Toward a Whole-Bible Theology: The Power and Promise of the Loss-Restoration Paradigm as Anchored in Jeremiah 32

The positives of treating theologies of each of the Testaments separately are many. For this reason the proliferation of books treating either testament theologically is to be welcomed. These works have yielded good insights both for Christian teaching and practice. However, the strong separation of the two testaments for treatment has forced the question: Is there a unity of the testaments, and if so how can that be articulated? To answer that question, whole-Bible theologies have recently been prepared. While textual, thematic, canonical and intertextual studies are helpful in framing a whole-Bible theology, attention to paradigm may be a further answer to the question of the Bible’s theological unity.

This essay explores the contribution to a whole-Bible theology of the loss-restoration paradigm as anchored in Jeremiah 32. After an analysis of the symbolic action of the prophet’s land purchase, and of the two resulting Yahweh speeches, the reach and the benefits of the loss-restoration paradigm will be delineated. The essay concludes by situating the paradigm model within other proposals for a whole-Bible theology and suggests the “promise” this paradigm holds for Christian belief and behavior.

I. Rooting the Loss-Restoration Paradigm in Jeremiah’s Symbolic Action (Jer 32)

To speak of paradigm is to speak of a kind of patterning. The word is at home in language study where conjugations follow a certain model. In theological/ethical discourse the word “model” is largely interchangeable with the word “paradigm.” One might think of paradigm as a template. Christopher J. H. Wright states, “A paradigm is something used as a model or example for other cases where a basic principle remains unchanged, though details

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2 In “Reaching for a Biblical Theology of the Whole Bible” (2001, pp, 85-87), I list reasons for working at integration which include the need for a balanced self-understanding within the church; greater clarity of the Christian message within a secularized society; and an articulated Christian world view in the face of global religious pluralism.
An approach closely related to the one advocated here is found in an article entitled “Theological Patterning in Jeremiah.” The loss/restoration paradigm here proposed illumines the relationship of the Old Testament to the New.

Jeremiah 32:1-44, on which the proposed paradigm is based, consists of a symbolic action of land purchase (vv 1-15), a prayer by the prophet (vv 16-25), an announced exile of a people from their homeland, an itemization of reasons for the same, and a forthright denunciation of the chosen people’s behavior (vv 26-35). A second lengthy announcement which follows immediately, as opposite as light is to darkness, contains a lengthy and passionate listing of the good that Yahweh will do to this people (vv 36-44). One message is about loss; another is about restoration.

Yahweh’s directive for Jeremiah to purchase a plot of land at a time when the Babylonians are surrounding the city (589-586 BC) follows years of prophetic preaching that announced coming judgment because of Judah’s history of defecting from Yahweh. Jeremiah’s confronting King Zedekiah with a strong critique of his policies and with announcements of imminent judgment through an enemy’s invasion, upset King Zedekiah, who then placed Jeremiah in custody in a palace-area guard house.

Jeremiah discerns through a divine message that his cousin Hanamel will come proposing the sale of his property to Jeremiah. So it happens. The transaction is given in detail (32: 9-12). Jeremiah, who may be thought naïve in buying the property when the enemy siege is in progress, spells out the meaning of this action, for it is a symbolic or parabolic action, a sign-act. The message is that though Israel will be driven off their land, God will see to it that they will eventually return to it. Jeremiah’s purchase is to be a sign that at some future day, Jewish people will populate the city and commerce will return. The apparent folly of a land purchase when the

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4 Andrew T. Abernethy, “Theological Patterning in Jeremiah. A Vital Word through an Ancient Book” (2014), 149-61. For Abernethy theological patterning refers “to networks of recurring, corresponding depictions of the God-human-world relationship.” (p. 151). He discusses patterned places (e.g., how in view of God’s action against Shiloh, (7:12-14) listeners might project how God would act against Jerusalem), patterned nations (e.g., “Just as God judges Judah for her recalcitrant heart [e.g. 3:10, 17; 4:14 . . . ], Moab and Edom also receive judgment due to the matters of the heart (48:29; 49:16), and patterned people (e.g., Jeremiah, Baruch, Ebed-Melech . . .)
indomitable Babylonians are already encamped around the city, triggers Jeremiah’s lengthy prayer to Yahweh, characterized as “trustful incredulity”5 in which he vents his perplexity.

That prayer receives a double answer: a Yahweh judgment speech (Jer 32:26-35); and a Yahweh salvation speech (vv. 36-44). The judgment speech opens with a self-presentation, a preamble of sorts: “See, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?” (v. 27). The affirmative answer to the rhetorical question bears on both Yahweh’s verdict of a people’s exile (vv. 28-35), and also on the announcement of Yahweh’s ingathering action restoring the people to the land (vv. 36-44). In most instances a prophetic judgment speech begins with accusation and ends with an announcement. Here the two parts are reversed, perhaps because the Babylonian army, the instrument of God’s punitive action, is already fighting against the city of Jerusalem (vv. 2, 28). The announcement is straightforward. “The Chaldeans who are fighting against this city shall come and set this city on fire, and burnt it . . . .” (v 29). A generalizing reason for this drastic action (employing the customary ki, “for”) has to do with all the evil committed by both Israel and Judah. Specifics of this evil behavior are named: turning one’s back on Yahweh, being deaf to Yahweh’s instruction, defiling Yahweh’s name, and contrary to God’s explicit command, setting up worship places for Baal (vv 33-35). Yahweh’s reaction is one of anger, a comment repeated twice (vv. 30-32).

Without a transition other than “Now therefore,” the Yahweh speech turns abruptly to become a salvation speech which itemizes God’s acts of beneficent intervention: gathering the people from the dispersion and settling them back in the land (vv 36-37); affirming a basic commitment (“they shall be my people and I will be their God,” v. 38); offering the returned exiles a “new heart;” showering them with good; and in the future even planting the returned exiles once again in the land (vv. 39-41).6 The last promise about settlement in the land receives further expansion in a resumptive, “Thus-says-the-Lord” oracle in which announcements of

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6 Terence Fretheim argues “that Jeremiah understands the purchase of land, not as a sign of a future restoration but as a sign that God will now bring a halt to the judgment in progress and move directly to restore Israel’s fortunes. “Is Anything Too Hard for God? (Jeremiah 32:27),” (2004). He notes, “Detailed studies of Jeremiah 32 are rare . . . .” (231, fn 1).
commerce in real estate sales, indicating prosperity, are made (vv. 42-44). The salvation ends with the climactic, if somewhat enigmatic, “I will restore their fortunes” (šûb šēbût) (v.44f).

II. Exploring Elements of the Loss-Restoration Paradigm

The final statement of the extended Yahweh speech, “I will restore their fortunes,” is the paradigm en nuce. The translation of the Hebrew šûb šēbût has taken several forms. The KJV understood šēbût to be derived from the root šbh (take captive), and so translated “I will return their captivity.” Later scholarship, however, assessed the two words to be cognate: literally, “turn the turning.” Even so, the question of translation remains. John Goldingay states:

“`Restore the fortunes’ (šûb šēbût) is an umbrella expression in the First Testament for restoration after a catastrophe (e.g., Jer 31:23; 33:26; Ezek 39:25 Joel 3:1 [MT 4:1]; Ps 14:7).

. . . .Turning the turning also involves rebuilding the city of Jerusalem with its citadel and palaces and ordinary homes (Jer 30:18; 33:7; Amos 9:14; Zeph 3:20); repopulating the land (Jer 32:44; 33:11), and replacing wrath with healing and forgiveness (Ps 8:1-2 [MT2-3]. It thus embraces the whole of life, the inner and the outer, without any assumption that either is more important than the other.”

“I will restore the fortunes,” though a popular rendering of the Hebrew šûb šēbût is not a particularly good choice in that “fortunes” connotes a windfall; the examples cited by Goldingay are marginal to the notion of “fortunes.” The Hebrew has to do with “turning,” sometimes in the sense of apostasy, but more often in the sense of restoration, so a better rendering into English would be, “bring about a restoration.” Support for such an understanding of šûb šēbût comes from an eighth century suzerainty treaty inscription which mentions how some property (a

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7 For an extended discussion of the verb as rendered in the Septuagint, the Targum, the Peshita and the Vulgate see William Holladay, *The Root šabh in the Old Testament,* (1958), pp. 13-50; for a lexical study, pp. 51-115, for its usage in the prophets, pp. 120-42, and for his definition in the qal form, p. 53: "having moved in a particular direction, to move thereupon in the opposite direction, the implication being (unless there is evidence to the contrary) that one will arrive again at the initial point of departure" (italics his). Such a definition allows for the word to reference both “apostasy” and “restoration.  Cf. R. J. R. Plant, *Good Figs, Bad Figs: Judicial Differentiation in the Book of Jeremiah,* (2008), 123. See also E.A. Martens, “Motivations for the Promise of Israel’s Restoration to the Land” (1972), 172-196. Of the 20+ occurrences of the phrase and its variations, one-half are in Jeremiah

house) came to belong to another but that the gods have brought about the return of the house to its ancestral owner. Joseph Fitzmyer observes, “The Aramaic expression shows that the noun is a cognate accusative and so supports the derivation of šēbűt from šwb. The context, moreover, is one of restoration.”

Such an understanding of bringing about a restoration fits well with other OT uses of the term, as in Job, where the issue is not one of captivity (though KJV so translates Job 42:10). A better reading there would be, “And the Lord brought about Job’s restoration.” In line with the idea of restoration to a former state (and more!) is the epexegetical comment, “and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.” But the “restoration” need not refer to “things” only, but may also refer to the restoration of relationships, as may well be inferred from the Joban context where mention is made of Job’s friends, his family and “all who had known him before” (Job 42:10, 11). John Goldingay writes somewhat expansively on “Renewing the People,” “Renewing the City,” “Renewing the Monarchy,” “Renewing the Priesthood,” and “Renewing the Land.” He concludes his exposition of “Renewing the Land” with the comment, “The restoration and flourishing of the land issue from Yahweh’s passion for it. Yahweh loves this land.” A key word in his comment and in the proposed paradigm is the term, “restoration” following loss.

The “loss-restoration” paradigm in Jeremiah 32 incorporates several dimensions. The loss is in two directions. First there is a loss of a bonding between Yahweh and the people. Yahweh is ill-disposed toward his people. He is angry with them. That broken relationship is idiomatically described, “they have turned their backs to me, not their faces” (v. 33). A relationship once intimate (Jer 2:2-3) is ruptured. Moreover, there is a loss of property. The city with its homes will be destroyed by fire. The people will be displaced, exiled, driven to different lands by Yahweh himself (v. 37).

The “restoration” dimension addresses the losses. Yahweh promises healing of the broken relationship. Yahweh will be the God of his people, and they will be his people (32:38). This so-called covenant formula harks back to God’s promise to Abraham (Gen 17) and is

repeated in various forms throughout the Bible.\textsuperscript{12} The restoration of a broken relationship of a people to bondedness with God involves the establishment of a covenant (32:40) and entails God’s cleansing and forgiveness. “I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me” (33:8). Thus that which was lost—the intimacy of covenant—will be recovered.

A second area that is emphasized in the salvation speech (vv 36-44) consists of the restoration of lands, a point repeatedly emphasized (32: 37, 41, 43-44d), and also reiterated in the next chapter, an extension of the Book of Comfort, also called the Book of Consolation (e.g., 33:12-13). The loss of “place” announced in the judgment speech is reversed. Israel will be given a homeland once more. “I will restore the fortunes (šûb šēbûr) of Judah, and of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first” (33:7). The paradigm moves on a trajectory of hope. Ellen Davis notes that the account of a land purchase (Jeremiah 32:1-44) “gives the future a topos, an identifiable location and shape . . . a sustainable local economy composed of small landholders.”\textsuperscript{13} The salvation oracle incorporates promises for the restoration of both frayed relationships and lost lands.

\textbf{III. Illustrating the Loss-Restoration Paradigm}

C. J. H. Wright has helped readers visualize how a paradigm functions. He diagrams God’s relationship with Israel and the land via the use of a triangle, with God at the apex and Israel and “The land” at the two remaining angles of the triangle.\textsuperscript{14} Routledge re-labels these: “God: The theological angle; Israel: The social angle; and The Land: The economic angle.” One may extend the sides of the triangle to form a greater triangle, the far angles of which then become “humanity” an extension of “Israel” and “earth” an extension of “land of Israel.”\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} In the Pentateuch (Lev 11:45; 22:33; 25:38; 26:12,44,45; Num 15:41; Deut 4:20; 29:12-13); in the prophets (Jer 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1,33; 32:38; Ezek.11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:27; Zech.8:8; 13:9) as well as in the New Testament ( 2Cor 6:16; Rev 21:3-7). See R. Rendtorff, \emph{The Covenant Formula} (1998), and E. A. Martens, “The People of God,” (2007).
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ellen F. Davis in chapter 6 “Witnessing in the Midst of Disaster: The Ministry of Jeremiah,” \emph{Biblical Prophecy} (2014), 162.
\item \textsuperscript{14} C. J. H. Wright, \emph{An Eye for an Eye} (1983), 90.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Robin Routledge, \emph{Old Testament Theology} (2008), 240. Routledge has reservations about Wright’s paradigm. “While recognizing the value of the paradigmatic approach, I would rather affirm that the OT has authority when addressing the church and then speak in more general terms about principles and typological correspondences in specific areas, rather than in terms of paradigms that govern whole classes” (241, fn 8).
\end{itemize}
Instead of a triangle, however, the loss-restoration paradigm is better sketched as a circle or as a set of circles. At the top of the circle one could mark “Yahweh, Land & People.” To the left with arrows pointing downward, one would mark “Alienation” and “Loss of Land.” At the circle’s bottom a small vertical line would indicate “Yahweh’s Intervention” (Repentance). Continuing to the right with arrows now pointing upwards the fitting words mid-way would be “Restoration of Bondedness” and “Return to the Land.” However, in drawing the circle the loop at the top is not completed; instead with the line moving outward, the resulting gap would signify, “Restoration Plus” because God will bring about a restoration not merely to a former reality but with promises of a larger reality. Elsewhere, the plus factor as to bondedness is defined as the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34), and a heart “to know that I am the Lord” (24:7). As to the promise pertaining to land, a superabundance is promised: “They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil . . . . ; their life shall be like a watered garden . . . . I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, says the Lord” (Jer 31:12-14).
The intervention (the mark at the bottom of the circle) which begins the upswing, in this instance originates in God’s purposes and the subsequent decree from Cyrus, the Persian (Isa 44:28—45:1). However, the human factor of a people’s repentance is also operative. Jeremiah cites repentance (return) as a motivation for Yahweh’s intervention (3:11-20; 31:15-20). One may conclude after examining the relevant texts in Jeremiah that the “spiritual restoration” (i.e. repentance) was regarded as a presupposition for the return. By contrast, “In Ezekiel however there is nothing at all about a repentance of the people preceding return to the land.” Rather, “after the people have been returned to the Land, Yahweh will give them a new heart and cleanse them (Ezek. 11:19; 36:24ff; 37:23).” Some would hold that God works the repentance in the first place. Others would distinguish more sharply between two initiatives, Yahweh’s and

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16 E.A. Martens, “Motivations for the Promise of Israel’s Return to the Land” (1972), 331-32.
Israel’s. In a way not easily made explicit the change from loss to restoration entails repentance and divine action.\(^{17}\)

This paradigm of loss, of intervention, of restoration, while applicable to the 6\(^{th}\) century experience of Israel being restored to the land, operates also elsewhere in Scripture. If one zooms in on the paradigmatic circle one can envision a move from the national group to the individual. In the OT one might select Joseph as an exemplar. Sold by his brothers and being taken to Egypt, Joseph lost his freedom, his status as an Israelite family member, and any hope of a satisfying life (Gen 37:25-28). The turning point in moving from loss to restoration came when Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream of fat and lean cattle and was more than compensated for his loss of status by Pharaoh who appointed him to a managerial post (Gen 41:1-45). Equally important, if not more so, the broken family connections were eventually restored through reconciliation with his brothers (Gen 50:15-21).

A corollary on the individual level in the NT is the story of the prodigal (Luke 15:11-24). Here the reasons for loss are not attributable to the actions of others. Rather by his own action the younger son forfeited relationships as well as property. The nodal point at which his fortunes were restored came when the prodigal determined to leave his dissolute way of life and return home. Restoration was complete when the father in forgiving him restored the prodigal to a positive filial relationship. Physically, the prodigal now enjoyed the father’s plenty. Clearly, on a personal level the parable of the prodigal son conforms to the paradigm of loss-restoration. In fact, it is a restoration with added benefits.

One may also zoom out and at one level trace the history of nations other than Israel, some of whom are in view in books like Nahum and Obadiah, and in large segments of the major prophets. But to limit oneself to Jeremiah, two oracles about Israel’s neighbor nations incorporate the loss-recovery paradigm. One of these, Moab, is censured, among other sins for her pride (48:29-30). Its cities will be depopulated. God will break Moab like a vessel no one wants (48:38). Yet, after a decimation that seems final, the prophet announces, “I will bring about the restoration (\(\text{šūb šēbūt}\)) of Moab in the latter days, says the Lord” (48:47). Similarly the

\(^{17}\) J. Unterman, disputing my treatment of the issue in From Repentance to Redemption (1987), concludes that on this subject the prophet’s thoughts passed through three stages: early on the prophet saw repentance as a determining condition for change; in a second stage (ca.597-587) the element of divine mercy outweighs that of repentance; in a third stage with the destruction of Jerusalem, “Redemption would be solely the work of God” (14, 176-77).
loss-recovery paradigm is displayed in the oracle concerning the Ammonites (49:1-6). Its capital city, Rabbah, “shall become a desolate mound” (49:2). Other cities like Heshbon shall be laid waste (49:3). Still, a restoration is promised. “But afterward I will bring about the restoration (šūb šēbūt) of the Ammonites” (Jer 49:6). No occasion, other than Yahweh’s fiat, is given for this about-turn. The paradigm of loss-restoration is on full display.

The paradigm is on display even as one zooms further out, and focuses on the larger world. The flood story is one of loss. Water covers the earth. But recovery is signaled by the dove which comes with an olive leaf (Gen. 8:10-11). And yes, God brings about restoration. Life resumes on the earth. The pattern is one of uncreation followed by new creation (cf. Zeph 1:2-3; 3:20). Jeremiah also depicts uncreation with all life gone on earth (Jer 4:23-26). Isaiah can talk of re-creation, new heavens and a new earth, such that the “former things” will not be remembered. (Isa 65:17-25). And the NT gives further substantiation both of loss and restoration. The old will be destroyed, not by water but by fire, yet God will see to it that there will be a new earth (2 Pet 3:7, 10-13).

The ultimate example of the loss-restoration paradigm is the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He suffered ultimate loss in death. His resurrection restored him to life, and that with an added plus of a raised spiritual body, which Paul describes as imperishable, “raised in glory … raised in power” (1 Cor 15:43-44).

Seizing on this paradigm of loss and restoration engages the imagination. The enlightenment has put reason front and center. So generations raised on the diet of science reach for analysis. But when it comes to spiritual matters that have at their center the God of the infinite, analysis can be helpful only to a point. Reason has its place; however, as humans we also have a capacity we term “imagination.” The paradigm of loss-restoration opens up possibilities. For someone with loss the paradigm invites the use of imagination. What might restoration look like? Even more daring: how might the restoration of what was lost yield a situation better than what was before? The lines in the diagram (above) do not come full circle but extend upward, leaving a gap. The imagination can go to work filling the gap with substance.

Walter Brueggemann writes, “The power of exile and restoration as an imaginative construct exercised enormous impact on subsequent Christian understandings of faith and life as
they were recast in terms of crucifixion and resurrection.” One of the three texts which Brueggeman employs is Isa 54:7-10 which deals with loss: a wife is deserted by her husband; in the poem, “the husband takes a fresh initiative to restore the relation.”

Beyond individual examples, the paradigm of loss-restoration summarizes the story of the Old Testament and also the New Testament, and –so goes the argument here--presents itself as a paradigm worth pursuing toward a whole Bible theology.

IV. Probing the Paradigm for its Theological Vectors

Returning to Jeremiah, the springboard for this discussion, one may identify several theological vectors such as the character of God, the role of repentance, and the “reach” of salvation which give “body” to the paradigm.

The Character of God. In the announcement of loss God is depicted as an angry God. However in the announcement of restoration, God is depicted as bringing good things. This tension about the nature and activity of the deity is for many a point of frustration, for it seems like a contradiction within God’s character. The paradigm of loss-restoration can ameliorate some of that frustration when it is pointed out that the divine response, whether of anger or compassion, is in part due to the circumstance to which God reacts. Given the story of a people who turn their back on their benefactor, who knowingly and deliberately move against his commandments, Yahweh’s reaction is one of anger. The people will go into exile. However, in the salvation oracle (Jer 32:36-44), given Israel’s suffering occasioned by the loss, God turns in compassion and promises that all his goodness will flow to these same people. However, recognition that whether God moves in anger or with goodness is dependent on the circumstance will not fully alleviate the tension that arises for those who desire a static uniform profile of the Almighty. Stated in another way: a paradigm of loss-restoration will not allow for a portrait of God as immutably static in his attributes. Attending to the paradigm, however, will make room, conceptually, for a divine move from imposing judgment to offering salvation.

To put it another way, this paradigm depicts God, though somewhat indirectly, as a God of grace. The divine judgment speech (Jer 32:26-35) leaves no doubt as to rationale; the exile is the consequence of the egregious sins of a people. But the immediately following salvation

speech without any transition (as noted above) offers no stated rationale for God’s restoration of a people to himself and their return from exile. And yet, to look more closely, that transition from the judgment speech to the salvation speech is not totally disjunctive. The salvation speech begins, “Now therefore.” One would expect that the “therefore” (lākēn) would follow logically from what has gone before. But, as Christopher Wright explains,

“But this piece of divine ‘logic’—this therefore in verse 36—transcends all that has just gone before with a completely new beginning. It is a non sequitur. It just does not follow. Rather it launches a new redemptive reality that is generated in the heart and mind of God, not in the chain of historical causation. Judgment is the logical outcome of principles of God’s own moral government (32:18-19). But beyond judgment there will be the abiding reality of God’s redeeming, restoring, re-creating love.”¹⁹ In that space between the words “loss” and “restoration” the grace of God is theologically writ large.

Attacks on the Bible and Christian teaching have come in recent years from various quarters. Formerly, the battle for the Bible moved along an intellectual front. The debate centered on the question of historicity: could the Bible be trusted? Was it inerrant? More recently the attack on Scripture has been on an ethical front. Stories in the books of Joshua and Judges tell of divine commands to exterminate a people. According to moderns, God is depicted as a one with questionable morals. Violence in Scripture has been the subject of numerous books recently.²⁰ The loss-restoration paradigm would draw attention to a counter message. The enduring Biblical message is one of a God who seeks wholeness, whose heart grieves over brokenness and destruction and whose work is intentionally about restoration.

¹⁹ Wright, The Message of Jeremiah, (2014), 348. J. G. McConville in Judgment and Promise, (1993) notes the “illogical lākēn (“therefore”)” of 32:36. The bold non sequitur requires a theological grounding, which McConville sees in 32:39-41 and consists in Yahweh’s intent, “central to which is the twice-repeated declaration that he will give the people a heart to fear him” (p.100).

**The Role of Repentance.** Lingering with the paradigm brings forward elements of hope through repentance in what might at first seem to be a hopeless situation. If the “loss” in question is loss associated with the consequences of sin, then repentance on the part of the offender may be a pivot, or turning point, whereby the loss and the reason for the loss are recognized and repentance follows. Jeremiah’s visit to the potter’s house brings forward God’s offer: “If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, if that nation . . . turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it” (Jer 18:7-8). A new or a different kind of future is possible if, in the case of sinful action, repentance is forthcoming.21 The specific dynamics whereby the loss is transformed to hope vary of course. Human repentance is not necessarily the decisive factor.22 The hope for restoration is sometimes grounded elsewhere. In our foundation passage of Jeremiah 32, the move toward restoration is triggered solely by Yahweh’s initiative. The decision to bless the people by returning them to the land is solely grounded (at least in this text) in Yahweh’s initiative. Loss there may be, but the surprising reality is that a situation described at one point as “loss” can be transformed into a situation best described as”restoration.”

**The “reach” of salvation.** An emphasis on the loss-restoration paradigm also offers a corrective to a view of salvation largely limited to a personal experience. Evangelicals have embraced the paradigm of loss and restoration in part but made application largely in the arena of the individual. Because of sin people are already “lost.” The good news is that through faith in Christ they can be restored to wholeness. Nothing should detract from that good news. But the loss-restoration paradigm reaches also to larger communities. At issue for Jeremiah is the recovery of a community which is ideally characterized by the tag line: “I will be your God and you will be my people.” Habakkuk, a contemporary of Jeremiah, voices a similar concern. Speaking prior to the exile, he laments the unraveling of a society. He observes a society given to

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violence. There is loss of order; justice is absent (Hab 1:2-4). So his prayer is for a society to be spiritually renewed (3:1-2). There follows a report of a theophany in which God comes in power and might, such that a gloried brightness shines with brilliance, mountains melt, and the sea broils. The head of the wicked will be crushed, and there will be salvation for God’s people (3:3-15). Habakkuk is reassured, for between the poles of ‘loss’ and ‘restoration’ Habakkuk glimpses the awesome power of God to effect change. At issue is the structure of existence. The potential is there for a reordering of an entire society!

Is it too much to claim that a substratum message of the prophets generally was that a society could move from loss to restoration? A book on the prophet Joel is titled, *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence: A Rhetorical Reading of the Book of Joel*. A reviewer writes, “Through this verse-by-verse rhetorical analysis, Barker defends his thesis that the message of Joel is intended to bring the audience from the depths of despair in the midst of devastation to the promise of restoration in God’s presence.”23 The message is one of reordering the society.

That reordering is touted by another prophet, Zephaniah, whose horizon extends to the cosmos. The book opens with Yahweh’s work of uncreation. “I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth,” says the Lord” (Zeph 1:2). In a recital of details reminiscent of the creation account, Yahweh determines to sweep away man and beast, birds of the air and the fish of the sea (Zeph 1:3). The prophet’s subject is “The Day of the Lord.” Following an expansive description of devastation, hence loss, the book ends with a call for song. Yahweh, positioned within Israel as a people, will “rejoice over you [Yahweh’s people] with gladness, he will renew you in his love” (3:17). The book ends with a litany of transformation leading to the final statement, “when I bring about restoration (šûb šēḇūt) before your eyes” (Zeph 3:20). Given the tone of the book, one catches here a glimpse of a restored creation. Loss? Yes! But eventual restoration and that on a very large cosmic scale!

To summarize: the loss-restoration paradigm has the potential of reframing popular ideology in two directions: 1) a corrective to negative perceptions about the nature of God, and 2) a corrective to the church’s narrow definition of salvation. Moreover, theologically speaking,

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the loss-restoration paradigm binds the two testaments together, for they describe the same reality and stir hope. The God depicted in both testaments is a God of newness. Loss, whether of relationships or property, is not to be the final word. Beyond loss, if God is in it, the prospect of restoration is hope-inspiring.

**Situating the Paradigm within Whole-Bible Theologies**

Situating the loss-restoration paradigm within other proposals can illumine the contribution of the proposed paradigm to whole-Bible theology. The theology of the exile has been helpfully expounded according to the judgment-salvation paradigm. Pertinent as such a schema may be, it has a certain harsh edge to it. The loss-restoration paradigm with somewhat gentler tone, is best considered as an extended thread in which the judgment-salvation component is a dominant colored string within the theological fabric. So while the judgment-salvation thematic captures the movement from sinful human action requiring divine judgment to God’s grace in salvation, the loss-restoration is fitting for losses that are incurred for reasons other than sin. Within the book of Jeremiah itself, the prophet’s loss of freedom through imprisonment is countered by a freedom for him to be with his people, though as a participant in a sad trek to Egypt. As for the people, the Book of Comfort depicts Israel as a people of wounds.

“For thus says the LORD: Your hurt is incurable, your wound is grievous. There is no one to uphold your cause, no medicine for your wound, no healing for you. All your lovers have forgotten you; they care nothing for you . . . Why do you cry out over your hurt? Your pain is incurable” (Jer 30:12-15a).

The “sin-guilt” backdrop, though not absent (30:14c), is not foregrounded. The loss of wellbeing (“Your hurt is incurable, and your wound is grievous” 30:12) is addressed with a word of restoration (“I will restore health to you and your wounds I will heal, says the Lord,” 30:17). The loss-restoration paradigm is more encompassing than theologies which focus exclusively on the judgment/salvation motif.

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Some overtures to a whole Bible theology are made according to themes. Charles Scobie sketches a “Biblical Theology” following the themes of 1) God’s Order; 2) God’s Servant; 3) God’s People; and 4) God’s Way.\textsuperscript{25} This structure enables him to incorporate a large number of subthemes to present a full-orbed whole-Bible theology. The paradigm of loss-restoration, with the advantage of being text-based, might similarly be fleshed out to incorporate significant nuances of the Bible’s message.

Scott Hahn offers a somewhat fresh analysis of the theme of covenant when he employs “the divine covenant(s) between God-as-Father and His people-as-Son as a center and organizing principle” of the Bible, yet with lengthy separate treatments of the subject first in the Old Testament and then according to the New Testament.\textsuperscript{26} The book’s subtitle, “A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises” meshes well with a loss-restoration paradigm. In the volume, Central Themes in Biblical Theology, in addition to the theme of “covenant” six other bridging themes (God’s commands, the atonement, the servant of the Lord, The Day of the Lord, The people of God and the History of redemption) are explored.\textsuperscript{27} Most of the themes there, if not all (e.g., atonement, covenant, people of God, Day of the Lord), are amenable to incorporation in a loss/restoration paradigm.

Certain biblical theologies of the OT have or could readily be enlarged to become whole-Bible theologies. One example of such expansion is Walter Kaiser’s book, The Promise-Plan of God, an expansion of his Toward an Old Testament Theology.\textsuperscript{28} Kaiser’s book has two divisions. The Old Testament section has chapter titles using the word “Promise,” the nine chapters in the New Testament use the word “Promise-Plan.” Vocabulary aside, Kaiser’s book provokes the question, “Is a walk-through of the Biblical books sequentially the appropriate

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shape of a whole-Bible theology? Is arrangement of the biblical material best done via synthesis or diachronically? The paradigm model urges synthesis.

My own attempt at synthesizing the message of the OT is a hybrid between the diachronic and the synthetic approach. The book, *God’s Design. A Focus on Old Testament Theology*, contains a chapter which could be enlarged to become a whole-Bible theology. The four elements of God’s Design (deliverance, community, experience of God, and “land”), drawn from the OT are sketchily expanded into the NT.

The proposal in this essay is to call to mind familiar Biblical events and motifs, and to show that a whole Bible theology gains clarity and power by attending to the paradigm of loss-restoration. Many are the Biblical stories of loss. Moderns can easily relate, for the paradigm speaks to their structure of existence, whether personally or within society or church. The pastoral benefits of such a paradigm are obvious.

The upbeat news about restoration is welcome, to be sure, but doubt may enter. Response to such doubt returns us to the Jeremiah 32 text in which Yahweh addresses a puzzled Jeremiah with the declaration and the question, “See, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me? “ (v. 27). Granted that the space between loss and restoration is large, and often troublesome, the theological punch line remains: Subsequent to loss Yahweh is fully able to bring about restoration (šûb šēbût).

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