarded weapons of war (39:9–16), and Israel will be restored securely its land (39:21–29).

Second Isaiah similarly prophesies a coming catastrophe on all the nations (Isa 34). Although Second Isaiah singles out Edom because of the violence it carried out against the people of Judah following the destruction of Jerusalem, Edom is representative of all the nations. Because the nations have violated the order of creation by assaulting the people of God, Yahweh will slaughter them in a horrific blood-bath: The land will be strewn with their bodies and the mountains will flow with their blood (34:2–3). The heavens will collapse (34:4); the streams will be turned into pitch and the land into sulfur (34:9); and the land will revert to chaos, bearing only thorns and thistles and inhabited by wild animals (34:11–15). The coming catastrophe against the nations will result in the complete destruction of creation.

Later prophets built upon this tradition of God's judgment on all the nations. Obadiah, for example, condemns the Edomites for their treatment of God's people after the destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 1–14). As in the case of Second Isaiah's prophecy of judgment, Edom is symbolic of all the nations. Although Obadiah lacks many of the cosmic metaphors characteristic of the other prophets, he does claim that the day of Yahweh is coming against the nations (vv. 15–16). We can infer from this metaphor that Obadiah envisioned the destruction of the nations through a cosmogonic battle. Yahweh will fight the nations who pose a threat to his kingship over creation. Through the battle the creation itself will be destroyed, but upon God's inevitable victory the world will be created anew. Then the people of God, who will survive the catastrophe, will inherit and possess the land of the nations (vv. 17–21).

In an anonymous oracle that has been appended to the prophecies of Zechariah, a prophet in the tradition of Ezekiel 38–39 foresees the assault of the nations against Jerusalem: "For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses looted and the women raped; half of the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city" (14:2). But then Yahweh will march forth to fight and destroy the nations (14:3–5). Upon Yahweh's victory, the creation will be

reconstituted. There will no longer be cold or frost which inhibit the earth's ability to produce (14:6). Darkness will never again consume the night (14:7). A river of living waters will flow out of Jerusalem to bring life to the periphery (14:8). And Yahweh will establish his kingship over the whole earth (14:9).

The most elaborate of the postexilic prophecies that reflect the catastrophe/new-creation myth is the book of Joel.¹⁵ Joel is a difficult book to understand. The first part of the book focuses on the destruction caused by a severe locust plague. The second part of the book focuses on God's judgment of the nations. What unites the two parts of the book is the theme of the day of Yahweh: Both the locust plague and the destruction of the nations are heralded as the day of Yahweh. For Joel, the locust plague that the people of Judah are experiencing both serves as a metaphor of the nations' assault against them, and signals the beginning of a cosmic catastrophe that will culminate in God's defeat of the nations in a cosmogonic battle.

A locust plague has caused severe devastation of the land around Jerusalem. The locusts have destroyed the crops, defoliated the trees and vines, devoured the pastures, and have caused a shortage of food so that even the daily temple offerings have come to an end. Their relentless assault on the people and the land is likened by Joel to an invading army:

⁶Before them peoples are in anguish,
 all faces grow pale.
⁷Like warriors they charge,
 like soldiers they scale the wall.
Each keeps to its own course,
 they do not swerve from their paths.
⁸They do not jostle one another,
 each keeps to its own track;
they burst through the weapons
 and are not halted.
⁹They leap upon the city,
 they run upon the walls;
they climb up into the houses,
 they enter through the windows like a thief.

(Joel 2:6–9)

This is no ordinary locust plague, for with their advance the locusts hasten the collapse of creation. At their march the earth and the heavens tremble, the sun, moon, and stars no longer shine (2:10). They transform the land that is like the garden of Eden into a desolate desert like the periphery (2:3). Joel thus recognizes the locust plague to be the day of Yahweh.

Although the people have suffered from the locust plague, their distress will only be temporary. The day of Yahweh is not a day of judgment against them. Joel enumerates no

¹⁵ The interpretation of the book of Joel can only be cursory in this context. For a detailed analysis of Joel from the perspective of catastrophe/new-creation myth, see Simkins (1991: 101-241; 1993).

sins of the people. The call to “return to Yahweh” (2:12–17) does not mean “repent of your sins,” but rather “honor Yahweh with the appropriate cultic rites of mourning” (Simkins, 1991: 171–90). Yahweh will remove the locusts from the land and destroy them in the sea (2:20). Yahweh will restore the land so that the threshing floors will be full of grain and the vats will overflow with wine and olive-oil (2:21–24).

According to Joel, the day of Yahweh must also include God’s destruction of the nations. The nations have to be judged for their corrupt treatment of God’s people (3:1–8). Joel thus interprets the locust plague as a metaphor of God’s coming judgment on the nations. Just as the locusts invade the land of Judah, so also God will gather all the nations to war outside Jerusalem (3:9–12). There Yahweh will judge the nations and defeat them in a cosmogonic battle that includes the collapse of creation, but the people of God will be safe on Mount Zion (3:15–16). After the nations are destroyed Yahweh will recreate the world. Just as Yahweh will restore the agricultural bounty that was devastated by the locust plague, God will recreate the land after the nations and their corruption has been purged from it:

In that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine
the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the stream beds of Judah
shall flow with water;
a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD
and water the Wadi Shittim.

(Joel 3:18)

In Joel’s vision only the center, the land of Judah, will be recreated. It will be transformed into a paradisiacal garden, and it will remain forever undefiled by the nations (3:17). However, the land of the nations at the periphery will become a desolate wilderness. Because of violence done to the people of God, the land of the nations will remain outside the creation of God (3:19).

The Prophets’ Values Toward Nature

In the preceding analysis of the prophets, we have used the catastrophe/new-creation myth as a model for fleshing out the structure and the metaphors of the prophets’ message. This model does not exhaust or fully explain the writings of the prophets, nor was it intended to. Rather, we have employed this model because it draws attention to the prophets’ values toward the natural world. By focusing on the status of the creation, this model makes explicit what the prophets presupposed about the triangular relationship between God, humans, and the natural world, and especially the interrelationship between humans and nature.

Although each of the prophets that we examined delivers a unique message, determined by the specific historical situation of each, all the prophets share the same worldview: Humans and the rest of nature are united in creation – humans affect the natural world with their actions, and are affected by the condition of nature. This integral relationship between humans and nature has been clearly articulated by Frank Cross in an essay aptly entitled, “The Redemption of Nature”:

The creation, created 'good,' falls into decay, sterility, wilderness, cursed by God. The earth is cursed for the sake of the rebellion of one of its natural creatures. The human spirit corrupts nature, and man is one with nature. Humankind belongs wholly to the realm of nature, mortal. His attempt to become a god, to transcend the insecurity of mortal flesh, is his primal sin. He is not half-god, half-animal. His soul contains no spark of the divine. He is an animal, a stately animal, theomorphic indeed, but he cannot free himself now or in the Beyond from nature. In him nature is an actor in the drama of salvation, and also apart from him nature is an actor, fleeing the divine wrath, transfigured by the divine glory, redeemed insofar as man is redeemed, damned insofar as humanity is damned (1988: 95–96).

The unity of humans and nature in creation, however, should not obscure the fundamental distinction between humans and the rest of the natural world. For the prophets, only humans have sinned against God, and only humans must return to God. Apart from humans, nature might be an actor in the drama of salvation, but only humans are moral actors (causal agents), affecting the whole creation with their actions.

The prophets place little confidence in human actions. Humans have always been inclined towards evil and corruption, and human actions alone are insufficient to redeem the world from their own sins. On the other hand, the prophets place great confidence in God. God will redeem what humans have destroyed. God will recreate the world and transform humans so that they will no longer sin against God and creation. Because human sin has corrupted the natural world, nature too stands in need of redemption. But also because humans are united with the rest of nature in creation, humankind cannot be redeemed apart from the redemption of the natural world. The hope of humankind is linked with the natural world in the redemption of all creation.

The writings of the preexilic and postexilic prophets reflect primarily the harmony-with-nature solution to the human-relationship-to-nature problem. Human sin adversely affects the natural world. On a theological level, sin is a human affront against God or the commands of God. But the commands of God are not arbitrary. God is the creator, and thus the commands of God correspond to the order of creation. On a ritual level, sin pollutes the world so that it needs to be cleansed. On a cosmic level, sin deteriorates the order of creation that must be reconstituted. Human sin ultimately destroys the creation itself (compare Kay, 1988). As a result, human redemption is dependent upon the recreation of the world.

Some of the prophets – most notably, the postexilic prophets,¹⁶ but also passages in Ezekiel and Second Isaiah – also reflect the subjugation-to-nature and the mastery-over-nature solutions to the human-relationship-to-nature problem. The subjugation-to-nature orientation is the response to oppression from the outgroup. In the book of Joel, for example, the people of Judah were suffering from devastation caused by an unprecedented locust plague. But unlike the preexilic and exilic prophets, Joel does not attribute the plague

¹⁶ The prophet Haggai, in contrast, reflects the harmony-with-nature orientation by blaming the people's experience of economic and ecological depression on their own failure to rebuild the temple.

to the people's sins. The catastrophe is not the inevitable result of the people's own actions, but rather is caused by an outgroup (a locust plague personified as an invading army) over which the people have no control. As in the case of Job, the people's only recourse is to God.

Hope of redemption is implicit in the catastrophe/new-creation myth. God will redeem the people in the midst of the cosmic catastrophe through a new creation (reflecting the harmony-with-nature orientation), resulting in a reversal of the people's orientation toward the outgroup. No longer will the people be subjugated to the nations or to a hostile nature. Their land will be restored to a fertile paradise, but the land of the nations (the outgroup) will become desolate and overrun with wild animals. In contrast to the king's mastery-over-nature orientation, however, this orientation is eschatological. It is actualized solely through the actions of God. God alone is the master over creation, and God alone will destroy the nations and devastate their land.