THE BABYLONIAN EXILE AND THE REVITALIZATION OF A PEOPLE

A Thesis

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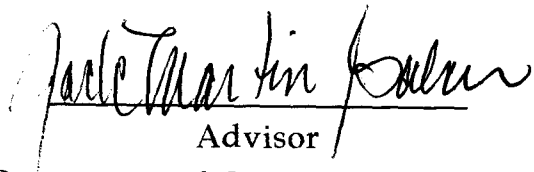

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PRECIS

The enslavement of the Hebrews and their subsequent "exodus" from Egypt, together, are deemed *the* defining experience of the Judaean people. Yet, another significant catastrophe in the history of the Jewish people occurred in the sixth century B.C.E.: the exile of a material portion of the Judaean population and all of its leadership to Babylonia -- a consequence of the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadrezzar II. Unlike historic precedents, wherein a defeated and exiled people was absorbed by its host nation and disappeared from the annals of history, this exile was unique.

Exiled from their land -- with their political system dissolved, their sacred place destroyed and their national language replaced by that of the host culture, the Judaeans are the only people to have survived from antiquity to the present under such conditions. The period of the so-called "Babylonian Exile" appears to have provided critical elements to ensure the survival, not the demise, of this people in diaspora throughout the centuries.

This thesis aims to establish the historical authenticity of the exile, to examine the conditions of exile and to uncover the clues or evidence of the elements of change that informed and enabled Jewish survival in Babylonia and, ultimately, the Judaean exiles' return to Judah and statehood.

With the enlargement and consolidation of the Babylonian Empire early in the sixth century B.C.E., the Kingdom of Judah faced a period of

turmoil and political instability. The defeat of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrian Empire in 722 B.C.E. had provided an ominous example for the Judaeans. Nevertheless, when tested, the political leadership of Judah failed.

In the face of imminent national disaster, the extra-institutional figure of the prophet came to the fore to provide the key ingredients necessary for survival -- vision and leadership. The prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah - each, in turn - responded to the crisis and, in so doing, transformed and revitalized the Judaeans' national-religious culture by (1) offering the population a rationale for the situation in which they now found themselves; (2) providing the exiled Judaeans with consolation, hope and a vision of the future; and (3) preparing the Judaeans for their national restoration. Together, the books of these prophets serve as the central texts for this paper, affording an exceptional prism through which the period of the exile may be viewed and analyzed.

Research methodology includes a survey of historical as well as biblical literary scholarship related to this period and to the three prophetic books. Epigraphic evidence of the period of the Babylonian Captivity is considered herein, such as the Babylonian Chronicles and Lachish Ostraca, as well as other archaeological material evidence. Art historical data is also examined, including materials related to the excavations of the towns that served as the outposts of Judah and, particularly, the excavations of the ancient city of Babylon. The Books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, in juxtaposition with the scholarly research, provide grounding and insight into the question of the survival of the Jewish people through the period of the Babylonian Exile.

DEDICATION

To my husband, Neil,
for his love and encouragement
of all that I endeavor.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"Find yourself a teacher and acquire a friend."
Avot 1:6

I wish to thank my adviser, Jack Balcer, whose inspired teaching and contagious enthusiasm for ancient history led me to this graduate program. His intellectual support, guidance and unfailing encouragement helped bring this thesis to fruition. His interest in my work and personal kindness buoyed me along the way.

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I am grateful to my husband, Neil, for his encouragement throughout this project and for his readiness to listen, read or edit, no matter how late the hour. He stands behind me and beside me in all that I do and I count his love as one of my great blessings.

A final thanks goes to Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman, Founding President Emeritus of the Wexner Heritage Foundation, whose imperious suggestion that I return to the university gave me the "permission" that I needed

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The "exodus," the term applied to the enslaved Hebrews leaving Egypt to resettle in Canaan, the land of their ancestors, has been deemed the central, core experience of the Israelite people. The significance of the event known as the exodus, whether mythic or historical fact, derives from two biblical traditions: (1) that the Hebrews escaped *from* foreign oppression and (2) that this escape led *to* the birth of the Hebrew nation as a theocracy.[1] Another event, however, this one historically verifiable,[2] appears to be an even more defining moment in the history of the Hebrews: the exile of a significant portion of the population of Judah to Babylonia as a consequence of the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadrezzar II in the sixth century B.C.E. The event of the exile,[3] in fact, stands as the antithesis of the exodus. The Babylonian exile

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[1] Donald E. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton 1992), 408-22; John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller, *Israelite and Judaean History* (Philadelphia 1977), 60-61; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3d ed. (Philadelphia 1981), 122-29; David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York 1992), s. v. "The Exodus" by K. A. Kitchen, 700-02.

[2] Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s. v. "History of Israel (Monarchic Period)" by Leslie J. Hoppe, 559; Peter R. Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia* (Oxford 1968), 1-9.

[3] The period from the fall of Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C.E. to the Return led by Ezra in 537 B.C.E. is described most frequently as the "exilic age," with emphasis placed on the Israelite population deported to Babylonia in 587/6 B.C.E. However, the exilic age should not be too precisely defined since there were, in fact, several exiles of the Judaean people to Babylonia and several returns. The first deportation occurred in 598/7 B.C.E. following the surrender of

represented the *return to* subjugation in a foreign land and appeared to signal the *end of* the nation as a theocracy.

The sixth century B.C.E. was of great moment for the Israelite community,[4] beginning with the fall of Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C.E. through the

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King Jehoiachin of Judah to the armies of Nebuchadrezzar (2 Kings 24:8-17). The Babylonian king besieged Jerusalem after Jehoiachin failed to pay tribute. Jehoiachin, the royal family and palace retinue, and thousands of other captives including landowners, military leaders, artisans, priests, prophets, and the elders of the people, were carried into captivity in Babylonia. Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, was installed by the Babylonians as the new ruler of Jerusalem but he too rebelled; Jerusalem was again defeated by the Babylonians and the Temple was destroyed(2 Kings 24:18-25:1; Jeremiah 39:1-10, 52:1-30). Captivity and exile again followed in 587/6 B.C.E. Gedaliah, the governor next appointed by the Babylonians, was assassinated; another uprising against the Babylonians resulted in "a further small deportation" in 582/1 B.C.E. See Jer. 52:30; Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, 1, 9-10; Hayes and Miller, 471; Geoffrey Wigoder, ed., *Illustrated Dictionary & Concordance of the Bible* (New York 1986), 150, 724-25.

It should be noted that preceding the Babylonian Exile, Judah had been subjected to a number of devastating deportations by the Assyrians during the time of King Hezekiah, beginning with Sennacherib's campaigns in Judah in 701 B.C.E. Unlike the period of the Assyrian assaults wherein "Jerusalem did not fall and the Davidic dynasty continued for more than a century longer," the Babylonian Exile stands as a watershed. Besieged by Nebuchadrezzar II, Jerusalem did fall and the political institution of the monarchy came to an end. Donald E. Gowan, *Theology of the Prophetic Books: The Death and Resurrection of Israel* (Louisville 1998), 50-51; also, see Wigoder, 605-607, 901-902.

[4]In *In Search of "Ancient Israel,"* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 148 (Sheffield 1992), Philip R. Davies represents a viewpoint of the "New Critical School" of Israelite historiography, a development of recent years that has gained a following; see Volkmar Fritz and Philip R. Davies, ed., *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 228 (Sheffield 1996). The New Critical School calls into question the historical authenticity of "Ancient Israel." Representing the extreme position of this school, Davies rejects the existence of "Biblical Israel," contending that biblical "Israel" is a literary construct--the product of the authors and redactors of the Hebrew Bible, 49-59. He contends that the "Historical Israel," i.e., the nation-state, never existed; rather, historical "Israel" refers to an "ethnically heterogeneous, culturally indigenous group" that inhabited "the Palestinian highlands," and was centered in the city of Samaria. In addition, he writes that the Kingdom of Judah "which exists at present exclusively in the biblical literature and the biblical scholarship dependent on it, remains theoretical," 60-74.

In "Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up? Archaeology and Israelite Historiography: Part I," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 297 (1995), 61-80, archaeologist, William G. Dever, critiques several newly-written histories of ancient Israel in terms of the issues of historiography and the use of archaeological data, including Davies' *In Search of "Ancient Israel."* Dever discredits Davies' position and categorically rejects the proposition of the revisionist "new school." Calling for a non-theological approach to "understanding the history and religion of ancient Israel," he makes the case for liberating "the writing of the history of ancient Israel, as well as its literature and religion, from all external dogmas. In

fall of Babylonia to Cyrus of Persia in 539 B.C.E. During this period, the formative elements of Judaism as a religious system (not a theocracy) were born.[5] With the conditions of their exile a foreign laboratory, first Babylonian and later Persian, the Judaeans would either develop a response to ensure continuity or be lost to the local culture.

The position of the exiled Judaean community in Babylonia can be described, in sociological terms, as a "cognitive minority," i.e., "a group of people whose view of the world differs significantly from the one generally taken for granted in their society."[6] In these circumstances, the Judaeans were

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particular, [he writes,] "we must redefine the relationship between our two best sources of information--texts and artifacts--not subsuming one under the dominant paradigm of the other...," 75. Dever presents the need for a "secular history" and maintains that the point of departure for writing this history "must be a mutual, honest, critical dialogue between textual studies and the best that archaeology can offer," 74-75.

The most compelling reason for rejecting the revisionist school, in this thesis, is its failure to acknowledge, in Dever's words, "the mass of archaeological data now available to illuminate the Iron Age in Palestine generally, and a specific 'Israelite national culture' in particular," 68.

Another powerful argument against the New School is its tendency to ignore the history of the Hebrew language. Davies' claim, for example, that "biblical Hebrew" did not exist until the Hellenistic period reveals a blindness concerning the "hundreds of seals, ostraca, graffiti, inscriptions, even some monumental stelae, all securely dated in the ninth to sixth century B.C."; see Dever, 68-69.

For similar positions and articles that address the issues of historiography and/or the relationship of biblical scholarship, history and archaeology, see Diana Vikander Edelman, ed., *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact and Israel's Past*, Journal for the Study of Old Testament Supplement Series 127 (Sheffield 1991) and Michael D. Coogan, J. Cheryl Exum, and Lawrence Stager, ed., *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King* (Louisville 1994); also, see William G. Dever, "Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up? Part II: Archaeology and the Religions of Ancient Israel," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 298 (1995): 37-58. For another voice of the "new school," see Niels Peter Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (Louisville 1998).

[5] Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "History of Israel (Post-monarchic Period)" by Robert P. Carroll, 567. Also, see Jacob Neusner, "Exile and Return as the History of Judaism" in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Concepts*, ed. James M. Scott, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 56 (New York 1997), 221-36.

[6] Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Garden City 1970), 6 and all of ch. 1, 88-90.

faced with three options: (1) surrender (resulting in the "self-liquidation of the theology and of the institutions in which the theological tradition is embodied"), i.e., assimilation; (2) "defiance," requiring the formation of a counterculture community, i.e., a sect; or (3) engagement in a "cognitive bargaining process" wherein the minority group "carefully accepts aspects of the majority beliefs that are not found to be destructive to the essentials of their faith," i.e., adaptation without assimilation.[7] The reformulation necessitated by the third option, adaptation, depended on the restructuring of certain elements or subsystems already accepted by the minority community. The reformulation was accomplished by "the person who is...the prophet or leader" and usually occurred "as a moment of insight, a brief period of realization of relationships and opportunities," i.e., an "inspiration or revelation."[8]

It is the thesis of this study that both before and during the exile, the leadership provided by the Hebrew prophets enabled the Judaeans to face the challenges that lay ahead -- to maintain the integrity of a tribal people without its ancestral land, to sustain the concept of nationhood without its political institutions, and to perpetuate the national theology without its sacred space. To achieve that end, the prophets, utilizing the option of adaptation without assimilation, responded to the crisis of exile by (1) offering the population a rationale for the situation in which they now found themselves; (2) providing the exiled Judaeans with consolation, hope and a vision of the

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[7]*Ibid.*, 19-24; Gowan, 146.

[8]Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956), 270. In its initial form, reformulation occurs in the mind of an individual; such insights are not the result of group deliberations. Wallace writes: "With very few exceptions, every religious revitalization movement with which I am acquainted has been originally conceived in one or several hallucinatory states of a single individual," 270.

future; and (3) preparing the Judaeans for their national restoration. At the same time that life in diaspora presented a threat to the continued existence of the group, the Exile offered both a challenge and an opportunity to the prophetic leadership for the "revitalization" of the group necessary to ensure its very continuity.

To the Judaeans, the fall of their northern neighbor, the Kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians in 722/721 B.C.E., and the dispersion and subsequent disappearance from history of her population,[9] must have stood as a mournful precedent (in fulfillment of the prophecies of Amos and Hosea) and a horrific prospect. The prophets of the Babylonian exile (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah), however, in their collective vision, offered the Judaeans an alternative, positive response to the current calamity: the crushing defeat at the hands of the Babylonians need not repudiate the strength of their God or their unique people-God relationship; rather, the defeat was, in fact, an instrument of their God, and exile not a punishment but a requirement for their purification. Also requisite was the people's removal from their cultic center, where ritual enactment had become artifice devoid of meaning. Focusing not on the cult but on the individual heart, the prophets foretold a new compact forged between the individual and God. As will be demonstrated, the prophets emerged in this period of national crisis, not only as charismatic religious figures predicting, prescribing, and consoling but also as astute political analysts.

Three of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible -- Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah[10] -- provide the critical insights into the political upheaval

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[9]Bright, *History of Israel*, 275-76.

that preceded the exile, the crisis in theology that occurred among the Judaeans, and the nature of the leadership and community response. While biblical exegesis does not necessarily reflect verifiable history, where other corroborative textual evidence is minimal or absent, these books provide a valuable, albeit limited, window into the period.[11] However, where available, epigraphical and archaeological evidence is utilized.

To appreciate fully the political and cultural distortions precipitated by the Babylonian Exile, brief account must be taken of the conditions in Judah in the years prior to the event. In marked contrast to the Exile, the preceding period, in fact, was one of national revival in Judah. With the Assyrian Empire in decline, the concomitant struggle between Egypt and Babylon for political hegemony left Josiah, the Judaean king, free to enlarge his empire and his armies, and to fortify cities.[12] In addition, Josiah authored significant cultic reforms, promoted social justice, and encouraged a nationalistic and spiritual solidarity[13]: "No king before him had turned to the Lord as he did...nor did any king like him appear again," (2 Kings 23:25).[14]

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[10] The designation "Second Isaiah" is predicated on the scholarship that holds that chapters 40-55 form a distinct unit within the sixty-six chapters of the Book of Isaiah. The historical context of these chapters is entirely different from the thirty-nine preceding chapters. In chapters 40-55, the setting is Babylon, not Israel and the enemy is the Neo-Babylonian Empire (626-539 B.C.E.), not the Neo-Assyrian Empire (935-612 B.C.E.). See Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s. v. "Book of Isaiah (Second Isaiah)" by Richard J. Clifford, 490-91. Also, see 66, n.170 of this paper.

[11] See Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Israel (Post-monarchic)," 568, for a discussion of interpretive ground rules for the post-monarchic period.

[12] Hayes and Miller, 464.

[13] *Ibid.*, 467.

[14] *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha* (New York 1971). Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are taken from this translation of the Bible.

The relative security of the nation was short-lived, however, when the struggle for the right of inheritance to the Assyrian Empire turned to the buffer regions that lay between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Josiah's death and defeat at Megiddo against the armies of Pharaoh Necho II ushered in a tumultuous era for the Judaean state.[15] A succession of Judaean kings, depositions, and alternating allegiance to Babylonia and Egypt culminated with Nebuchadrezzar's punitive campaign against Judah in 598/7 B.C.E.[16] With the Babylonian armies at their door, Judaean national solidarity crumbled; divisiveness ruled.

The behavior of Jeremiah and the prophets who succeeded him, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, led to what may be termed a process of "revitalization."[17] Up until the prophetic activity of Jeremiah, the office of prophecy was closely allied with the monarchy.[18] King Jehoiakim's break with Jeremiah signalled a change in the prophet-king relationship. Judaean society was besieged politically and militarily and traditional institutions, under extreme stress, began to break down. The phenomenon of revitalization, consisting of "attempted and sometimes successful innovation of whole cultural systems,"[19] characterizes the activities of the three prophets of the exilic period. The prophets' innovative visions reduced the stress on

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[15] *Ibid.*, 468-69; Abraham Malamat, "Caught Between the Great Powers: Judah Picks a Side...and Loses," *Biblical Archaeology* 25(1999), 34-41.

[16] Hayes and Miller, 470-71.

[17] Wallace, 264-81.

[18] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, Revised and Enlarged (Louisville 1996), 190; Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Prophecy (Preexilic Hebrew)" by John J. Schmitt, 486.

[19] Wallace, 264.

individuals as well as on corporate identity.[20] In addition, in light of contemporaneous events, the prophets' deliberate efforts to rationalize the nation's relationship with their God were intended to promote a new self-understanding and, in doing so, both prevent the disintegration of the covenantal group and provide the means for Israel's continuity. Operating outside of traditional institutions, the prophets were able to envision "a new way of life."[21]

The preexilic and exilic periods demanded a new leadership and a new vision.[22] Indeed, a new self-definition or reformulation of national identity, adapted to the prevailing political reality, was requisite. Leadership emerged from the prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, and their collective visions founded an ideological revolution.

In the following chapters, each of these prophets and their writings will be examined with the objective of discerning the ways in which prophetic leadership impacted or reformulated the exiles' national identity and theology in order to ensure their continuity.

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[20]*Ibid.*, 266-67. Wallace writes that it is "functionally necessary for every person in society to maintain a mental image of the society and its culture...," 266. He defines this image as "the mazeway," i.e., an image that comprises "both the maze of physical objects of the environment (internal and external, human and nonhuman) and also of the ways in which this maze can be manipulated by the self and others in order to minimize stress," 266.

[21]*Ibid.*, 268.

[22]Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s. v. "Prophecy (Postexilic Hebrew)" by John Barton, 489-95.

CHAPTER 2

A CRISIS IN JUDAH AND THE PROPHECIES OF JEREMIAH

The prophecies of Jeremiah introduce profound changes for his people and his time. A prophet whose career began during the period of Josianic reform, Jeremiah endorsed and advocated those reforms including centralization of the cult in Jerusalem and a return to obedience to the covenant[23]: "If you obey me and do all that I tell you, you shall become my people and I will become your God. And I will thus make good the oath I swore to your forefathers, that I would give them a land flowing with milk and honey, the land you now possess" - 11:4-5.[24] The connection between the people and their land was an irrevocable trust, the Judaeans must only return to "the ancient paths" (6:16). The prophecies of Jeremiah's early ministry (622-605 B.C.E.)[25] are conventional in content and reinforce the concept of

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[23] Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s. v. "Jeremiah (PROPHET)" by Jack R. Lundblom, 687-88.

[24]For simplicity, biblical citations in this paper for the Book of Jeremiah in Chapter 1 will be noted without the customary "Jer."; accordingly, in Chapter 2 on Ezekiel, "Ezek." will be omitted and in Chapter 3, "2 Is." will be omitted.

[25] Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Jeremiah (PROPHET)," 687-89. Legitimate disagreement surrounds the question of the onset of Jeremiah's career, e.g., Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, dates the activity of Jeremiah to 626-580 B.C.E., 347. William L. Holladay in *Jeremiah: A Fresh Reading* (New York 1990) presents an argument for a new chronology that situates Jeremiah delivering his first prophecy in 609 B.C.E., 8-24.

covenant associated with Abraham: "Leave your own country, your kinsmen, and your father's house, and go to a country that I will show you...There the Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'I give this land to your descendants,'" (Gen. 12:1, 12:7). While not universally popular, Jeremiah's early prophecies were, at least, consonant with the reforms initiated by the head of state, Josiah.

The battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.E.[26] marked the decline of Egypt and the emergence of Babylonia as the new power in world affairs. 605 B.C.E. also demarcates the late career of Jeremiah (604-586 B.C.E.) from the early one,[27] and the beginning of the end for the Kingdom of Judah. According to the Babylonian "Chronicle Concerning the Early Years of Nebuchadnezzar [sic] II," Crown Prince Nebuchadrezzar II defeated and slaughtered to a man the Egyptian army at Carchemish.[28] Other sources indicate that he continued south to conquer Hamath and thereby cleared the way into Judah and to Egypt as far south as the border at Wadi el'Arish.[29] With the enemy at the door, Jeremiah received the prophetic vision[30] to commit his prophecies to a permanent record: "In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Take a scroll and write on

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[26]"Of Egypt: concerning the army of Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt at Carchemish on the river Euphrates, which Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah," (Jer. 46:2).

[27] *Ibid.*, 689-90.

[28] A. K. Grayson, *Texts from Cuneiform Sources Volume V: Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley 1975), 99-102.

[29]James B. Pritchard, *The Harper Concise Atlas of the Bible* (New York 1991), 88.

[30]The question of the precise nature of the prophetic "vision" remains a theological issue beyond recovery. Accordingly, reports of visions will be taken at face value as the record of a determinative event regardless of what actually happened.

it every 'word that I have spoken to you in the reign of Josiah down to the present day," (36:1). Moreover, the theme of his prophecies appears to be motivated more by political than religious considerations.[31] Of course, when national security was threatened, so was the inviolability of the convenantal relationship, engendering a theological emergency as well.

In the face of a Babylonian onslaught, Jeremiah urged Judaean submission. Already, the Babylonians had demonstrated their might in 604 B.C.E. with a march along the Palestinian coastal plain and the sack of the Philistine city of Ashkelon, including the deportation of its leading citizens.[32] This show of force had an immediate impact and, for a time, Jehoiakim submitted in vassalage to Babylonia. But in 601 Nebuchadrezzar again met the forces of Necho in a battle at the frontier where the fighting was fierce and the result indecisive. The Babylonians then turned homeward in order to reorganize their forces. Misinterpreting the Babylonian retreat as weakness, Jehoiakim seized the moment to rebel against his overlord.[33]

Jeremiah, however, recommended an opposing course of action. Perhaps regarded, by this time, as a *persona non grata* for traitorous espousals, Jeremiah may have been censured by the king.[34] Thus, Baruch, his scribe, was entrusted to read the prophesy committed to a scroll, "in the

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[31] See Wallace, 264-81, for a discussion of the emergence of charismatic leadership during a period of national stress.

[32] Bright, *History of Israel*, 326-27; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26-52* (Minneapolis 1989), 29.

[33] The exact location of this battle is unknown. James B. Pritchard has suggested that "[t]he clash could have taken place in the Gaza plain, through which the principal highway ran, for it effectively ended Egyptian control in Asia by land." See Pritchard, *Harper Concise Atlas of the Bible* , 88.

[34] Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 255.

house of the Lord and...in the hearing of all of the people" (36:10), which admonished the Judaeans to capitulate to Babylon.[35] Though the palace would view Jeremiah's advice (received directly from God) as treasonous, additional evidence of dissension within the society is further seen in the choice of location within the house of the Lord for the reading of the scroll: "the room of Gemariah son of the adjutant-general Shaphan in the upper court at the entrance to the new gate" (36:10). Shaphan had served Josiah as secretary and can be identified as the individual who had read the Deuteronomic scroll to the king[36]; the status accrued to his father, therefore, must have devolved upon Gemariah as well. Jeremiah's scroll was presented a second time, this time in Shaphan's own room, to the palace guard "where all the officers were gathered" (36:12). This recitation reinforced the shift from the religious to the political arena -- an appeal not directed to the masses, but to their leadership.[37] The "trembling" officers (36:16), obligated by the first public reading to report Jeremiah's indiscretion to the king, nonetheless, warned Baruch and Jeremiah to go into hiding (36:19). Thus, factionalism is observed at the highest level of government, with Jeremiah offering and, perhaps, instigating or abetting an alternative response to the Babylonian threat.

When the report of Jeremiah's words were received by the king, Jehoiakim ordered the scroll delivered and the words read to him: [then] "the king cut them off with a penknife and threw them into the fire in the brazier.

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[35] For a discussion of dating of this episode, see Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 29.

[36] Wigoder, *Concordance*, 910.

[37] Holladay, *Jeremiah: A Fresh Reading* , 78-81.

He went on doing so until the whole scroll had been thrown on the fire," (36:23-24). The burning of the scroll punctuated a significant shift in Jeremiah's perception: Yahweh's threats were no longer mere possibilities; Yahweh would now activate the master plan -- using a foreign power as the instrumentality[38]:

> Therefore these are the words of the Lord about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have no one to succeed him on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be exposed to scorching heat by day and frost by night. I will punish him and his offspring and his courtiers for their wickedness, and I will bring down on them and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem and on the men of Judah all the calamities with which I threatened them, and to which they turned a deaf ear. (36:30-31)

Underscored in a second written scroll (36:32), Yahweh's edict was irrevocable.[39]

Jehoiakim's death (or assassination) in December 598 B.C.E. was followed by the installation of his eighteen-year-old son, Jehoiachin. Three months later (in March 596 B.C.E.), Jerusalem surrendered.[40] In the "Chronicle Concerning the Early Years of Nebuchadnezzar [sic] II," the record of the Judaean defeat appears:

> He [Nebuchadrezzar] camped against the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Adar he captured the city (and) seized (its) king. A king of

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[38] *Ibid.*, 81.

[39] *Ibid.*, 81-9.

[40] 2 Kings 24:6, 12; Jer. 22:19, 36:30.

his own choice he appointed in the city (and) taking
the vast tribute he brought it into Babylon.[41]

The exile of Jehoiachin, the royal family, and the upper echelons of society resulted in severe political, religious and socioeconomic dislocations within Judaean society. And while mass deportation as both political strategy and punishment was common practice in this region at this time,[42] the lesson of the Northern Kingdom of Israel's exile by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E. and Israel's subsequent disappearance would not have been lost on the Judaeans.

"King Zedekiah son of Josiah was set on the throne of Judah by Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon," (37:1). The appointment of Zedekiah, the uncle of Jehoiachin, threw into question who was the legitimate king of Judah. In fact, the prophecies of Ezekiel are dated in his book according to the years of captivity of Jehoiachin whom Ezekiel regarded as the *de jure* king. Also, seal impressions, discovered in Israel and attributed to this period, bear the words "Eliakim, steward of Jehoiachin" and may indicate that, though in exile, Jehoiachin retained the crown property.[43] Only twenty-one years old on his accession to the throne, Zedekiah inherited a state that was not only militarily and economically debilitated but which had been also deprived of its experienced advisors[44]:

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[41] Grayson, *Texts from Cuneiform Sources*, 102.

[42] See Bustenay Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden 1979).

[43] See Ezek. 8.1; Wigoder, *Concordance*, 1049; Bright, *History of Israel*, 328f.

[44] Hayes and Miller, 471-72; Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s. v. "Zedekiah" by Robert Althann, 1069.

> The king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, took its king and its officers and had them brought to him at Babylon...He took away the chief men of the country, so that it should become a humble kingdom unable to raise itself.... (Ezek. 17:12,14)

Despite a sympathetic ear to Jeremiah's prophecies -- his predictions and prescriptions -- the indecisive Zedekiah was influenced time and again by his anti-Babylonian officers.[45]

Numerous times Zedekiah sought Jeremiah's counsel: "inquire of the Lord on our behalf" (21:2) and "pray for us to the Lord our God" (37:3). Often, their meetings were arranged covertly: "King Zedekiah had Jeremiah brought to him and consulted him privately in the palace" (37:17) and "King Zedekiah had the prophet Jeremiah brought to him by the third entrance to the Lord's house," (38:14). True authority, however, appears to have resided with the military[46] and, in every instance, Zedekiah yielded to their demands:

> the officers said to the king, 'The man must be put to death. By talking in this way he is discouraging the soldiers and the rest of the people left in the city...King Zedekiah said, "He is in your hands; the king is powerless against you." (38:4-5)

In this period of political, military and social upheaval, what threat did Jeremiah pose? In the early years of his prophetic career, Jeremiah supported,

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[45] Jer. 37-8; Hayes and Miller, 472.

[46] In a confrontation between King Zedekiah and his officers in Jer. 37-38 concerning the disposition of Jeremiah, Zedekiah capitulates to the officers' demands--to put Jeremiah to death--despite the fact that the king sought Jeremiah's advice on several occasions. Also, Zedekiah must secretly provide for the welfare of the prophet, outside the knowledge of his officers.

by and large, the Josianic reforms[47] and could be viewed as an ally of the monarch. Perhaps influenced by the shared history of Jeremiah and his father, Josiah, Zedekiah sought advice from a prophet "from the past" -- one who had had a connection with his father. However, conditions within Judah had deteriorated considerably since Josiah's death and, while Zedekiah pursued Jeremiah's advice, he proved a feckless leader. He did not appear to have the courage to act against his officers, much less against a populace among whom Jeremiah had never enjoyed popularity. During the reign of Josiah, Jeremiah had advocated the divestiture of Judah's vassalage to Assyria and Egypt.[48] Now, Jeremiah advised Zedekiah to submit to Babylon.

What Jeremiah sought from his people was not limited to a return to Yahweh (Deut. 4:30) and a circumcision of the heart (Deut. 10:16), but an outright rebellion against the king and the military. In 594 B.C.E.,[49] King Zedekiah met with the envoys of the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon in Jerusalem to discuss a coordinated revolt against the hegemony of Babylonia.[50] Emboldened by a rebellion against Nebuchadrezzar II within Babylonia, Zedekiah and the foreign kings planned to take advantage of this supposed weakness. Recorded in the "Chronicle Concerning the Early Years of Nebuchadnezzar [sic] II," is: "The tenth [year: ...]...From the month Kislev until the month Tebet there [was] a rebellion in Akkad. [...] ... he put his large [army] to the sword (and) conquered his foe." This insurrection involved

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[47] Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Jeremiah (PROPHET)," 687-88.

[48] *Ibid.*; Jer. 2.18, 36; 13.1-11.

[49] Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 118.

[50] Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Jeremiah," 689; Bright, *History of Israel*, 329.

military elements and resulted in mass executions.[51] What Zedekiah and the other kings perceived as weakness resulted in yet another show of strength by Nebuchadrezzar. At the same time, other prophets, particularly Hananiah, foretold triumph over Babylon and the return of Jehoiachin and the Judaean exiles (28). Employing dramatic visualization ("the cords and bars of a yoke" upon his neck[52]), Jeremiah addressed the foreign envoys with "the words of the Lord":

> I now give all these lands to my servant Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon...If any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon or submit to his yoke, I will punish them with sword, famine, and pestilence...." (27:6,8)

Jeremiah also reported to the envoys that he had delivered this same message to "Zedekiah, king of Judah" and "to the priests and all the people" (27:12,16). With this prophecy, Jeremiah meant to provoke all segments of Judaean society.

Not only is Babylon seen in this prophecy as the instrument of divine judgment but, more significantly -- in fact, revolutionary -- is the indication of the dissolution of the Abrahamic covenant. The title to the land, pledged to Abraham and his descendants forever ("As an everlasting possession I will give you and your descendants after you the land in which you are now aliens, all the land of Canaan...," Gen. 17:8), was actually transferred to Yahweh's new "servant," Nebuchadrezzar, in Jeremiah 27. The people-land connection, so vital to the Judaeans' self-definition, appears to have

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[51] Grayson, *Texts from Cuneiform Sources*, vol. v, 20, 102; Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 107.

[52] Jer. 27:2.

dissolved. Furthermore, the Lord whose words Jeremiah conveyed now was seen not as the parochial God of Judah, but as the God of all nations. God's message of obedience and peace (or disobedience and punishment) was directed to the peoples of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon as well as to those of Judah: reject the prophesy of Jeremiah "and I shall banish you and you will perish. But if any nation submits to the yoke of the king of Babylon and serves him, I will leave them on their own soil," (27:10-11). Here the special "My people-your God" relationship is seen in the context of a universal God.

The heightening of the theological crisis, concomitant with the political, is further reflected in Jeremiah's vision of the good and bad figs (24), and in a letter that he sent to the exiled Judaeans in Babylon. In the vision, the two baskets of figs serve as a metaphor: the "first ripe," desirable figs represent the Judaean exiles in Babylonia, while the putrid figs "not fit to eat" represent "Zedekiah, king of Judah, his officers and the survivors of Jerusalem...I will make them repugnant to all the kingdoms of the earth...an object-lesson..." (24:8-9). In the letter sent from Jerusalem, both to the leadership among the exiles (elders, priests, and prophets) and "to all the people whom Nebuchadrezzar had deported" (29:1-2), Jeremiah conveys God's word -- an exhortation not merely that the community should resign itself to exile, but assiduously to create a normalized society:

> Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Marry wives and beget sons and daughters; take wives for your sons and give your daughters husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters and you may increase there and not dwindle away. (29:4-6).

What is more, Jeremiah's letter instructed the exiles to be exemplary, patriotic citizens: "Seek the welfare of any city to which I have carried you off, and pray to the Lord for it; on its welfare your welfare will depend" (29:7).[53] The letter, conveyed to Babylon by Elasar, son of Shaphan and presumably the brother of Ahikam who had protected Jeremiah after delivering his provocative temple sermon and Gemariah, son of Hilkiah (Jer. 29:3), was, undoubtedly, unknown to Zedekiah. On a royal mission for Zedekiah, Elasar and Gemariah most likely travelled to Babylon in 594 B.C.E., as part of a delegation to reassure Nebuchadrezzar of Zedekiah's loyalty following the failed summit conference of the nations of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon in Jerusalem.[54]

The implications of the vision of the figs and the letter to the exiles were revolutionary. That a people, whose connection to the land of Judah was intrinsic, could not only survive but thrive in exile is a startling concept. The people Israel were removed from Jerusalem, their historic, religious-political center; the Davidide was ignominiously cast off and they were far from the Temple site, without the traditional mechanism of sacrifice to connect ritually with their God. How would the identity of this people remain intact? Yet Jeremiah was convinced that the promise for continuity resided with the exiled community. Physically displaced from their rotten center, the Judaeans would have the opportunity to begin afresh. In the vision of the good and bad figs, God's promise was renewed: in Babylonia, "I will give them wit to know me, for I am the Lord; they shall become my

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[53] See Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon*, 20, 58-59, for a discussion of the question of attribution.

[54] Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 139-40.

people and I will become their God, for they will come back to me with all their heart," (24:7).

In the ensuing conflict between the armies of Nebuchadrezzar and Jerusalem, one redemptive moment occurred -- however, short-lived. Zedekiah proclaimed "an act of freedom for the slaves" (34:8), a covenantal act of compliance for which Jeremiah had advocated in the past. With national disaster at Judah's door, Zedekiah's ulterior motive in declaring emancipation may have been his hope in strengthening the army with freed slaves: "All who had Hebrew slaves, male or female, were to set them free; they were not to keep their fellow Judaeans in servitude," (34:9). Despite the rhetoric, Zedekiah and the former slave-owners "changed their minds and forced back into slavery the men and women whom they had freed," (34:11) -- due, perhaps, to a respite in the military threat from Babylonia.[55] The rescission underscoring, once again, the rottenness in Zion.

While the rotten fig-good fig metaphor held, Jeremiah possessed no naïveté regarding the inherent dangers of exile. In a letter written to those exiled in 597 B.C.E., Jeremiah warned of the seductiveness of the host culture: "Do not fall into the ways of the nations, do not be awed by the signs in the heavens..." (10:2). Despite the material richness of the god-images (beaten silver from Tarshish, gold from Ophir, draped in luscious fabrics in violet and purple),[56] "the carved images of the nations are a sham," (10:3). How could such Babylonian deities be gods when, in fact, they "all are the work of craftsmen and goldsmiths...all the work of skilled men," (10:9)? Jeremiah

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[55] J. Alberto Soggin, *A History of Ancient Israel: From the Beginnings to the Bar Kochba Revolt, A.D. 135* (Philadelphia 1985), 250-51.

[56] Jer. 10.9.

must have been aware of both the architectural magnificence of Babylon[57] and the elaborate pomp and circumstance of the New Year's Festival (*akitu*) in which Marduk, chief god in the Babylonian pantheon, and Nabu, a lesser god, were carried throughout the city.[58] Cognizant of the psychological precariousness of the exiled Judaeans and the allure of the materially rich host culture, Jeremiah not only warned of false gods but reminded his community that they were God's inheritance ("Israel is the people he claims as his own; the Lord of Hosts is his name" - 10:16). In his letter to the exiles, Jeremiah also held out to the captives the promise of redemption (10:17-25).

Concrete expression of belief in this promise of redemption occurred during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 588 or 587 B.C.E. when Jeremiah attempted to leave the city to purchase land in Anathoth (37:11-13).[59] In Anathoth, his native city, Jeremiah had the opportunity to purchase a field, through "the right of redemption and possession as next of kin" (32:7), ostensibly a poor investment in light of his own prophecies that Judah would surely fall to the Babylonians. Arrested at the Benjamin Gate on his way to Anathoth, when a respite in the siege took place, Jeremiah was accused of desertion to the enemy by the officers who took him into custody (37:11-16).[60] Despite his arrest and imprisonment, first in the house of Jonathan the scribe

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[57] Robert Koldewey, *The Excavations at Babylon* (London 1914).

[58] Joachim Marzahn, *The Ishtar Gate: The Processional Way/The New Year Festival at Babylon* (Berlin 1992).

[59] Bright, *History of Israel*, 329-30; Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Jeremiah (PROPHET)," 688; Hayes and Miller, 473.

[60] It is likely that Egypt, under a new pharaoh, Hophra, sent troops to Judah to help rout the Babylonians. With Nebuchadrezzar at the height of his power, his battalions were temporarily redirected from the siege of Jerusalem and defeated the Egyptians before they could reach the Judaean capital. Soggin, *Ancient Israel*, 250-51; Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 328.

that had been converted into a prison (37:15), and then in the court of the guard-house attached to the royal palace (32:2), Jeremiah succeeded, nevertheless, in purchasing and fulfilling all the contemporary requirements for the legal transfer of property from his place in the court of the guard-house (37:9-14).[61] The promise of the restoration of the exiles to the Judaean homeland, in fact, is explicit in Jeremiah's prophesies. While the land of Judah may be taken from God's chosen people and given to Nebuchadrezzar, the instrumentality of punishment, this transfer was only a temporary one: "though I punish you as you deserve, I will not sweep you clean away," (46:28). Unlike the fate of their exiled neighbors, the northern tribes of Israel, the exile of the people of Judah would have finite dimensions: seventy years. "When a full seventy years has passed over Babylon, I will take up your cause and fulfill the promise of good things I made you, by bringing you back to this place," (29:10). In fact, the term of exile is repeated (25:12), as is the promise of restoration: "I will restore the fortunes of Jacob's clans and show my love for all his dwellings...Their sons shall be what they once were, and their community shall be established in my sight," (30:18-20).

Not only would God effect the exiles' return to Judah, the rebuilding of Jerusalem (31:38), and the restoration of her prosperity, but in two amazing declarations, God (through the voice of Jeremiah) promised to make a "new covenant" (31:31) and to reestablish the Davidic line ("I will make a righteous Branch of David spring up" and "David will never lack a successor on the

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[61] Shekels were weighed and given to the seller (Hanamel) and two copies of the deed of purchase, one sealed and one unsealed, were witnessed. The deeds of purchase were then deposited in an eartherware container for posterity (Jer. 37.6-14). Also, see Holladay, *Jeremiah: A Fresh Reading*, 119-29, for a discussion of such a legal document, and Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon*, 290, for a facsimile and description of a similar sealed contract from Elephantine.

throne" - 33:15,17). During the seventy years of exile, the generation that had turned its back on the Lord (disobeying God's statutes and emptying religious ritual of meaning) would die and a new, blameless generation would stand in its stead. Jeremiah prophesied that when seventy years had passed, the exiles (including the people of Israel exiled in the previous generation by the Assyrians) "shall come together and go in tears to seek the Lord their God; they shall ask after Zion, turning their faces toward her," (50:4-5). At this juncture, "a host of mighty nations...from a northern land" (50:9) would serve as God's instrument against the Babylonians.[62] The exiles were urged then to "flee from Babylon, from the land of the Chaldeans...like he-goats leading the flock," (50:8). The slate of iniquities would be wiped clean during the period of captivity ("search shall be made for the iniquity of Israel but there shall be none, and for the sin of Judah but it shall not be found"); moreover, God's message proclaimed that "those whom I leave as a remnant I will forgive," (50:20).

Except for the brief mention of a future Davidic king, a restored Davidic state is not elaborated upon in Jeremiah's promise for the future. Since the national cult appeared to him as an abomination, a revival of the former religious institution may not have been envisaged.[63] Rather, Jeremiah foresaw the rebirth of the community through personal regeneration -- "after

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[62] The instrument, with history's hindsight, appears to be Cyrus of Persia who attacked Babylonia from the northeast in 538 B.C.E. Holladay, however, indicated that Jeremiah's prophesy implicates the exiles of Israel to Babylon's north who will be used as Yahweh's war club against the Babylonians. See Holladay, *Jeremiah: A Fresh Reading*, 127-28 and Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* , 407, 409, 414-16.

[63] In 3:16, God, speaking through Jeremiah, describes not an elaborated priesthood but promises to provide the returnees with "shepherds after my own heart, and they shall lead you with knowledge and understanding."

those days...I will set my law within them and write it on their hearts," (31:33).[64] After the nation's destruction, the Judaeans (also called "the people Israel") would survive as a people without an external, political organization and they would survive outside of their covenantal geographic borders. In an entirely new context, the form this community would take would be based more on personal conduct and individual righteousness, that is, on individual response to the prophetic message, than on membership in the nation.[65] Jeremiah offered his people a revolutionary insight and a wellspring of hope in his assurance that even without their temple and outside of their homeland, the dispersed ones could still call upon Yahweh: "If you invoke me and pray to me, I will listen to you: when you seek me, you shall find me; if you search with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord," (29:12-14).[66]

The destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of the nation of Judah, in the prophecies of Jeremiah, were inevitable. With the city under siege and the population suffering severe starvation, the gates of the city were thrown open to the Babylonians (52:4-7). Instead of heeding Jeremiah's instruction to give himself up to Nebuchadrezzar, Zedekiah and a group of nobles attempted escape towards Transjordan. Pursued by the Babylonian army, Zedekiah and all his company were captured and brought before the Babylonian king:

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[64] Henri Frankfort, H. A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Thorkild Jacobsen, and William A. Irwin, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago 1977), 339.

[65] *Ibid.*, 342; John Bright, *The Anchor Bible Jeremiah* (Garden City 1965), cxiv-cxv.

[66] Bright, *History of Israel*, cxvi.

> The king of Babylon slew Zedekiah's sons before his eyes; he also put to death all the princes of Judah....Then the king of Babylon put Zedekiah's eyes out, bound him with fetters of bronze, brought him to Babylon and committed him to prison till the day of his death. (52:9-11)

With the capture of the Judaean king and the execution of his sons, the line of the Davidic house through Zedekiah was terminated. The city of Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in the summer of 587 or 586 B.C.E.[67] Under the Babylonian captain of the guard, Nebuzaradan, the city of Jerusalem was systematically destroyed and the temple and royal palaces burned. Valuable ceremonial objects used in temple ritual, as well as architectural ornamentation (columns and capitals) worked in precious metals, were taken to Babylon as war booty (52:17-23). Even the walls of the sacred city were pulled down "all round Jerusalem" by the Babylonian forces (52:14).

Archaeological evidence reveals that, in addition to the conflagration of Jerusalem, numerous cities and important centers throughout Judah were devastated in the Babylonian campaign of this period, including Lachish and Tel Zakariya (Azekah), both mentioned in the Jeremiah narrative (34:7), Eglon, Tel Bet Mirsim, Ramat Rachel, Bet Shemesh, Bethel, Arad, Ein Gedi, and others.[68] Taking advantage of Jerusalem's downfall, the Edomites also

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[67] For a discussion of dating, see Hayes and Miller, 474.

[68] *Ibid.*, 475.

The author of this thesis, excavating at Tel Beth Shemesh in July 1996 with an archaeological team under the direction of archaeologists, Shlomo Bunimovitz and Zvi Lederman, observed firsthand evidence of an extensive ash line in domestic buildings at Iron Age II levels in two separate quadrants of the dig site (E-22 and D-22). The question posed was of what were the ash layers indicative? One hypothesis was that a massive conflagration was the result of a Babylonian invasion in 586 B.C.E. or later. Continued excavation and further study of the site architecture and material finds were requisite to confirm or refute that the Babylonians burned Beth Shemesh to the ground. Also, see Shlomo Bunimovitz and Zvi

contributed to the devastation of Judah by incursion into her southern areas.[69] Numerous religious, military and civic leaders were executed, and others among the upper classes were deported to Babylonia.[70] The closing chapter of Jeremiah indicates that Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian captain of the guard "deported the rest of the people left in the city, those who had deserted to the king of Babylon and any remaining artisans" (52:15), leaving "only the weakest class of people to be vine-dressers and laborers," (52:16).[71]

Jeremiah, who had consistently argued for Judah's capitulation to Nebuchadrezzar and for the exigency of exile, was freed from his chains among the captives and invited by Nebuzaradan to accompany him to Babylon where "special care" of the prophet would be taken (40:1-4). Without awaiting Jeremiah's response, Nebuzaradan did an about-face and instructed Jeremiah to join Gedaliah, the newly appointed governor of Judah, at Mizpeh, the new territorial seat, and gave him leave to stay with Gedaliah "openly; or else go wherever you choose," (40:5-6). In the sequence of events that followed, including the assassination of Gedaliah, Jeremiah -- still preaching to the remnant -- was taken (presumably against his will) by Johanan ben Kareah to resettle in Egypt: "All the men who are bent on going to Egypt and settling there will die by sword, by famine, or by pestilence; not

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Lederman, "Beth-Shemesh: Culture Conflict on Judah's Frontier," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 23 (1997), 42-49, 75-77.

[69] Hayes and Miller, 475.

[70] Jeremiah 52:29 identifies the number exiled at this time as 832 which probably accounts only for the adult Jerusalemite males. See Bright, *History of Israel*, 330f.

[71] For a discussion of the term "artisans" and another estimate of the exiled population, see Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon*, 9.

one shall escape or survive the calamity which I will bring upon them," (40:17).

Although the ultimate fate of Jeremiah in Egypt is unknown,[72] his prophetic legacy provided a foundation of hope for the exiled Judaeans. With defeat at the hands of the Babylonians, Judah's national theology -- predicated both on the Abrahamic covenant wherein God promised the land (Zion) in perpetuity to God's chosen people, and on God's immutable promise of eternal rule by the House of David -- was in ruins. Because the national cult was an abomination to him, Jeremiah's words envisaged a religion based on conformance to religious "rights" (i.e., commandments), not rituals:

> ...when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt, I gave them no commands about whole-offering and sacrifice; I said not a word about them. What I did command them was this: If you obey me, I will be your God and you shall be my people. You must conform to all my commands, if you would prosper. (7:22-23)

Furthermore, with the experience of the ultimately failed Josianic reform behind him, Jeremiah may have trusted more in the ability of the individual to reform rather than a nation: "circumcise your hearts, men of Judah and dwellers in Jerusalem," (4:4); "mend your ways and your doings, deal fairly with one another, do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, shed no innocent blood in this place, do not run after other gods to your own ruin," (7:5-6).

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[72] Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Jeremiah (PROPHET)," 690; Bright, *History of Israel*, 336.

On the basis of individual accountability, Jeremiah's nation could be cleansed in exile -- one person, one generation at a time. And, finally, in Jeremiah's prophecy, the God of the exiles (their national God) -- the God who rewards and punishes -- transfused their theology with the promise of a new compact that binds, protects, and forgives:

> I will make a new covenant with Israel and Judah...after those days [of exile]...I will set my law within them and write it on their hearts; I will become their God and they shall become my people. No longer need they teach one another to know the Lord; all of them, high and low alike, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their wrongdoing and remember their sin no more. (31:31, 31:33-34)

Thus, a profoundly changed theology emerged from the military and political defeat of Judah and the concomitant theological crisis, a theology that was both responsive and portable and that would enable the Judaean exiles not only to endure, but to re-invent, reinforce and renew their identity as a cohesive, distinct religious group while dwelling amidst a foreign nation.

CHAPTER 3

EZEKIEL: PROPHET OF THE CAPTIVITY AND CONSOLER OF THE PEOPLE

While Jeremiah, the prophet of transition, spanned the period of political instability within Judah through the resounding defeat and exile of the Judaeans by the Babylonians, Ezekiel, the prophet of ecstatic visions, resides squarely within the captivity. The Book of Ezekiel, in fact, opens with Ezekiel speaking (in the first person) and locating himself among the exiles beside the Kebar canal in Babylonia (3:15).

If Babylonia were indeed the instrument of divine judgment, as Jeremiah had prophesied, then the prophecies of Ezekiel were to explain further the raison d'être of exile and God's rejection of the covenant. Ezekiel projects the restoration both of the holy Temple and Jerusalem, the holy city. Significantly, he predicts a program of complete reform of the nation that would engender the restoration of the covenant and the concomitant return of God's consecrated people to Judah. In the final analysis, Ezekiel expands on Jeremiah's theological explanation of the evolving relationship between Yahweh and the people of the covenant. Not only does Ezekiel see a profound relationship in the historic sequence from judgment to restoration

but the prophet of the Exile derives from this sequence a new understanding of the divine purpose and a path to avoid the failures of the past.[73]

In this chapter, the historical context of the period of the exile is examined together with the conditions of exile, including social organization and the freedoms enjoyed therein. The influence of the host culture, particularly as viewed through the prism of the Book of Ezekiel, is evident. Most important, the leadership of the prophets proves to be the critical factor of Jewish continuity through the catastrophe of defeat, their relocation to Babylonia and their eventual return; and, during the period of exile, the figure of Ezekiel is paramount. A prophet of fantastic visions, Ezekiel provided the means to acknowledge both the reality of everyday life in Babylonia and the theological rationale for the Judaeans' condition. Even more, the prophet consoled Yahweh's people with the promise of their eventual return to and the restoration of Judah.

The Book of Ezekiel and the prophet's ministry is set firmly in Babylon; his prophecies occurred, in the main, between 593 and 573 B.C.E.,[74] during the reign of Zedekiah and through the downfall of Jerusalem.[75] Some have argued for Jerusalem, not Babylonia, as the locale for Ezekiel's ministry, given the vivid descriptions of Jerusalem and his knowledge of political events

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[73]David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York 1992), s. v. "Ezekiel" by Lawrence Boadt, 720-22.

[74]Peter R. Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia* (Oxford 1968), 63; Solomon B. Freehof, *Book of Ezekiel* (New York 1978), 228; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, trans. Ronald E. Clements (Philadelphia 1979), 11. There is consensus among the foregoing authors that an isolated oracle occurred in 571 B.C.E.

[75]Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Ezekiel," 713-15.

there. This position has won little critical support.[76] The dating of Ezekiel's prophecies, as recorded within the Book of Ezekiel, do not correspond with the dating of the reign of Zedekiah, the uncle of Jehoiachin installed on the Judaean throne by Nebuchadrezzar during this period. Rather, his prophecies are calculated according to the ruling years of King Jehoiachin who, during the period of 593-573, was in captivity in Babylon.[77] Like his contemporary Jeremiah, Ezekiel viewed Jehoiachin as the legitimate king of Israel and Zedekiah merely the regent.

The details of the man Ezekiel are scant: he was a priest (1:3); he was married to a woman who died during the siege of Jerusalem and during that siege his children fell by the sword (24:15-22), sometime between December 598 and March 597 B.C.E. It was during this period that the rebellious King Jehoiakim died (or was assassinated) and the eighteen-year-old Jehoiachin was placed on the throne. At the time of Jerusalem's surrender in March 597 B.C.E., Ezekiel was more than likely to have been found among the exiled entourage that included the royal family, court advisors and leading citizens.[78] Ezekiel's ministry was not coincident with the onset of his exile. By this time, however, Ezekiel would have acquired not only priestly learning and an intimate knowledge of the temple layout and regimen in

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[76]Carl Gordon Howie, "The Date and Composition of Ezekiel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 4 (1950), 5-26; G. A. Cooke, *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (Edinburgh 1936), xx-xxvii; Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Ezekiel," 714-15; Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration* (Philadelphia 1968), 106-108.

[77]Jehoiachin remained in captivity for thirty-seven years, long after Ezekiel's prophesies ceased. According to 2 Kings 25:27, the king was released in 560 B.C.E. by Nebuchadrezzar's successor, Amel-Marduk. D. J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon* (Oxford 1985), 82

[78]Bright, *History of Israel*, 327; Cooke, xxxiii.

Jerusalem but also the insight that would characterize his later prophecy. Moreover, the numerous affinities of his prophecies to that of Jeremiah reflect a marked familiarity with the latter.[79] It is to be assumed that Ezekiel heard Jeremiah's prophecies before 597 B.C.E. and that Jeremiah's later prophecies were conveyed through communications between Judah and the exiles.[80]

While Jeremiah uses a broader brush to paint the political scene in Jerusalem before and after the first exile of 597 B.C.E., Ezekiel provides corroboration and some additional information. In 2 Kings 24:12, it is learned that Jehoiachin, who assumed the throne from his father, Jehoiakim, during the siege of Jerusalem, surrendered himself to Nebuchadrezzar in what seems to have been a voluntary act, most likely in order to save Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah from total destruction.[81] What follows is related in Ezekiel: then Nebuchadrezzar stripped the nation of its leaders rendering it virtually powerless, placed Zedekiah on the throne and "made a treaty with him, putting him on his oath," (17:13).

While Zedekiah inherited a "humble kingdom unable to raise itself" (17:14), the realpolitik of Judah -- a small, weak state crippled militarily and economically -- did not prevent Zedekiah from conspiring against Babylonia with his pro-Egyptian ministers. Inclined to listen to Jeremiah's advice warning against rebellion (Jer. 27), in 594/3 B.C.E. he nevertheless looked to Psammetichus II for help and "sent messengers to Egypt, asking for horses

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[79]Cooke, xxxi; Zimmerli, 44-46.

[80]*Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem 1972), s.v. "Ezekiel" by Moshe Greenberg, 1092-93; Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Ezekiel," 719.

[81]D. Winton Thomas, *Documents from Old Testament Times* (New York 1958), 84-5.

and men in plenty," (17:15).[82] At this moment, however, the Babylonian king and his armies were campaigning in the western territories in an effort to consolidate their authority. Perhaps for this reason, with the armed enemy so near, the revolt did not materialize.[83] Zedekiah, a weak ruler without self-confidence, must have been seduced by the encouragement of Pharaoh Hophra (also known as "Apries"), the son of Psammetichus, into open rebellion four years later (589/8 B.C.E.). The sharp disapproval with which Ezekiel viewed this rebellion -- an open breach of treaty and, moreover, a breach of covenant sworn before Yahweh -- is reflected in chapter 17: "I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, you great monster, lurking in the streams of the Nile...[and] I will make the land of Egypt the most desolate of desolate lands," (17:3,12).[84]

In addition to the evidence in Ezekiel, other historical documents point to the close ties of Judah to Egypt, Tyre and possibly Ammon at the time of this rebellion. Taken together, faith in these allies may have fueled in Zedekiah the hope for success. First is Lachish ostracon III that suggests close military cooperation between Judah and Egypt[85]; second is the reference in Josephus to the coordination of the revolt of Tyre against the Babylonian overlord with that of Zedekiah[86]; and third is the suggestion in Ezekiel that

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[82]André Parrot, *Babylon and the Old Testament*, trans. B. E. Hooke (New York 1956), 94; Hayes and Miller, 471-72.

[83]Zimmerli, 14; Hayes and Miller, 472.

[84]Zimmerli, 15; Hayes and Miller, 472; Parrot, 96.

[85]James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near East Volumue I: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, (Princeton 1958), 322; Hayes and Miller, 472.

[86]Josephus, *Josephus*, v. 1, *The Life/Against Apion*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (New York 1926), 21.

the king of Ammon had allied himself with the Judaean king (21:23). Hence, the Ammonite city of Rabbah was slated "for the sword" of Nebuchadrezzar on the road to Judah and Jerusalem (21:20).[87]

The reaction of Nebuchadrezzar to the Judaean rebellion was swift and the siege of Jerusalem began early in 588: "Man, write down a name for this day, this very day: This is the day the king of Babylon invested Jerusalem. Sing a song of derision to this people of rebels...," (24:1-3). Found in Ezekiel are numerous oracles against the Egyptians (29-32) as well as against the Judaeans. These oracles serve as an indictment not only of Egypt but against the Judaeans for working against Yahweh's decreed destruction of Judah. These anti-Egyptian oracles and descriptions of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem seem to be historical reportage, that is, restatements of events that had already taken place. In fact, Egypt's interference in Babylonian-dominated Judah, marked the final episode of Egyptian adventurism in the Sinai peninsula.[88]

During the Babylonian siege, the city of Jerusalem was ravaged by a famine so severe that cannibalism is implied (4:9-11, 5:10). Reports of the fall of Jerusalem and the episodes of the escape and horrific punishment of Zedekiah, his sons and his contingent are also recorded (12:1-16). Such news apparently was communicated to Ezekiel in exile by fugitives from Jerusalem (33:21). Additional information, political or military, concerning the kingdom of Judah also reached Ezekiel. In his series of oracles against foreign nations, Ezekiel indicts those who would encroach on her borders when

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[87]Hayes and Miller, 472; H. L. Ginsburg, "Judah and the Transjordan States from 734 to 582 B.C.E.," *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume* (New York 1950), 366.

[88]Pritchard, *Harper Concise Atlas* (New York 1991), 84-85.

Judah was all but decimated by Babylonia. Singled out for vengeance by the God of Israel are Edom and Philistia for having taken "deliberate revenge," (25:12-17). In fact, archaeological evidence clearly demonstrates that numerous Judaean cities were destroyed during the Babylonian campaign as well as by invasions of border peoples.[89]

Dating from the period of the destruction of Jerusalem are twenty-one ostraca found at Lachish, a city that lay on the Babylonian route from Judah to Egypt. Several of these tablets were sent from Hosha'yahu, commander of a northern post (possibly Bet Shemesh or Mareshah/Tel Sandahannah) to Ya'ush, the governor and commander of the Lachish region. These tablets take the form of reports or request for instructions.[90] Significantly, ostracon IV closes with the following ominous observation:

> "...and he [Ya'ush] would know, concerning the beacons of Lachish, that we are watching, according to the instructions that my lord has given, for we do not see [the signals of] Azekah."[91]

To accord any precision to the numbers of Judaeans deported to Babylonian is problematic. Figures vary according to the author or tradition from 3,023 (Jeremiah 52:28) to 8,000 (2 Kings 24:16) to 10,000 (2 Kings 24:14). The more precise figure of Jeremiah probably accounts for the adult males

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[89]Thomas E. Levy, *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (London 1995), 431; W. F. Albright, "The Seal of Eliakim and the Latest Preëxilic History of Judah, with Some Observations on Ezekiel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51 (1932), 103-4; Ephraim Stern, "Israel at the Close of the Period of the Monarchy: An Archaeological Survey," *Biblical Archaeologist* 38 (1975), 35; J. M. Myers, "Edom and Judah in the Sixth-Fifth Centuries B.C.," *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright,* ed. Hans Goedecke (Baltimore 1971), 391.

[90]Parrot, 99-101; Thomas, *Documents,* 212-17.

[91]Parrot, 101.

only. The figure of 4,600 that he provides (Jer. 52:28-30), i.e., the total for the three deportations of 597, 587 and 582 B.C.E., also may denote the adult male population. Thus, the actual total might be three or four times that number, or 13,800-18,000. One authority estimates that the population of Judah, 250,000 in the eighth century B.C.E., fell to half that figure between 597 and 587 B.C.E. so that the size of the deportation was certainly a significant proportion of the total population.[92] Although no estimate of the diaspora is provided by Ezekiel, indications are that he was among a population of numerical significance, one that provided for an identifiable hierarchy or social stratification.

The exact route and the nature of the trek to Babylonia are not known.[93] What seems certain, however, is that the king, Jehoiachin, and his family were exiled to the capital city of Babylon while others were dispersed among various areas, including the Kebar River, generally identified with the great canal (*naru kabara*) that flowed from the Euphrates in the Nippur area southeast of Babylon.[94] One distinguishing characteristic of the Babylonian exile was that, unlike the Assyrian system of deportation and resettlement,

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[92]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 20-23; Peter R. Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, 8-9; Parrot, 90-91. In W. F. Albright, *The Biblical Period* (Pittsburgh 1955), the author writes that a low estimate of exiles my be "partly due to the heavy mortality of the starving and diseased captives during the long desert trek to Babylonia," 47.

[93]Parrot, 90-91, posits a possible route and the probable travel conditions of the refugees; the former is conjecture while the latter is derived from earlier Assyrian reliefs, i.e., "against their will, under a strong escort, with a small allowance of baggage, the men travelling on foot, the women and children carried in two-wheeled carts," 91-92.

[94]*Ibid.*, 92; Ezekiel 3:1.

this deportation was in one direction only. New populations were not introduced to Judah nor, more specifically, to the areas depleted by the exile.[95]

Knowledge of the conditions of the exile are rather limited. Written sources suggest that the Judaean king was imprisoned under somewhat favorable conditions. The Jehoiachin Tablets, discovered during the 1899-1917 excavations of ancient Babylon by Robert Koldewey, testify to the deliveries of rations to the king and his retinue, mainly oil and barley.[96] These cuneiform tablets reference five "sons" (unnamed) of Jehoiachin (*Ya'u kinu*), under the care of Kenaiah (*Kanama*), and "eight men, Judaeans" (also unnamed).[97] Comparison of the generous ration amounts listed for the king to the more limited rations listed for the "eight men" suggest either the high regard in which the king was held or, more likely, the greater number of dependents for which the king had to provide.[98] Another insight into the provisions allotted Jehoiachin and his family may be reflected in the later Roman practice that required vassal kings and princes to provide for their own maintenance in captivity. Income collected from the crown properties in Judah would have contributed to their maintenance. In fact, three seal

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[95] See Oded Bustenay, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Weisbaden 1979); Hayes and Miller, 475.

[96] Thomas, *Documents*, 84-86; Parrot, 91-92, writes "oil and sesame," 110.

[97] Pritchard, *ANET*, 308; Parrot, 110-12, suggests that these "sons" were actually the brothers of Jehoiakim, since the latter was only eighteen years of age at the time of the exile. On the other hand, Thomas, *Documents*, 85, suggests that, while this explanation is plausible, it is more likely that these are the "sons" of Jehoiachin, born in the first five years of captivity, beginning with Shealtiel, born about 598 B.C.E., the eldest and the father of Zerubabel. Also, see W. F. Albright, "King Joiachin in Exile, *Biblical Archaeologist* 5, (December 1942), 49-55.

Note that the ration tablets span the period from the 10th to the 35th year of Nebuchadrezzar or 595/4 to 570/69. It is during this period that Jehoiachin's name appears four times. Parrot, 110; Thomas, *Documents*, 85.

[98] Parrot, 111.

impressions discovered in Judah dating from the period of the exile reference one Eliakim who served as administrator for such properties[99]: "We may be absolutely certain, a priori, that the Babylonians followed the same practice as the Romans...[several hundred years later]."[100]

A significant change in the status of Jehoiachin in his thirty-seventh year of exile, however, seems to occur with the succession of Evil-Merodach to the Babylonian throne (562-60):

> "[He] showed favour to Jehoiachin king of Judah. He brought him out of prison, treated him kindly and gave him a seat at table above the kings with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin discarded his prison clothes and lived as a pensioner of the king for the rest of his life. For his maintenance, a regular daily allowance was given him by the king as long as he lived" (25:28-30).[101]

The seat at the king's table, in this case, should not be taken as literal. Rather, this expression is explained as the receipt of regular royal allowances including oil and barley and, on occasion, meat, ointment and clothing and certainly implied a faithfulness to the donor.[102] The rations provided the royal family throughout their captivity, in fact, may have been part of a "re-

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[99]Albright, "Seal of Eliakim," 77-79, 102-103.

[100]*Ibid.*, 103.

[101]In Albright, "King Joiachin," the author concurs with Ernst F. Weidner that the ration distribution "undoubtedly" suggests that, at the beginning of his so-called "captivity," Jehoiachin was not imprisoned and enjoyed freedom of movement within Babylon. Only later was Jehoiachin placed in prison, probably as the result of an intrigue, attempted escape or an actual revolt in Judah. No evidence for these suggestions, however, is provided by Albright.

[102]Wiseman, 82-83.

education plan" designed to engender loyalty for the Babylonian regime that would be sustained through their eventual return to Judah.[103]

While King Jehoiachin, his family and some of his court were taken to live in Babylon, Ezekiel, a cadre of elders and other exiles were resettled along the Kebar River (8:1, 14:1, 20:1-3). In fact, Ezekiel locates himself here immediately in the narrative without using an exact place name (1:1). Soon thereafter the prophet travels to the community of exiles at Tel Abib, also on the river Kebar: "I came to the exiles at Tel-abib...For seven days I stayed with them..." (3:15).[104] Archaeological excavations have revealed evidence of Judaean settlements in the neighborhood of Nippur from the fifth century B.C.E.[105] Since the grand canal flowed for many miles through this region, it is likely that the first place of residence near the Kebar mentioned for Ezekiel was located in the vicinity of Tel Abib. Tel Abib, then, may have been the second place of residence for Ezekiel since he is often found at this site.[106]

The tendency for the Babylonian authorities to settle groups of exiles together in one community is indicated by Neo-Babylonian texts found in

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[103]*Ibid.*, 81.

[104]Soggin, 253. Tel Abib is most likely the Hebrew distortion of an Akkadian name, possibly *til abubim* or "mound of the flood" or "hill of the storm-flood," a common Babylonian place name given to the mounds or sandhills of destroyed towns in Mesopotamia that antedate the flood. The Tel Abib of this context is undoubtedly connected with Tel Melah and Tel Harsha, other settlements of the exiles mentioned in Ezra 2:59. Also, see Albright, "Seal of Eliakim," 100; Zimmerli, 139; Moshe Greenberg, *The Anchor Bible Ezekiel 1-20* (New York 1983), 71; Cooke, 42-43.

The Kebar, also called the "great river" or "grand canal" (*naru kabari*) was more than likely the artificial waterway originating from the Euphrates above Babylon and which ran first in a southeast direction for about sixty miles and then passed through Nippur (where it still divides the city in half); the canal can then be traced, more or less, till it rejoins the Euphrates above Ur; see Cooke, 4.

[105]Cooke, 4-5.

[106]*Ibid.*, 43.

Nippur -- albeit dated one century later. These texts reveal that populations of deportees from Lydia and Phrygia were settled together in one community while those from Urartia and Melidea were settled in another. If this policy were typical, the Judaeans would have found themselves together at Tel Abib in numbers sufficient to constitute a community there and, as suggested by the archaeological discoveries, in other towns proximate to the Kebar as well.[107] Like the Assyrians before them, the Babylonians resettled exiles in administrative cities or in areas that had been destroyed and rebuilt or which were to be developed agriculturally.[108]

The Murashu Archive may also help to corroborate the presence of Judaean exiles in this area and, possibly, help to shed some light on the economic activities of a number of individuals within the community. Like the Neo-Babylonian texts mentioned above, the Murashu tablets are also from the second half of the fifth century B.C.E. (the Persian period) and, in and of themselves, do not provide conclusive proof of the conditions of the first generation in exile in Babylonia. Nonetheless, it is of value to note that these tablets, comprising the records of a Babylonian business company in Nippur owned by the non-Jewish Murashu family, contain a small proportion of Jewish names.[109] The Jewish names found within these records have been identified primarily on the basis of the almost exclusive theophoric element "Yhw" found in Jewish names; several non-Yahwistic but distinctly Jewish names, such as "Shabbatai" and "Minyamin," names

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[107]Wiseman, 76-77.

[108]Hayes and Miller, 482-83, write that those areas that had been destroyed or rebuilt may be those with the element "tel" (mound) in the place name.

[109]*Ibid.*; Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, 19-20.

that were not recorded before the Jewish exiles arrived in Babylonia but bear the imprint of Aramaic influence, also appear in these lists.[110] Since non-Yahwistic names appear in legally binding documents, these names must have been used by the bearers publicly.[111] The information that the Murashu Archive provides is that some Judaeans were engaged in commerce with individuals of other nationalities and, presumably, that these Judaeans were descended from the families that had been exiled in 597, 586 or 581 B.C.E. While some of these same names may reflect a cultural symbiosis, little more can be deduced regarding their economic or social status.[112]

The remaining epigraphic sources identifying Jews in Babylonia of this later period also rely on onomastic clues. These include a document identifying slaves, a marriage contract, a seal dated +/-540 B.C.E. and a document that mentions an individual's name.[113] Thus, the only non-

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[110]Ran Zadok, "The Jews in Babylonia During the Chaldean and Achaemenian Periods According to the Babylonian Sources," *Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel*, Monograph Series, v. 3 (Haifa 1979), 4-5, 21-26. It should also be noted that the ethnic designation "Judaean" is not found in Babylonian records during the period of the exile except for those referring to King Jehoiachin. Thus, to identify Judaeans written into Babylonian documents reliance must be placed almost entirely upon onomastic evidence despite the fact that, at times, this may be misleading.

[111]Michael David Coogan, "Life in the Diaspora: Jews at Nippur in the Fifth Century B. C.," *Biblical Archaeologist* 37 (1974), 10-11. Evidence in biblical and extra-biblical sources reveal that use of Babylonian names in Babylonia as well as Judah increased in the post-exilic period. Societal pressure to use Babylonian names may account for their use not only among member of the Judaean community but also among the royal household, including three returnees of the House of Judah in 538 B.C.E.: Shealtiel, Zerubbabel and Sheshbazzar.

[112]Zadok, 3-4.

[113]*Ibid.*, 38-40. In the research on the slave document undertaken by Muhammad A. Dandamaev, very few Jews (i.e., Jewish names) were designated as slaves. It is useful to note that in Dandamaev's opinion Nebuchadrezzar II did not enslave the Judaean exiles, whose numbers exceeded 10,000, because the Babylonian forced labor sector could not have absorbed such a large number; see Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia: From Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626-331 B C* [sic]), rev. ed., trans. Victoria A. Powell (DeKalb 1984), 652.

biblical, conclusive evidence for the Jewish condition in exile remains the ration allowances for Jehoiachin, his family and small retinue.[114]

Found within the biblical literature, with special attention to Ezekiel, are clues to the nature of the social stratification within the community and to the freedoms of movement and assembly enjoyed by the exiles. Although living outside their own political nation-state and with their head of state in captivity, the exiled Judaeans may have continued to view Jehoiachin as their legitimate king. After all, the ascension of the son of the dead king to the Judaean throne was a three hundred year old practice. Zedekiah, placed on the throne by the Babylonians, may have been viewed solely as regent by the exiles, while Jehoiachin was seen as king *de jure*.[115] Jehoiachin alive, albeit in Babylon, must have sustained for the exiles, as well as a party within Judah, the sense of national identity, a hope for return and the restoration of the House of David. Throughout the Book of Ezekiel, the exiles counted time, however, not according to the regnal years of Jehoiachin lest such a public acknowledgment of loyalty to the deposed king be considered treasonous, but according to the years of the exile of Jehoiachin (1:2; 33:21; 40:1).[116] Hence, theirs was not "local time," i.e., the years of the reign of Nebuchadrezzar, but their own distinctive time that accounted for their

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[114]Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, 19-20; Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 31-32.

[115]Albright in "Seal of Eliakim" writes: "We must not forget that regencies were not uncommon in Judah: the best known case is Jotham. It is, therefore, *a priori* practically certain that a large party in Judah would consider Joiachin as the real king, after his deportation, and would regard Zedekiah as only regent, or as king *de facto* but not king *de jure*," 92. While this author agrees conceptually with Albright, she takes issue with "a *large* party in Judah" (italics for emphasis).

[116]*Ibid.*, 93; Albright, "King Joiachin," 54.

current status as simply transitory and the restoration of their king and their nation as a reasonable hope for the future.

During this same period, furthermore, crown property within Judah was identified with the seal impression "Belonging to Eliakim steward of Yaukin [Jehoiachin]," not the steward of Zedekiah. Appointed by Nebuchadrezzar as head of state, Zedekiah controlled the administrative government but dared not interfere with the personal property of Jehoiachin. Archaeologists who discovered these seal impressions at Bet Shemesh, Tel Bet Mirsim and Ramat Rachel identify Eliakim as administrator for the crown property belonging to Jehoiachin and inherited from his father, Jehoiakim.[117] Understandably, the legitimacy and continuity of the royal line (the House of David) is predicted by Ezekiel: "my servant David shall for ever [sic] be their prince" (37:25). In fact, later writings confirm that two of the seven sons of Jehoiachin, Shealtiel and Sheshbazzar, played important roles both in the exile and the return while the grandson and rightful heir in Jehoiachin's line, Zerubbabel, led the return and was appointed governor over Judah in the Persian period (Ezra 1:8; 2:2: 5:14; Haggai 1:1).[118]

While Jehoiachin clearly remains the legitimate king for Ezekiel and the people of Israel, the prophet indicates that there will be no future restoration for any of the members of the Davidic line alive at the time of exile:

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[117]In "Seal of Eliakim," 102-103, Abright writes that such personal property was distinctly "separate from the public domain and the public treasury." Also, see Parrot, 111-13, and Hayes and Miller, 481-82.

[118]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 204-205; Hayes and Miller, 481-82; Albright, "King Joiachin," 52.

...fire bursts forth from its own branches
and burns up its shoots.
It has no strong branch any more
to make a sceptre for those who bear rule. (19:14)

But neither does Ezekiel predict the end of the dynasty. Cognizant of the greatness of the former kings of Israel and Judah as well as the abuses committed by them, the prophet nonetheless promises that the Davidic monarchy will again flourish:

I, too, will take a slip
from the lofty crown of the cedar
and set it in the soil;
I will pluck a tender shoot
from the topmost branch
and plant it.
I will plant it high on a lofty mountain,
the highest mountain in Israel. (17:22-23)

The future king, the *nas'i*, will rule over a unified nation ("they shall no longer be two nations or divided into two kingdoms" - 37:22) and his power and privilege though great will be clearly delineated.

What is evident throughout the Book of Ezekiel is that there is a correlation between past behavior and future status in a restored Israel. In this relationship, there is subtlety or nuance in the degree of offense vis-à-vis the final disposition of the social group or individual, e.g., unjust rule by the former kings of Israel resulted in the downfall of the monarchy but not its eradication. After all, the kings were not guilty of the ultimate abomination -- idolatry.[119] In Ezekiel, a hierarchy of offenses and punishments exists. Self-

[119]Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel* (New York 1994), 43, notes that monarchical responsibility for cultic sin is "strikingly absent" from the primary group of accusations of idolatry found in Ezekiel 8-11. One exception, however, is found in 43:7-9.

interested rule, oppression and injustice are positioned lower on the scale than the most grievous offense -- offense against Yahweh in the commission of cultic sin or idolatry.[120]

Similarly, past faithfulness determines the future standing of the priests (the *kohanim*) and the Levites in a restored kingdom. But what evidence is found in Ezekiel of this social group, its stratification and its standing during the period of the exile? Scant reference to the priesthood appears in Ezekiel and surprisingly absent is the figure of the so-called "High Priest" (*hakohen haggadol* or *hakohen harosh*) in Ezekiel's vision of a restored theocracy (40-48).[121] Another term, *hakohen* ("the priest"), found in regard to an expiation ritual (in 45:19), is more than likely, synonymous with the terms used in other sources for "high priest." Significantly, even in his critique of cultic abuses that occurred within the Temple precinct and seen in a vision (8-11), Ezekiel criticizes not a single member of the priesthood but, instead, criticizes elders, men and women -- in essence, the members of the laity.[122]

Distinctions are made between two priestly groups, the Levites and the levitical priests of the family of Zadok. In Ezekiel's vision, Yahweh proclaims that the "Levites deserted me when the Israelites went astray after their idols" (44:10) and, as a result, "they shall not have access to me, to serve me as priests," (44:13). Seemingly an appropriately harsh judgment, Yahweh

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[120]*Ibid.*, 40-42.

[121]References to the "high priest" elsewhere in the *tanakh* are identified in Duguid, 58-64.

[122]*Ibid.*, 68-72. Also, the references to a "priest" in 7:26 and "priests" in 22:26 seem quite benign and, in the case of the latter, is probably borrowed from Zephaniah 3; *ibid.*, 64-65, 72-75.

nonetheless retains the Levites as a special class with a sanctified responsibility: "I [Yahweh] will put them in charge of the temple with all the service which must be performed there," (44:14). In addition, the Levites are granted land for the towns in which they will live in this prophetic vision of a restored theocracy (45).

The Zadokite priesthood appears to have adhered to a higher form of conduct than did the Levites: "the family of Zadok remained in charge of my sanctuary when the Israelites went astray from me..." (44:15). Accordingly, this group from among the Levites would be set apart to perform the priestly role of direct attendance on Yahweh within the so-called "Holy of Holies" -- the altar-sanctuary of Yahweh. Incumbent on the Zadokites are rigorous regulations regarding dress, hygiene, marriage, death, the prohibition of wine and the conduct of offerings (44:15-27) and, unlike the Levites, the Zadokites are given no patrimony, only an area within the sanctuary to accommodate their houses as well as a "sacred plot for the sanctuary," (45:4).[123] While the relative positions and responsibilities of the two groups would reflect the degree of past faithfulness to Yahweh, perhaps, more important, this division of labor provides strong evidence of the tension within the priesthood or the (former) temple leadership (44:10-14).[124]

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[123]While previous scholarship ascribes the separation of the Zadokites from the Levites as an elevation in status for the former group and a downgrading in status of the latter, Duguid describes this arrangement as "harmonious": two groups with parallel assignments -- one to maintain the inner sanctuary and the other group to take responsiblity for the temple service and the temple precinct outside of the "holy of holies," both honorable positions, 87. When one group, the Levites, is punished or condemned -- as in losing the right to serve as priests, and another group, the Zadokites, gains an exclusive right, "disharmony" between the two seems the more likely nature of relationship.

[124]Steven Shawn Tuell, *The Law of the Temple in Ezekiel 40-48* (Atlanta 1992), 176.

Two additional, significant phenomena can be observed in the Temple Vision of Ezekiel regarding the organization of society. In the first place, neither the Zadokites or the Levites are permitted access to the inner sanctum, i.e., the holiest place within the altar, the Holy of Holies -- the place of the divine presence of Yahweh. Only the angel that has led Ezekiel on his visionary tour and measurement of the restored Temple enters the Holy of Holies but with Ezekiel close behind (41:1-4).[125] Seen in this lofty place at a time when the institutions of the monarchy and the Temple were brought low, Ezekiel is positioned, physically, between the priests and God; the prophet during the exile then could be understood to be the *only* mediator that remained between humans and God.

A second phenomenon in this projected world of a restored Temple is the altered role of the *nas'i* ("prince") or head of state. In Ezekiel 46:8-12, the *nas'i* assumes responsibility for leading the festival processions to the Temple and for providing the sacrifices at the Temple. The replacement of the head priest by the *nas'i* in these cultic rituals becomes definitive and, in this way, the head of state and the head of the (state) religion are resolved into one figure, mirroring the Babylonian society of the period of the exile.[126]

In addition to the political and religious leadership of the exiled community, two other groups having authority may be identified among the exiles: the elders (the *z'qenim*) and the "commanders" or "officers" (the *sarim*). The elders, referred to as "the elders of Judah," "the elders of the

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[125]Duguid posits that Ezekiel could go to the doors of the inmost sanctuary but had to remain without, 82.

[126]Note the similarities in the description of the Babylonian New Year procession and rituals in Marzahn, 43-46.

House of Israel" or "the elders of Israel," comprised the overall leadership of the tribes; these men were heads of families who formed village councils for adjudicating matters political and religious. The "commanders," in some instances, may have been among a small council of high royal officials or, in others, minor military commanders.[127] This leadership appears in the Book of Ezekiel basically as a group of elders sitting in the prophet's house awaiting an oracle (14:1, 3; 20:1; 33:30) or, in a less neutral category, as elders singled out to bear responsibility for the defilement of the cult and the land of Judah (and, therefore, to be condemned and judged) or as commander/conspirators (sometimes named) in a cabal. Their guilt centers on the sin of idolatry. The guilt of the commanders centers on the abuse of power to further their own ends.[128]

Another group that is mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel is the *"a m ha'aretz,"* literally "the people of the land" or, more generally, "the citizenry" (7:27; 22:29; 45:16, 22; 46:2f., 8f.). In a few instances, *"am ha'aretz"* may refer more specifically to a Judaean power group associated with the Davidic monarchy.[129] While the latter may ring true, this named group would fall under the category of "commanders" and not require its own category for the discussion of the components of lay leadership within the exiled community.

The citizenry of Judah, often characterized as a "rebellious house" (2:5; 3:9,26; 12:3,9,25; 24:3) and, even more, its leadership of elders and commanders, are responsible for the departure of Yahweh from the Temple

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[127]Duguid, 110. For a slightly different explanation, see Greenberg, 156. Greenberg offers that the *n'si'im* may have been the tribal chiefs.

[128]Duguid, 111-23; Greenberg, 166.

[129]Duguid, 119-21; Greenberg, 156-57.

and from Jerusalem.[130] These groups will be punished accordingly but, more important, in Ezekiel's prescriptive vision of a newly consecrated Temple, the role of the laity is substantively downgraded. Just as the Levites' position and function in the Temple hierarchy were degraded and their physical proximity distanced from the dwelling-place of Yahweh, so too was the laity distanced from their God. No longer would they be permitted to offer their own sacrifices ("[the Levites] shall slaughter the burnt offerings and the sacrifices for the people" - 44:11) and their participation in worship would now require an intermediary, the *nas'i* (45:16-17), whom they may join in a procession through the outer court of the Temple on major festivals.[131] On Sabbaths and new moons, however, an even greater distance was to be maintained to prevent contamination of the priests: "The people of the land shall worship before the Lord...at the entrance of the same gate" (46:3). In parallel with the religious community (the Zadokites and the Levites), the laity within the newly ordered community would thus reflect the reward and punishment for sins of the past.[132]

The freedoms of speech and assembly that the community in exile enjoyed are indicated in the text of Ezekiel and, possibly, suggested in the Book of Jeremiah as well. When Jeremiah exhorts the captives to accommodate themselves to the conditions of exile -- to "build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Marry wives and beget sons and daughters...[and to] seek the welfare of any city to which I have carried you off" (29:5), implicit is the freedom to do so. In Ezekiel, of course, the

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[130]Duguid, 123-24.

[131]*Ibid.*, 127-28.

[132]*Ibid.*, 131-32.

evidence is more direct. Ezekiel not only has the freedom to travel from at least one community to another in the vicinity of the Kebar Canal, he also appears to be unfettered in either his speech or in his activities (1:1, 3:15). In addition, the elders join him as a group, that is, they form an assembly. Throughout the book, the elders are present (apparently not restricted by obligations of labor or profession) to hear Ezekiel's communications, i.e., the transmission of his visions inspired by Yahweh. His home or property appears to be sufficiently commodious to accommodate such a group (8:1).

Thus, in the Book of Ezekiel the elements of a societal structure within the exiled population can be observed: the elders and the laity, the Levites and the special class within the Levites, i.e., the Zadokites, and the Davidic line (seen in a predictive future). The Davidide, however, would emerge as a prince (*nas'i*) not a king (*melech*), i.e., a prince who would stand at the head of a hierocracy (the titular head of the religious sphere -- as well as the secular). Also observed in the Book of Ezekiel are the freedoms of speech, movement and assembly enjoyed by the exiles in their so-called "captivity."

Nevertheless, the political, religious and economic leadership was torn from its native land and Judah itself lay in ruins -- its capital city, Jerusalem, and its sacred space, the Temple, were desecrated and burned. Fifty years would pass until the first of the exiles returned to Judah and more than one hundred years until Ezra led the return of a more substantial group back to their homeland.[133] The Judaeans adapted to their new situation and what they saw and what they heard became an integral part of their new reality -- their realpolitik. The imagery and the vocabulary of Babylonia were thus

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[133]Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, 348-49.

absorbed and, as a result, synthesized images appear in Ezekiel's prophecies as well as in numerous Aramaicisms.[134]

In the first chapter of Ezekiel, the fantastical chariot vision is presented. Here, the prophet describes four creatures in the midst of fire, each with four faces and four wings and having straight legs with calves' hoofs; the creatures move in a straight line, never swerving (1:5-13). The parallel between the Egyptian exile and Exodus and the Judaeans' present dilemma occurs throughout the Book of Ezekiel. In the Egyptian story, the appearance of fire signifies the presence of Yahweh amidst the people. It is no wonder that the image of "fire" and objects "glowing like fire" appear in this vision (1:4-5, 13, 27); it is to say that a force powerful and awesome is among Yahweh's people, even in exile. Evidence reveals that the image of the winged creatures may have been inspired by the sculpted-relief figures of Assyrian bulls dating from the sixth century B.C.E.[135] These huge gate figures were often human-faced bulls or lions; they featured wings and five legs, i.e., five legs only when the latter was viewed obliquely so that when viewed frontally or from the side the beast could be seen in one emphatic posture[136]: "they moved straight forward in whatever direction the spirit would go; they never swerved in their course," (1:12). The image of the human-faced bull (specifically, a two-headed human-faced bull), in fact, persists through the Achaemenid

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[134]For a discussion of the influence of Aramaic on the Hebrew language, see Howie, 47-68.

[135]While these figures guarded palaces throughout the Assyrian Empire that, during the period of the exile, lay in ruins, many of these powerful figures were still extant. See Parrot, 129-34 and Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, 74.

[136]Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (New York 1985), 154.

period.[137] Four-faced deities, often in the form of bronze statuettes, were discovered in Mesopotamia as early as the period of the independent states of Isin, Larsa and Babylon (2025-1594 B.C.E.).[138]

Within the same so-called "chariot vision," Ezekiel describes a scene that would, in an artistic application, also reveal distinct similarities to a scene conveyed in enamel found at an Assyrian palace at Assur, not inconceivably a way station on the forced trek to Babylonia. The vision concludes thus:

> Above the vault over their heads...[appeared] a form in human likeness. I saw what might have been brass glowing like fire in a furnace from the waist upwards; and from the waist downwards I saw what looked like fire with encircling radiance; it was like the appearance of the glory [or rainbow] of the Lord. (1:26-28)

In the enamelled picture from Assur, a vault is represented above which heads are visible as well as, in the distance, mountains with a rainbow. Above the heads and mountains, the central feature of the picture is the "form of a man" holding a bow aimed at the mountains; this form is dramatically placed within a circle of fire or "radiance," a godlike representation.[139]

In the vision of the rebuilt Temple, Ezekiel describes a bronze male figure "with a line of flax in his hand and a measuring-reed" (40:3). These

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[137]*Ibid.*, 358, 362.

[138]*Ibid.*, 93, 122. In the vision of the rebuilt Temple, additional two-faced creatures are depicted, i.e., cherubim with two faces: "one the face of a man, looking towards a palm-tree, and the other the face of a lion, looking towards another palm-tree" - 41:19.

[139]Parrot, 134, 136.

two objects, a line and a measuring reed, occur frequently on monuments found within the Mesopotamian region and, as such, are identified as the instruments employed to mark out the ground-plan for buildings under construction. One such monument, the stele of Ur-Nammu discovered at Ur, depicts the moon god Nannar with these instruments in his hands. The scene reveals the god receiving the homage of a king who has come seeking instructions concerning the building of a ziggurat -- a building type found in Babylonia.[140]

Whether or not the exiled Judaeans actually had access to or viewed the specific images described in the foregoing, it is likely that such images were replicated in various forms throughout the Tigris-Euphrates Valley and, quite likely, the exiles were exposed to this genre of such national/religious artifacts. Similarly, while the exiles specifically mentioned within the Book of Ezekiel are located in the area of Tel Abib and the Kebar canal (with the exception of King Jehoiachin and his retinue in Babylon), it is more than likely that word of the impressive pomp and circumstance of the Babylonian New Year celebration (enacted within the city of Babylon and its environs) reached all segments of the population throughout the nation-state

In the visions of the impending fall and ruin of Jerusalem (4-7) and her guilt, punishment and fall (8-24) and in the vision of the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (40-45:8), additional images are employed that underscore the integration or influence of the host culture on the exiles.[141] In 4:1, Ezekiel is instructed to take a brick tile and to draw on it a plan of the city of Jerusalem.

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[140]*Ibid.*, 145.

[141]Two of these examples are utilized by Howie, as proof of Babylonia as the location of Ezekiel's prophecies and to discredit the arguments for a Jerusalem locale, 5-26.

Maps drawn on brick tiles were common in the Neo-Babylonian Empire but, in terms of archaeological evidence, are unknown in Judah.[142] Moreover, Babylonian walls and buildings of this period were constructed of mud brick while in Judah mud bricks were non-existent in the sixth century B.C.E. In this way, Ezekiel's audience, the elders sitting with him in his home, would understand that when he is commanded by Yahweh to "dig through a wall" of a building near the altar gate and enter therein (8:8-9) that, in fact, Ezekiel would be able to do as commanded. The frame of reference is definitely Babylonian. In Judah, where preexilic walls were constructed of stone or adobe, a breach in a wall would have brought about its immediate collapse. Similarly, in two other visions where Ezekiel's words serve to discredit the false prophets (13:10 and 22:28), he uses the metaphor of a wall poorly made and cosmetically covered over with plaster, i.e., such prophets' words may be poetic or reassuring but will not stand up in a torrent of rain.[143] The point of reference for Ezekiel's audience would be, of course, the mud brick walls of Mesopotamia -- not the stone walls common in Judah.

In the Temple Vision in chapter 8, following Yahweh's instructions to Ezekiel to "dig through the wall" and "go in," the prophet is confronted with a horrifying scene: carved into the walls of this holy place is "every detestable form of creeping things and beasts" and "all the idols of the house of Israel" and there seventy elders were practicing "monstrous abominations," (8:9-13). No doubt that in Babylon the prophet would have seen (or, at least, heard

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[142]Solomon B. Freehof, 38; Howie, 18; Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, 80. Despite the suggestion otherwise, the absence of maps drawn on brick tiles among the material remains found in ancient Judah, to date, does not preclude their possible use there.

[143]Freehof, 80-81; Howie, 18.

descriptions of) the monumental Ishtar Gate, the site of the Babylonian New Year rituals, built of bricks glazed in sparkling turquoise and incised with the ornamental dragons of Marduk as well as other composite creatures, i.e., "abominable beasts" including lions, birds of prey and scorpions.[144] Thus, Ezekiel employs contemporaneous Babylonian symbols to describe the abominations occurring or that had occurred within the temple precincts in Jerusalem.

In every instance of the mention of a foreign god, Ezekiel seems to refer to the idolatrous practices that interpenetrated worship in Jerusalem, probably originating in the time of Manasseh. His indictment is non-specific; he ridicules the worship of inanimate objects. Nonetheless, the prophet demonstrates a knowledge of the attributes of these gods as well as of foreign customs and rituals. In Ezekiel's Temple vision, the prophet sees "women weeping for Tammuz" (8:14) and "twenty men...their backs toward the temple...their faces toward the east" worshipping the sun (8:16).[145] Respectively: Shamash, the Babylonian sun god is associated with the number twenty and, furthermore, the house of Israel had been commanded to face westward when worshipping, specifically to avoid the appearance of worshipping the rising sun.[146] In this same scene, the worshipping men are

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[144]Marzahn, 17-31; Parrot, 140-41.

[145]Note that in the masoretic text "twenty-five" men are recorded while the figure "twenty" is recorded in the Septuagint; see Parrot, 141f. William Foxwell Albright in *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore 1956) speculates that the cult of Tammuz was imported to Judah from Mesopotamia in the eighth and seventh centuries and became deeply rooted in Aramaean paganism through the Moslem period, 167.

[146]Freehof writes that in tractate Yoma 77a, the Talmud comments that not only did the men turn their backs to the temple but did so with indecent gestures, 59. Also, see Freehof, 58-59 and Parrot, 141. Albright, *Archaeology*, conjectures that "Ezekiel's zeal for pure monotheism...led him to consider this practice [sun-worship] as relatively worse than the others," 167-68.

seen to "put a branch to their nose," a reference to the Assyrian custom of *laban appi*, a ritual gesture of putting one's hand (or branch) to the nose as a symbol of humility before the god.[147] Time and again, Ezekiel castigates the Israelites for past behaviors. However, of great significance is that after 586 B.C.E., neither in the Book of Ezekiel nor in any other written source is found the direct accusation (only suggestions - 14:3, 20:30-32) of the practice or idolatry or pagan rituals by members of the community in exile.[148]

In a period of history when a god or gods were site-specific, i.e., attached to a particular nation and place, the physical images of Babylonian power, the secular coincident with the religious, to which the exiles were exposed must have had an enormous psychological impact. The brilliance of Ezekiel's vision lies in the distinctive syncretic imagery that is projected: with each image, Ezekiel's words connect the audience with the reality "on the ground" and, at the same time, reconnect his listeners with their own religious tradition and the transcendent power of that tradition.

Far from their particular sacred space during the exile, i.e., the Temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, the Judaeans and their leadership faced not only a theological crisis but lacked the essential elements (a "clean" land - Israel/Judah, a "clean" space - the inner court and the "Holy of Holies," and their ritual objects) with which to conduct their cultic rituals. Clearly, the exiles peered into a vacuum; it is this vacuum that a mound of speculation

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[147]Parrot, 141. Another explanation that has been offered derives from a later period, i.e., the Persian period, when during fire-worship priests would hold an aromatic branch to their noses; see Freehof, 60.

[148]William Foxwell Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* (New York 1963), 85; Yehezkel Kaufmann, *History of the Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. and abridged, Moshe Greenberg (Chicago 1960), 440-41.

regarding "new" (or, newly enhanced) rituals accreted. Increased emphasis on Sabbath observance, circumcision and the system of dietary laws, in particular, has been attributed to the period of exile -- "portable" rituals in the place of those cultic rites that were site-specific; and, in fewer instances, the origin of the institution of the synagogue is said to derive from this period. Indeed, time-bound rituals (both the Sabbath and the Passover observances stressed in Ezekiel 44-46, e.g.), body marking (circumcision) and dietary regulations that governed all consumption would serve to visibly set apart the exiles from their Babylonian neighbors despite the Judaeans' social and economic integration.[149]

To be sure, these religious observances originated in times that pre-dated the exile. Hence, the mention (or even emphasis) of such rituals within the Book of Ezekiel is not surprising. Ezekiel's warnings against acts of desecration, e.g., improper sacrifices (fat and blood - 44:7) or the eating of carrion (44:31), parallel and further reinforce his concern that the experience of exile must serve to purify the community -- dross in the furnace of Yahweh's wrath must be converted to pure silver (22:17-22). Whether or not these rituals replaced temple sacrifice and thereby would have underpinned the communal religious experience of the exiles is a matter of conjecture.[150] Rather, the most that can be said is that these observances were "re-examined and re-presented in the exilic age" -- just as other aspects of Israel's religious life were reinterpreted in the blaze of that fiery furnace.[151]

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[149]It has been suggested that "with the loss of holy place the 'holy time' became more important." See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Worship in Israel* (Oxford 1967), as cited in Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 35.

[150]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 32-36.

[151]*Ibid.*, 35.

Influences of the majority community on the exiles were great. Some, like the adoption of the Mesopotamian calendar, were retained even upon their return to Judah and are still evident today as in the names of the months. The Aramaic language, the *lingua franca* of the region, was adopted during this period as well as the Aramaic alphabet.[152] Nonetheless, it would appear that Ezekiel spoke in Hebrew to his audience and, in so doing, the prophet immediately and powerfully distinguished the Judaeans' own cultural tongue from the Babylonian Aramaic; in this way, the perpetuation of their native language also may have contributed to the maintenance of group identity.[153]

The Book of Ezekiel emphasizes three significant theological themes. The first of these themes reveals, in particular, striking affinities with the prophecies of Jeremiah: the primary focus in both books is upon the overall fate of the community. As in Jeremiah, Ezekiel provides a theological explanation for Yahweh's breaking of the covenant and the resultant catastrophe of exile and, second, Ezekiel (like Jeremiah) provides a means for the re-establishment of the covenantal relationship -- the purification of the people. It is the third theme that uniquely belongs to Ezekiel: to establish the connection between and to endow with meaning the entire sequence from the exile (the judgment) to the return (the restoration of the covenant)

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[152]Soggin, 254-55.

[153]The language of the prophets is the language of poetry. Ezekiel, like Jeremiah and Second Isaiah, used poetic imagery, allusion and metaphor. Thus, the complexity of the written (or spoken) language would indicate that these speeches were originally composed and delivered in the prophet's native Hebrew--not translated from what would have been the prophet's second language.

Ezekiel's purpose was to provide insight into the divine purpose so as to avoid repetition of past failures.[154]

In chapters 1-24, the explanation for the broken covenant is made patently clear: time and again, despite the repeated warnings from Yahweh and through Yahweh's prophets, the people Israel "rejected my laws and refused to conform to my statutes," (5:6). In the *golah*, the prophet's attention is thoroughly concentrated on the reality of the disaster and he is compelled to justify the deeds of Yahweh to his people. The cumulative offenses were so overwhelming (the failure of leadership, cultic offenses and idolatry) that no room was left even for repentance. Thus, Ezekiel strives to explain that no alternative was left to Yahweh[155]: "I will execute judgments in your midst for the nations to see, such judgments as I have never executed before nor ever will again, so abominable have your offenses been," (5:9). In fact, even the righteous were destroyed with the wicked for their failure to turn the latter from their evil ways (9). The prophecies make clear, however, that those saved from death (but exiled) were not spared due to righteousness on their own part; rather, the exiles were spared due to divine judgment or the righteousness of God (34).[156]

While the exile is seen as the result of the people's breaking of the covenant ("I will treat you as you have deserved" - 16:59), the re-establishment of the covenant would have less to do with repentance or God's duty to Israel than the freedom of God to act out God's divine power: it

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[154]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 87; Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Ezekiel," 720.

[155]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 104-105, 108.

[156]*Ibid.*, 104-106.

is Yahweh alone who maintains the glory and power of Yahweh's name ("It is not for your sake that I am acting; be sure of that, says the Lord" - 36:32). The power of repentance would be insufficient to effect the restoration; only God's initiative in providing the nation with a new heart and a new spirit would transform Israel[157]:

> I will give them a different heart and put a new spirit into them; I will take the heart of stone out of their bodies and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will conform to my statutes and keep my laws. (11:19-20)

The "new heart" theme echoes the prophecies of Jeremiah. Indeed, repentance will occur after the "organ transplant" -- only then will the exiles possess a new ability to recognize the "shame and disgrace" of their past behaviors (36:32).

Ezekiel's prophecies reinforce that in exile the people will be purified so that the next generation can be restored to the land; the prophecies underscore that those left behind in Judah, i.e., those who continue in their idolatrous ways, would not be redeemed. In this way, Ezekiel also reassures the exiles that Yahweh would vouchsafe their property -- those left in Judah may inhabit the exiles' houses and live on their land but they would never possess it: "You eat meat with blood in it, you lift up your eyes to idols, you shed blood; and yet you expect to possess the land?" (33:25-26).[158]

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[157]Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Ezekiel, "721.

[158]Such pronouncements by Ezekiel prefigure the conflict that will transpire upon the return between the exiles who constituted the "Yahweh-alone" party and those Judaeans, mostly "the poor of the land" (2 Kings 25:12), who promoted a highly syncretistic cult. See Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (London 1987), 62-74.

Nevertheless, when prophesying on the restoration, the metaphor of the two separate tablets, one marked "Judah and his associates of Israel" and the other "Joseph, the leaf of Ephraim and all his associates of Israel," clearly expresses the importance of the unity of the people (37:15-22)[159]: "I will make them one single nation in the land," (37:22).

It is the third theme of Ezekiel, the connection between the disaster of exile and the purpose of restoration, that is original and carries the theological message one step beyond that of Jeremiah. In the Book of Ezekiel, the God-driven, "historical" relationship is not only about a people and its god, rather it is a story with divine purpose revealed within a *world* context.[160] Ezekiel set in order "right relationships" -- the rebuilding of the Temple as the symbol of the presence of God among God's people[161]; the re-establishment of the cult by which "the life of the community is maintained and its purity preserved"[162]; and "the purification and organization of land and people,"[163] that is, the purification of the land so that it may once again be fruitful; the re-establishment of the Davidic line ("my servant David shall for ever [sic] be their prince" - 37:25); and the reactivation of the tribal order but with emphasis nonetheless on the unity of the whole people.[164] The restoration thus would bring the people, her land and her God into "right relationship"

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[159]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 114-15.

[160]*Ibid.*, 117.

[161]*Ibid.*, 111-12.

[162]*Ibid.*, 112.

[163]*Ibid.*, 113.

[164]*Ibid.*, 113-15; also, see Ezekiel 37:15-22.

but would also, significantly, reveal to the world the omnipotence of the god, Yahweh: "Thus I will prove myself great and holy and make myself known to many nations; they shall know that I am Yahweh" (38:23).

Similarly, in a vein that also hearkens to Jeremiah, Ezekiel underscores that the Babylonian armies did not defeat the kingdom of Judah, but rather that the Babylonians served as the agent of Yahweh. In the same way, the oracles against foreign nations (25-32), containing comments on some aspects of the contemporary state of world affairs, posit to the exiles the conviction that Yahweh is engaged in a battle with hostile forces even where Israel is not concerned.[165] Belief that Yahweh is active in the world and is therefore accessible beyond the borders of the nation becomes a "test of faith," however, for the population in exile.[166] Before the exile, Yahweh was the one god of Israel, a national god -- in a world where the prevailing belief was henotheistic or monolatrous.[167] Ezekiel, nonetheless, promotes a connection to Yahweh that, at once, is universal and yet still tied to the concept of "nation."

The shocking reality of living in an "unclean land," especially for Ezekiel, presented challenges to the continuity of the people. How to live in a foreign land where there were seemingly no barriers to assimilation and yet maintain their own national and religious identity? How were the Judaeans to live among peoples whose traditions were at such variance with theirs? How to resist the lure of the dazzling material richness of Babylonian society

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[165]Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, 92.

[166]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 108.

[167]D. Winton Thomas, "The Sixth Century B.C.: A Creative Epoch in the History of Israel," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 6 (Spring 1961), 29.

when they were, at the same time, integrated into the economic life of the country? How to maintain Hebrew, their sacred and national language, when Aramaic became/was their *lingua franca*?

The pattern of resettlement within Babylonia, that is, the group clusters concentrated in various locations in the vicinity of the Kebar Canal, certainly helped to contribute to the maintenance of group identity. The continuity of the leadership of a group of elders in the diaspora must have also contributed to the cohesion of the group. That these elders also gathered around and sought guidance from a central figure -- the prophet, Ezekiel, who provided a religious authority and underpinning from which their leadership benefited, also provided a focus for identity that would hold up during the trial of their exile. In addition, many of the exiles, who comprised the upper echelons of society, must have left behind substantial property and some may have left behind family members -- links not easily relinquished. In either or both cases, many of the exiles must have had tangible connections to their native homeland as well as the more abstract connections of nationality and religion.

During this tenuous period, the figure of the prophet Ezekiel provides the centerpiece for understanding the persistence of the people Israel through the Babylonian Captivity. His prophecies revealed and confirmed that history itself was endowed with theological meaning; and, in this way, the prophet provided the rationale for and the inherent meaning of the continuity of the people Israel. Ezekiel was not only the "watchman" on guard against the indiscretions of the people[168] but also their consoler. Through his

[168]In Yehezkel Kaufmann's *The Religion of Israel*, the author writes that "Ezekiel never issues a demand that they [the Judeans] remove idols from their midst; he never upbraids them for entering pagan temples, or celebrating pagan festivals, or taking part in sacred

extraordinary visions and unusual and physically challenging ordeals, he demonstrated not only oratorical skills and fearless leadership but he also provided metaphoric evidence time and again for the majesty and presence of the God of Israel amidst the people exiled in a foreign land. And, in the vision of the valley of the dry bones (37), Ezekiel pointed to the resurrection or revival of the nation in its own land:

> I am gathering up the Israelites from their places of exile among the nations...I will restore them to their own soil. I will make them one single nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel, and they shall have one king...I will rescue them from all their sinful backsliding and purify them. Thus they shall become my people, and I will become their God.
>
> (37:21-23)

Thus, the figure of the prophet Ezekiel looms large at this critical juncture in the history of the Jewish people. With no apparent barriers to total assimilation,[169] the people of Judah could have easily shared the destiny of the people of the northern kingdom, Israel. Exiled and dispersed following the Assyrian conquest in 722 B.C.E., the people of the Northern Kingdom disappeared from the pages of history forever. With the profound influence and leadership of Ezekiel, however, the people of Judah not only persisted but flourished in the *golah*, the diaspora. The prophesies of Ezekiel, while deeply

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processions," 441. Kaufmann explains that the exiles were, "at bottom, monotheists who could never adopt the religion of their environment," 440. The author fully expands this argument in *The Babylonian Captivity and Deutero-Isaiah*, trans. C. W. Efroymson (New York 1970). Nonetheless, the history of the Northern Kingdom of Israel seems to belie this argument.

[169]Michael David Coogan, "Life in the Diaspora," writes of the Murashu Archive that in none of the tablets "which mention identifiable Jewish individuals is there any hint of discrimination or restriction on religious or ethnic grounds; Jews are engaged in the same types of contractual relationships, at the same interest rates, as their non-Jewish contemporaries...," 9-10.

rooted in the Babylonian experience, transcended the Babylonian milieu and transformed the experience. Ezekiel imbued the exilic experience with a raison d'être and provided a singular vision--a blueprint--for the future: Judah would be restored as a legitimate nation-state with all the conventional trappings -- a dynastic political leader, a religious hierarchy once-again enshrined in a reconstructed temple on its holy mountain and a tribal people whose territory would be restituted on the basis of an inheritance granted to them by God.

CHAPTER 4

SECOND ISAIAH: THE RISE OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE AND THE PROMISE OF REDEMPTION

Significantly for the Judaean exiles in Babylonia, the mid-sixth century B.C.E. brought political and military reversals of fortune and, ultimately, the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and, in parallel, the birth of the largest single state the ancient Near East and Mediterranean had ever known,[170] the Persian Empire. Politically astute, a brilliant orator, and a leader of his people, the prophet known as Second Isaiah provided the exiles with a social and political road map, marked with profound new theological pathways, during this period of upheaval--from the anticipated fall of Babylonia through the ascendancy of the Persian Empire. His prophecies, comprising chapters 40-55 of the Book of Isaiah,[171] would serve to comfort and guide his community during this tumultuous time.

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[170]Richard Tomlinson, *From Mycenae to Constantinople: The Evolution of the Ancient City* (New York 1996), 48.

[171]Sidney Smith, *Isaiah Chapters XL-LV: Literary Criticism and History* (London 1944), 1-23; Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 118-121; A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah Chapters 40-66: Commentary* (New York 1975), 2-4; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary* (Philadelphia 1969), 8-11; Bright, *History of Israel*, 355n; Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford 1998), 3; Yehezkel Kaufmann, *History of the Religion of Israel, Volume IV: From the Babylonian Captivity to the End of Prophecy* (New York 1977), 55-56; John D. W. Watts, *Word Bibical Commentary Volume 25: Isaiah 40-66* (Waco, Texas 1987), 70-72; R. N. Whybray, *The Second Isaiah* (Sheffield 1983), ix. Whybray writes that chapters 40-55 "manifest such a high degree of *internal* coherence

This chapter will examine the historical context of the period of the prophet Second Isaiah, as well as explore the meaning of his message for his time and his community. Like his predecessors, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Second Isaiah brought the exiled Judaeans words of comfort and consolation--acknowledgment that, after almost three generations, they had more than fulfilled the terms of their punishment and that, close at hand, their relief would arrive in the person of Cyrus of Persia. Inherent in his message is a new promise, the promise of redemption: Cyrus, the instrument of Yahweh, would redeem the exiles and facilitate their return to Zion, their sacred place, their homeland. Implicit in the prophecy of return is the promise of the restoration of the exiles' national entity with many but, significantly, not all of its concomitant political and religious attributes.[172]

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that they can, and indeed must, be studied as a distict body of literature, one which has been preserved virtually untouched by later hands...," ix.

In Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge 1987), s.v. "Isaiah" by Luis Alonso Schökel, 165-83, the author describes the Book of Isaiah as "a collection of collections" with chapters 40-55 being the "most compact and homogeneous" and "corresponding to the historical situation of the Exile," 165. The most highly debated portions of the writings of Second Isaiah continue to be the four so-called "Servant Poems," 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9 and 52:13-53:12. For purposes of this paper, chapters 40-55 will be treated as one coherent whole, n.b. S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 16-18; Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 120, 127-28.

For an opposing point of view, see Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downer's Grove, Ill. 1993), 25-30, who argues for the unity of the entire Book of Isaiah, chapters 1-66.

[172]For insight into the themes of Second Isaiah and the period of the Restoration that were prefigured in Jeremiah ("first things," reenactment of the Exodus, etc.) and, in fact, reaffirmed during the Restoration period, see Baruch Halpern, "The New Names of Isaiah 62:4: Jeremiah's Reception in the Restoration and the Politics of 'Third Isaiah,'" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117/4 (1998), 623-43. Halpern proposes that the prevailing view that Jeremiah's writings did not "impact on the literature of his own 'party' (Deuteronomy, DtrH)" is incorrect. Rather, "Jeremiah's status in the Restoration suggests that regnant views that the political economy or the 'party' divisions of the Judahite elite continued more or less unchanged from the preexilic to the postexilic periods require adjustment," 624. Halpern asserts that during the period of the Restoration, "the elite community regarded Jeremiah's prophecy... [unpopular with the preexilic elite, to be] so entirely fulfilled, so thoroughly vindicated," 630. Jeremiah "was in fact a canonical figure, to whom it was at least *comme il faut*, and possibly very much expedient, to make direct literary and ideational connections," 630.

The prophecies of Second Isaiah reveal several tightly interwoven themes, relying heavily on polarities: first and last things; Babylon and Zion; Yahweh and the gods; and Israel and the nations.[173] Preaching after forty or so years into exile, Second Isaiah both explained the contemporary realities of his people and elucidated future events. Frequently, the story of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt, the paradigm of the corporate experience of Judaean history, provided the ultimate metaphor for these events. Moreover, Second Isaiah presented a world context for these events, past, present and future and, in doing so, articulated the concept of one single, universal God. The prophecies, often framed as dialogue between a judge and the accused, are replete with demonstrations of not only the impotence of other gods but, in fact, of their nonexistence.[174]

In addition to the Exodus metaphor, the repeated use of the Creation story highlighted Yahweh as "the sole creator from the beginning,"[175] particularly, when played against the backdrop of the numerous Creation myths of the ancient Near East. Throughout Second Isaiah, the implicit contrast between the various Near Eastern Creation myths and the Yahweh-Creation story is clear. While the former conceived of a world in constant

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[173]Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Book of Isaiah (Second Isaiah)," 498-99. Primarily literary devices requiring extensive skilled analysis, these polarities are important to note because of their recurrence and their allusions but will not be fully explored in this paper.

[174]Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, 107.

[175]John L. McKenzie, *The Anchor Bible Second Isaiah* (Garden City, NY 1968), 23-24. Although Second Isaiah employs, e.g., the Near Eastern image of "the sky as a solid dome over the disk of the earth" ("He [Yahweh] sits upon the dome of the earth" - 40:22), the prophet clearly distinguishes Yahweh from any and all possible contenders: "Do you not know, have you not heard? The Lord, the everlasting God, [is] Creator of the wide world" - 40:28. See McKenzie, 21-24; also, Pritchard, *ANET*, 31-39.

flux from chaos to creation and back to chaos, Yahweh transformed chaos (*tohu*) into an ordered world, inhabited by humans, and created for a purpose.[176]

The dominant theme of Second Isaiah is salvation but even more important is the underlying proposition of *why* and *for what purpose* the Judaean exiles -- the people Israel -- would be redeemed. The answer lay not entirely in the apocalyptic nor the eschatological realm of the future.[177] Rather, the *why* is seen in the gratuitous demonstration of the power of Yahweh, not exercised for Israel's sake alone, but as definitive evidence for the entire world that only Yahweh is God.[178] In the unfolding of real time, Israel would move into a real and realized future--restored to her homeland--a new, practical and national existence . In contrast to the Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel where hope lay in a distant, unfocused future, Second Isaiah speaks of redemption in terms of an "immediate future." Israel's purpose or mission would be to serve as a "light unto the nations" (49:6), i.e., an actualized "ideal" community, the model of righteousness.[179]

Of biographical details about the prophet almost nothing is known--not even his name.[180] Unlike the Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, no

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[176]McKenzie, 83.

[177]*Ibid.*, lvi.

[178]*Ibid.*, lvii.

[179]*Ibid.*, lviii.

[180]Westermann, 6; Bright, *History of Israel*, 355; Soggin, 263; Whybray, *Second Isaiah*, 2; Kauffman, *History*, 51.

Sean McEvenue, "Who Was Second Isaiah?" in *Studies in the Book of Isaiah: Festschrift Willem A. M. Beuken*, eds. J. Van Ruiten and M. Vervenne (Leuven 1997), argues that the author of Second Isaiah was a woman, 213-22. McEvenue's thesis hinges on the use of three unattached participles in 40:1, the use of feminine verb forms and feminine suffixes in

introductory information regarding his life and his ministry is provided (Jer. 1:1-3, Ezek. 1:1-3) and, unlike the former two prophets who explicitly served as the direct conduit of Yahweh's message ("the word of the Lord came to me," Jer. 1:4; "He said to me, Man, I am sending you to the Israelites," Ezek. 2:3; "The hand of the Lord came upon me," Ezek. 3:22; and "These are the words of the Lord God," Ezek. 5:5), the commission of Second Isaiah is derivative, that is, as if the prophet had overheard God's message ("it is the voice of your God" and "for the Lord himself has spoken," 40:1,5).[181] In 40:6, Yahweh's directive to Second Isaiah to prophesy appears to be a secondhand account, albeit the prophet's own: "A voice says 'Cry,' and another asks, 'What shall I cry?'"[182] The voice in one of the so-called "Servant Songs"[183]

40:9, and the use of the neutral collective *mebasseret* imagined as feminine. On such linguistic matters, this writer is unqualified to comment. However, in McEvenue's own words, "[t]his argument stands or falls on cumulative probabilities," 221. Also, see Blenkinsopp, 185.

In Bebb Wheeler Stone, "Second Isaiah: Prophet to Patriarchy," *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament* 56 (1992), 85-99, Stone raises the question of the gender of Second Isaiah based on "hearing a woman's voice" in the text; she suggests that the prophetic message is gendered and that the text contains evidence of a critique against patriarchy itself.

In Samuel A. Meier, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), Meier suggests that the messenger described in poetic metaphor in 40:9 is a "female envoy," 17.

Precedent for a female prophet is found in 2 Kings 22:14-19 where the prophetess Huldah is consulted when a scroll is discovered in the House of the Lord.

[181]Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, 124-25.

[182]In Samuel A. Meier, *Speaking of Speaking: Marking Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Bible* (New York 1992), Meier writes: "The opening verses of Isaiah 40 are notoriously complex in their interweaving of speaking voices...Therefore, one is left with an unidentified concatenation of speakers in vv. 2-11...," 254. For example, 40:6 presents an instance of dialogue that is only "partially marked," that is, the author writes "[i]t is unclear that it is the divine voice speaking in Isaiah 40:6" and in "the final statement, its remark is not formally introduced," 33.

[183]As noted above, the Servant Songs have been identified as a separate literary unit. The question of the identity (or identities) of the Servant, an on-going debate since Bernard Duhm first isolated these literary units in 1892, will not be addressed in this paper. See McKenzie, xxxviii-lv; Antii Laato, *The Servant of YHWH and Cyrus: A Reinterpretation of the Exilic Messianic Programme in Isaiah 40-55* (Stockholm 1992). Well-argued contrary

(49:1-7) may be the most obvious allusion to the prophet's calling; here, the "servant" speaks in the first person as if to an audience and seems to refer to himself.[184]

Similarities to the call to Second Isaiah to prophesy are found in the callings of Jeremiah and Moses. "He named me from my mother's womb" (49:1) parallels "before you were born I consecrated you" (Jer. 1:5); "he made my tongue his sharp sword" (49:2) parallels "I will help your speech and tell you what to say" (Ex. 4:12), "say whatever I tell you to say" and "I put my words into your mouth" (Jer. 1:7,9). "To restore the tribes of Jacob, to bring back the descendants of Israel" (49:6) parallels "I am resolved to bring you up out of your misery...[into] a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:17). "When they see you kings shall rise, princes shall rise and bow down" (49:7) parallels "I give you authority over nations and over kingdoms" (Jer. 1:10).[185] In this way, Second Isaiah sets himself in the line of prophetic literary tradition--both the exilic tradition of Jeremiah and the Exodus-Conquest tradition of Moses.

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positions notwithstanding, the Servant is viewed within the context of this paper, at times, as the personification of the people Israel, as well as individuals (Cyrus, an unnamed individual or Second Isaiah himself). The cumulative force of this position is demonstrated in the examples cited in this chapter.

For a similar viewpoint, see Knud Jeppesen, "Mother Zion, Father Servant: A Reading of Isaiah 49-55" in *Of Prophets' Visions and the Wisdom of Sages: Essays in Honour of R. Norman Whybray on his Seventieth Birthday*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 162, eds. Heather A. McKay and David J. A. Clines (Sheffield 1993), 125.

[184]*Ibid.*, 254. Meier describes this voice as "an unidentified voice that is clearly not God's [that] speaks throughout certain lengthy sections, sometimes drawing attention to himself without specifying who he is," 254. Also, see Gowan, 159-60; S.Smith, *Isaiah*, 19; Herbert, 88-89.

[185]In Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Book of Isaiah (Second Isaiah)," Clifford suggests that "the absence of biographical detail was deliberate, to show that the speeches actualize the ancient Isaian tradition for the exiles," 493.

The authority of Second Isaiah derives from his presence among the Divine Assembly. The setting of 40:1-8 is in the heavens where Yahweh holds court surrounded by his host of heavenly servants. His attendance among the "heavenly council" provided Second Isaiah with the legitimacy for his prophetical status.[186] While the concept of the Divine Assembly is rooted in Near Eastern thought, the Israelite notion of the heavenly council stands in contradistinction to the traditions found in Mesopotamian, Ugaritic and Egyptian literature. In the Hebrew materials, Yahweh is seated above his heavenly, unnamed, undifferentiated servants; it is within this context that the prophet receives his commission and both sees a vision of God and receives the message he is to bear.[187] Similarly, Jeremiah received his commission among the heavenly council (Jer. 23:22). The prophet never becomes a member of the Divine Assembly; rather, the council is comprised of spirits that enhance the glory of Yahweh "by providing a court befitting his majesty."[188] By contrast, Second Isaiah's polemic against the Babylonian heavenly council (40:13-14) brings to mind the characteristics of the Near Eastern conception: a council comprised of one named greater god, and named lesser gods with independent powers and differentiated status.[189]

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[186]Whybray, *Second Isaiah*, x.

[187]Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Divine Assembly" by E. Theodore Mullen Jr., 215; Max E. Polley, "Hebrew Prophecy Within the Council of Yahweh, Examined in its Near Eastern Setting" in *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method*, eds. Carl D. Evans, William W. Hallo and John B. White (Pittsburgh 1980), 141-56.

[188]Polley, 148.

[189]*Ibid.*, 148-49; R. N. Whybray, *The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah XL 13-14: A Study of the Sources of the Theology of Deutero-Isaiah* (Cambridge 1971), especially chapters v, vii and xi.

While the identity of Second Isaiah remains unresolved, his speeches place the prophet in Babylon among the exiles in one (or more) of the exiled Jewish communities of the period.[190] Although these speeches, more a "series of prophetic utterances," do not appear in any chronological order, they do permit a fairly accurate dating of the major bulk of these chapters. The attribution of dates for the prophecies of Second Isaiah, 547-538 B.C.E.,[191] leaves a span of approximately twenty-six years without prophetic leadership

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[190]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 120; Sommer, 3; Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Book of Isaiah (Second Isaiah)," 492, 493; McKenzie, xvii-xviii; Blenkinsopp, 184; Gowan, 147-48; Whybray, *Second Isaiah*, x.

For a viewpoint that places Second Isaiah in Judah, see Westermann, 5-6, 27-28. One line of argument for the Judah location, for example, rests on the use of "there" (*sham*) in 52:11: "Turn, turn away, touch naught unclean as you depart from *there*..."--Second Isaiah's admonition to the distant exiles in Babylonia on the eve of their return to Judah (translation from *JPS Hebrew-English TANAKH*, Second Edition [Philadelphia 1999], 970). Such an argument can be deflected when Second Isaiah is pictured in Babylon at the head of his cohort, persuading and leading the exiles (*from* there) out of Babylon. On the spiritual plain, Second Isaiah was not *there* in Babylon for although the prophet empathized with his people and consoled them, he lived in (and lived for) a future in which Israel, purified by the trial of exile, would be restored by the one God, Yahweh.

Other geographical possibilities have been considered. James D. Smart, *History and Theology in Second Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 35, 40-66* (Philadelphia 1965), states that "The simple fact, which should be frankly acknowledged, is that the author of chs. 40 to 55 nowhere makes clear to us his geographical location." Hans M. Barstad in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Book of Isaiah: "Exilic" Judah and the Provenance of Isaiah 40-55* (Oslo 1997), mirrors Smart's conclusion. Barstad writes: "I do not believe that the matter of the geograhical location of Isa 40-55 is a problem to which we may provide any definite answer," 92-93. In spite of this "conclusion," while Barstad rejects the arguments for a Babylonian domicile in his closing statement, at the same time, he writes that, for now, "we shall simply have to live with the possible assumption that the text in question originated on Palestinian soil," 93. Believing in the unity of the entire Book of Isaiah, Motyer, 27-28, rejects Babylonia as a locale for 40-55 but offers no definitive alternative; he does identify Palestine, however, as the locale for chapters 56-66.

[191]The attribution of dates for Second Isaiah's prophecies can only be an approximation, e.g., R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66* (Greenwood, NC 1975), dates his prophecies to 550-539 B.C.E., 22-23.

Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Book of Isaiah (Second Isaiah)," 492; S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 22-23. Smith writes: "Though it would be wrong to assume that the present arrangement is based on chronological sequence, it is probable that in fact c. xli is the earliest utterance and that cc. lii-liii are the latest; there may be some correspondence between historical events and the arrangement, but it should not be relied on for deductions," 112.

from the end of the prophecies of Ezekiel in 573 B.C.E. Of historical import, however, it should be noted that with the death of Nebuchadrezzar in 562 B.C.E., the power of kingship in Babylonia and the strength of that nation began to wane.[192] In the Book of Isaiah, contemporary references or allusions to players and events within the volatile political context provide the historical markers for the period.

A major historical marker and the most striking contemporaneous reference, the name of Cyrus is mentioned only twice in chapters 40-55 (44:28 and 45:1), but the allusion to the Persian king and conqueror occurs in several other passages.[193] Second Isaiah preached to an audience with the purpose of persuading that Cyrus was "he whom [Yahweh] has taken by the hand to subdue nations before him and undo the might of kings" (45:1), and that Cyrus was poised on the verge of the conquest of Babylonia.[194] Cyrus, ruler of Anshan, by this time had overthrown Astyages, king of Media, and had consolidated the two kingdoms.[195] Earlier events, however, provide

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[192]Nebuchadrezzar's successors and their historical relevance are are follows: Amel-Marduk (Evil-merodach, 562-560 B.C.E.) is known for his release of Jehoiachin from prison (Jer. 52:31-34; 2 Kings 25:27-30); Nergal-shar-usur (Neriglissar, 560-556 B.C.E.) may have succeeded to the throne as the result of a rebellion; Labashi-marduk (556 B.C.E.), the young son of Nergal-shar-usur, was removed in the same year by rebels who then placed on the throne Nabonidus, a high diplomatic official, not of the royal Chaldean house. See Ackroyd, *Exile*, 19-20; Bright, *History of Israel*, 352-53; Paul-Alain Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus King of Babylon 556-539 B.C.* (New Haven 1989), 21, 84-88, 97, 110-11.

[193]In *Isaiah XL-LV*, Smith writes that "[t]here is no general agreement, however, as to all the passages," 158. For a catalogue of varying points of view, see S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 158.

[194]Blenkinsopp, 82. Blenkinsopp suggests that "[s]upport for Cyrus must have been strong [at this juncture], though perhaps not unanimous, among the ethnic minorities settled in the cities and countryside of the alluvial plain of southern Mesopotamia," 186.

[195]Whybray, *Second Isaiah*, contends that before Cyrus' victory over the Medes in 550 B.C.E., the Persian's "name and reputation, and the danger which he represented to the Babylonian power, are unlikely to have been familiar to the ordinary inhabitants of Babylon,

important historical clues, not only for the dating of the prophecies of Second Isaiah but for understanding the evolution of circumstances that led to the defeat of Media and, eventually, the defeat of Babylonia by the Persians.

The historical background to the ultimate conflict between Babylonia and Persia begins with the early relationship between Nabonidus and Cyrus. Nabonidus, king of Babylonia (556-539 B.C.E.), supported Cyrus against the Median Empire, viewing the latter as a potential rival to his own empire.[196] Two Babylonian texts, in fact, reflect the favorable attitude of Nabonidus toward Cyrus in his conquest of the Medes. One, the Chronicle of Nabonidus, is contemporary; the other, possibly earlier, Abu Habba cylinder, relates a purported dream of Nabonidus wherein Marduk "has caused Cyrus, the king of Anshan, his young (or little) servant, to advance against him [Asytages] with his small army, overthrow Astyages and take him captive to his own land."[197] Historians suspect either an alliance between Nabonidus and Cyrus or the possibility of international intrigue on the part of the Babylonians.[198] This period coincides with Nabonidus' movement of a significant numbers of troops toward the west (particularly Harran) and Arabia. Although it is

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who included the Jewish exiles...[After that date,] his name will have been a household word," 11.

[196]Sommer, 6.

[197]If the dates of this cylinder account are correct, the overthrow of Astyages by Cyrus would have occurred in 554 or 553 B.C.E., with which many scholars concur. See J. M. Cook, *The Persian Empire* (London 1983), 27. On the other hand, dating the Nabonidus Chronicle in 550 B.C.E., which reads: "When the third year arrived, he (Marduk) aroused Cyrus, king of Ans[h]an, his young servant, who scattered the large (armies) of the Mede with his small army, and (who) captured Astyages, king of the Medes and took him to his country as captive," appears to be even more broadly accepted, in Beaulieu, 108, 197. Also, see S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 35 and Hermann Bengtson, *The Greeks and the Persians from the Sixth to the Fourth Centuries* (New York 1965), trans. John Conway, 5.

[198]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 33.

difficult to separate the political motives of Nabonidus from the religious, it would appear that a pact may have been made, on the one hand, between Nabonidus and Cyrus wherein Nabonidus would subdue the pro-Median area of Harran, an important center of the Babylonian cult of Sîn.[199] On the other hand, Nabonidus may have felt comfortable moving his troops westwards (thereby, leaving his northern and eastern borders unprotected), only if armed with the knowledge that Cyrus would be preoccupied with the defeat of Astyages.[200] Thus, between 556 and 552 B.C.E., at least, relations between Nabonidus and Cyrus could be characterized as cooperative or, at worst, as neutral; there were no indications of the imminent downfall of Babylonia during these years.[201]

Second, the defeat of Astyages in 550/49 B.C.E. did not imply the allegiance of the entire Median kingdom to Cyrus and, accordingly, no alarm was raised in Babylonia over the latter's extension of power.[202] In fact, Cyrus undertook several campaigns against the Medes, a loose confederation of members, before his sovereignty was recognized by all. The tribes east of the Tigris River[203] were secured during the campaigns of 548 B.C.E. and, in 547, Cyrus crossed the Tigris below Arbela to subdue the Median provinces all the

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[199]In M. A. Dandamaev, *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire* (New York 1989), trans. W. J. Vogelsang, the author concurs that "[t]he Babylonians, taking advantage of Astyages' difficulties, occupied Harran around 552 B. C. It would also seem that at that time Nabonidus regarded Cyrus as his ally," 18.

[200]*Ibid.*; Beaulieu, 109-10; S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 32-34.

[201]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 34.

[202]*Ibid.*, 34-35. In Dandamaev, *Political History*, the author writes that "[i]n the years 549-548 B.C. the Persians occupied the countries which had belonged to the defunct Median state, including Parthia, Hyrcania and apparently, Armenia," 21.

[203]This area of conquest covered the entire Iranian plateau and into northwest India, see Hayes and Miller, 517.

way to the Halys, the river that formed the border between the former Median Empire and the Lydian.[204] At the Halys, Cyrus faced the formidable Lydian cavalry[205] and successfully drove the Lydian king, Croesus, all the way to his capital at Sardis.[206]

The attitude of Nabonidus regarding Cyrus' consolidation of the Median kingdom--whether neutral or pro-Persian--may be suggested in the Babylonian response to the Lydian situation. When Croesus retreated to Sardis after battling the Persians at the River Halys, according to Herodotus (Book I:77), the Lydian king intended:

> to invite help from the Egyptians in fulfillment of their pledge...and to send for the Babylonians also (for with these, too, he had made an alliance, Labynetus [Nabonidus] being at the time their sovereign)...[207]

Thus, it appears that, at this time, Babylonia was tied to Lydia through an alliance but did virtually nothing to come to her aid. Lydia fell to the Persians at Sardis in 546 B.C.E.[208] With this victory, Cyrus decisively altered the balance of power in the ancient Near East.

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[204]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 34-36; Cook, 28.

[205]Following the demise of the Assyrian Empire, hegemony of the Near East was dominated by four powers: Egypt, the Neo-Babylonian Empire, Lydia and Media. See Bengtson, 4-5 and Cook, 28.

[206]Herodotus, *The History*, trans. David Grene (Chicago 1987), i, 73-86; Yehoshua Gitay, *Prophecy and Persuasion: A Study of Isaiah 40-48* (Bonn 1981), 55; Kaufmann, *History of the Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings*, 52.

[207]Beaulieu writes of some confusion in Herodotus and other Greek sources regarding the identity of Labynetus; at times, Labynetus is Nabonidus and, at others, Nabonidus' son, Belshazzar. In this case, however, Beaulieu grants that in this report of Herodotus' Labynetus is clearly Nabonidus, 80-82.

Cyrus' military victory against Lydia may not have been seen as an immediate threat to the viability of a politically independent Babylonia. The fact was, however, that Babylonia was now encircled by a single powerful kingdom that stretched from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf; Persia now had at its disposal not only the Persian cavalry and the forces of the Median confederation but the well-equipped Lydian army as well. In addition to military might, Persia now possessed resources that were almost unlimited; significantly, she now controlled all the metal supplies of Asia Minor and Iran. The defection of Ugbaru, Nabonidus' governor of Gutium, a transtigridian province, must have also contributed to Babylonia's declining fortunes.[209] From 547 B.C.E. onward, as the position of the Babylonian Empire eroded, tension and hostilities began to characterize her relationship

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[208]Several additional suggestions are worth noting here: When the Persian forces crossed the Tigris on their campaign toward Lydia, they assuredly traversed Babylonian territory. With Nabonidus at the oasis of Teima in Arabia in 546 B.C.E., Belshazzar, his son and regent, also seems to be away from Babylon. The most plausible explanation based on both the Babylonian and the Nabonidus Chronicles, is that Belshazzar stationed himself and his army in Syria or northern Mesopotamia (Beaulieu, 198-200) -- either as a feigned show of force on behalf of their Lydian "ally" or in case of a Persian attack on his own empire.

At this point, Nabonidus was in his ninth regnal year, the last five of which he spent primarily in Teima; the length of residence there through the end of his reign when he fled to Sippar span the years 553-539 B.C.E., Beaulieu, 149-69, 199.

[209]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 33, 40; Beaulieu, 201-202, 226-30. While both S. Smith and Beaulieu accurately record the incident of Ugbaru's defection, they mistakenly identify "Ugbaru" for "Gobryas." Confusion has reigned as to the identities of Ugbaru, Gubaru and Gobryas, all cited in ancient texts. Jack Martin Balcer in *A Prosopographical Study of the Ancient Persians Royal and Noble, c 550-450 B.C.* (Lewiston NY 1993), brings clarity to this issue. Gobryas I served Cyrus II (the Great) in "the Achaemenid conquest of Babylon against Nabonidus in 539 B.C., and governed there as satrap of Babylonia and Coele-Syria ("Beyond the River") during the reigns of Cyrus and Cambyses II"; Gubaru is the Akkadian variant of Gobryas, 75-76. Balcer writes: "Gobryas is often confused with Ugbaru, the governor of the Guti (an anachronism for Elamites) under Nebuchadrezzar II"; Ugbaru "defected to Cyrus' side and entered Babylon at the head of the Persian army" and died three weeks later, 76.

with Persia.[210] Tracing the chronology of Cyrus' conquests and Nabonidus' undertakings, the words of Second Isaiah assume their full significance.

Without mentioning him by name,[211] Second Isaiah references Cyrus' campaigns in 41:2-4:

> Tell me, who raised up that one from the east,
> one greeted by victory wherever he goes?
> Who is it that puts nations into his power
> and makes kings go down before him,
> he scatters them with his sword like dust
> and with his bow like chaff before the wind;
> he puts them to flight and passes on unscathed,
> swifter than any traveller on foot?

The evidence is apparent for identifying Cyrus and dating this passage. The passages were written some time after the defeat of Lydia in 547; they do not announce but rather reflect an event that has already taken place and they communicate an excitement or anticipation that must have been felt throughout the ancient world.[212] The "one from the east" (41:2) who enjoys victory after victory can be none other than Cyrus who began his conquests in Ecbatana, the capital of Media, and from there travelled east to west, all the way to Sardis, the capital of Lydia in Asia Minor.[213] Submission of some districts was achieved without force; Cilicia, Cyprus and, among the Greek

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[210]Sidney Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts Relating to the Capture and Downfall of Babylon* (London 1924), 100-102, 106-107, 108.

[211]Westermann allows that not employing Cyrus' name is consonant with the writing style of Second Isaiah wherein a (Hebrew) sentence without an object is followed by a clause without an object--what Westermann calls "a peculiar form of supplementary parallelism," 64; S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 49; Lindblom, 376n.

[212]Westermann, 64.

[213]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 36, 40-41; Herbert, 28-30; Soggin, 263.

cities of Asia Minor, Miletus surrendered voluntarily.[214] The phrase, "passes unscathed" (41:3), may also allude to Croesus' retreat from the River Halys to Sardis after an indecisive battle[215] or to the behavior of the Lydian army that did not oppose Cyrus' advance toward Sardis.[216] The nature of the advance, "swifter than any traveller on foot" (41:3), may reference the speed of the march toward Sardis since the Persians were also mounted.[217]

During this period, Nabonidus departed for Teima in Arabia, a journey that has been characterized most frequently as "religious" in nature.[218] Another explanation provided for Nabonidus' departure for Teima relates to a military venture. Most convincing, however, is the argument that it was economic pressure, brought to bear by the relative strength of neighboring kingdoms and the ascendancy of the Medes, that drove Nabonidus to

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[214]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 41; Hayes and Miller, 517.

[215]Cook writes that "seeing that his army was outnumbered and the season was advanced, Croesus...dismissed his mercenaries for the winter, intending to assemble a larger army the next spring. Unexpectedly, Cyrus followed on his heels," 28.

[216]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 50.

[217]*Ibid.*, 159.

[218]In Hayim Tadmor, "The Inscriptions of Nabunaid: Historical Arrangment" in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on his Seventy-fifth Birthday* (Chicago 1965), 351-63, the author's careful examination of the Nabonidus inscriptions in light of new discoveries provides important new evidence of the chronology of events of Nabonidus' reign. Tadmor rebuffs the notion of early restoration of Ehulhul (the Temple of Sîn) in Harran and the elevation of Sîn above all other gods. He writes that while we do not know the motives behind Nabonidus' departure to Arabia in his fourth year, "[i]t is only after Nabunaid's return from Teima that the tendency to elevate Sîn above all other gods is fully manifested," 363. What is remarkable is that Tadmor's findings were anticipated by Sidney Smith in *Isaiah XL-LV* twenty years earlier.

On the significance of Teima, see Raymond P. Dougherty, "Têmâ's Place in the Egypto-Babylonian World of the Sixth Century B.C.," in *Mizraim: Journal of Papyrology, Egyptology, History of Ancient Laws, and their Relations to the Civilizations of Bible Lands*, vol. I, Nathaniel Julius Reich, ed., reprinted from 1933 (New York 1971), 1-4.

Teima.[219] At the beginning of the reign of Nabonidus, the Medes controlled the trade routes to the east and north of Babylonia while access to the northwestern routes were dominated by the Lydians and Cilicians and subject to treaty. When Cyrus gained control of the vast territories and resources formerly dominated by the Medes, Lydians and Cilicians, the pressure on Nabonidus grew exponentially. It became incumbent upon Nabonidus to secure the trade from the Persian Gulf area and the increasingly prosperous routes from southern Arabia and the Red Sea.[220] Teima, a requisite stop for any caravan crossing the desert from the Persian Gulf to Egypt, must have served then as an important way station for the Babylonian control of the Arabian trade routes.[221]

Evidence that Nabonidus achieved economic benefit from his position in Teima is seen in his own royal account. Here, Nabonidus recounted the conquest of a string of oases between Teima and Medina, the receipt of tribute from various regions and that he staved off armed intrusions, possibly by nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes.[222] Also, the description found in the so-called "Verse Account of Nabonidus" contributes to the picture of economic well-being, i.e., he made the city of Teima, the oasis, "like Babylon": "He

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[219]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 39-40.

[220]*Ibid.* Dandamaev, *Political History*, attributes the quest for new routes to changes in the course of the Euphrates that consequently blocked the passage from the Persian Gulf to southern Mesopotamia, 40.

[221]*Ibid.*, 136-37.

[222]Beaulieu, 172-74. Dandamaev, *Political History*, writes that if the Nabonidus Chronicle is credible, "kings from Egypt, Media and other countries sent their ambassadors to Tema to honor him," 40.

[em]bellished the city and built [his palace] (there) like the palace of Babylon."[223]

Although the activity of Nabonidus in Arabia may have been an attempt to strengthen the nation's economic foundation,[224] at the same time, his sojourn in Teima and his religious activities also contributed to undermining the kingdom. Nabonidus' promotion of the god Sîn to supremacy of the Babylonian pantheon and related temple building (and re-building) projects revealed a strong disregard for the Babylonian religious tradition that placed Marduk at the head of the pantheon.[225] In this way, Nabonidus created powerful enemies in Babylon, particularly among the priesthood, as illustrated by the overtly biased "Verse Account of Nabonidus," written by the Marduk priesthood. Furthermore, Nabonidus' activities may have put a strain on the very resources he was trying to protect.

Perhaps even more significant to the undermining of his kingdom was his appointment in 553 B.C.E. of two officials, the "Royal Officer over the King's Coffer" and the "Royal Officer Lord of the Appointment." Their responsibility was to supervise the business transactions of the E-Anna Temple in Uruk and to ensure the collection of royal taxes. This effort of Nabonidus' to scrutinize closely the transactions of the temples flew in the face of the status quo established by his predecessors, Nabopolassar and

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[223]The Verse Account, Col. II, 24, as translated in Beaulieu, 171. Although "The Verse Account" is generally recognized as a highly biased account, this positive description is telling because the account, attributed to the Babylonian priesthood, is biased *against* Nabonidus.

[224]Another view, offered by Dandamaev, *Political History*, is that Nabonidus determined to unify the numerous Aramaic, Sîn-worshipping tribes of the region as a barrier against the impending danger from Persia, 41.

[225]See Tadmor, 351-63.

Nebuchadrezzar, each of whom had received twenty percent of temple revenues and, in return, refrained from interference in temple matters.[226] In addition, Nabonidus' virtual abandonment of the kingdom's capital for ten years with, most likely, a significant cohort of troops, must have signalled to Cyrus a vulnerability and a strategic opportunity.

Of the history of the onset of hostilities between Persia and Babylonia little is known. Some clues, albeit controversial ones, are found in excerpts from Berossus, Xenophon and Herodotus.[227] What stands of interest is that, between the years of the fall of Sardis in 547 and the final attack on Babylon in 539 B.C.E., Cyrus gained control of Asia, including the area known by the Babylonian nomenclature, *Ebir Nari*, the land "beyond the river," or Syria-Palestine.[228] Distinguished from among the other Asiatics, the "Arabs" (inhabitants of this area) were not subdued but, rather, are distinguished as "guest-friends." This group that occupied the Sinai Peninsula was not subservient to Cyrus but did bring the Persian king "gifts" (frankincense), opened the way through the desert for the Persian armies and may have helped the latter to encompass the walls of Babylon.[229] Nevertheless, a few pockets of resistance to Persian domination held out, e.g., Neirab,[230] but such

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[226]Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, Second Edition (New York 1980), 370-71. Roux writes that evidence of a declining Babylonian economy during this period is further observed in price increases in hire and sale contracts, in the cost of cultivated land and in the price of foodstuffs, as well as in such inflationary practices as long-term borrowing on credit, 371-72.

[227]For a discussion of these sources, see Cook, 11-23 and S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 42-42, 145-47.

[228]On the basis of the Nabonidus Chronicle, it appears that Nabonidus was driven from Arabia by Cyrus just before 539 B.C.E. or early in that year. See S. Smith, *Texts*, 82, 109.

[229]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, writes that later these Arab tribes would also open the desert to Cambyses on his way toward the conquest of Egypt, 43-44.

evidence does not invalidate the evidence that, by the winter of 540 B.C.E., most of the provinces of the Babylonian Empire had fallen to the Persians.[231] Cyrus had effectively "drawn a cordon round northern Babylonia."[232]

Additional evidence of the period of successive conquests by Cyrus is seen in Second Isaiah 41:5: "Coasts and islands saw it and were afraid, the world trembled from end to end." The reference to "coasts and islands" here (and throughout the Book of Second Isaiah) are those of the eastern Mediterranean. The ends of the earth may suggest those distant settlements of Jewish exiles,[233] e.g., those dispersed following the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C.E., and those who were scattered after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. to such far reaches as the colony at Elephantine. Or, more broadly, the allusion, "the world...end to end," may point to all the peoples of the world to the utmost limit.[234] Similarly, the passages that follow indicate that the far-flung Judaeans, or those within the Babylonian Empire, may already be at war or were girding for war on the side of Cyrus against Nabonidus:[235]

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[230]In *Isaiah XL-LV*, S. Smith writes that Neirab, a flourishing provincial trade capital located in the "land between the rivers," southwest of Harran and to the northwest of Babylon, did not succomb to the Persians, 147-48; also, see map no. 2 also in S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*. However, whether this "hold out" was political or military in nature, Smith does not specifiy.

[231]*Ibid.*, 145-46.

[232]*Ibid.*, 145.

[233]*Ibid.*, 50.

[234]Herbert, 29-30.

[235]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, suggests that the proximity of the verses 41:1-7 to those of 41:11-12 indicate that "the war between Cyrus and Nabonidus had started when verses 1-7 were spoken, though there was as yet no promise that Cyrus would free the exiles, 50.

Now shall all who defy you
be disappointed and put to shame;
all who set themselves against you
shall be as nothing; they shall vanish.
You will look for your assailants but not find them;
all who take up arms against you
shall be as nothing, nothing at all. (41:11-12)

These words of Second Isaiah provided not only encouragement to the exiles but may have contained military intelligence as well. Connections may have been established by the Persians with the exiles and other insurgent groups within Babylonia--thus implying a date of 545 or 544 B.C.E. for these passages.[236]

The metaphor employed in 41:10, wherein Yahweh supports the Judaeans with a "victorious right hand," is a direct reference to the most significant and highly charged Mesopotamian ritual of the calendar year, performed as part of the Babylonian New Year ceremony, the *akitu*.[237] With a right-handed grasp, Yahweh would insure success for the Judaeans' efforts against the Babylonians in the same way that the king grasped the hand of the greatest Babylonian god, Marduk, and thereby insured the prosperity and success of the nation for yet another year.[238] This Yahweh-hand imagery is

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[236]*Ibid.*

[237]In 538 B.C.E., when appointed king of Babylon by his father Cyrus, Cambyses sought to legitimize his position by participating in the *akitu* ceremony: "Thus he became king of Babylon by receiving his authority from the hands of the supreme god Marduk in his temple of Esagila, Dandamaev, *Political History*, 56.

[238]Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Akitu," by Jacob Klein, 138-41. Marzahn, 46, writes that high point of the eleven-day New Year celebration occurred on the eighth and ninth days when Marduk and Nabu met with the assemblage of Mesopotamian deities to determine the fate of the country and its inhabitants. When the accompanying ceremonies were completed, the procession of the gods to the akitu temple located outside of the city began only when the king symbolically seized the hand of the god Marduk and bade him rise.

used again in 41:13 and less specifically in 42:6 (the "right" hand is not mentioned). In the same way, in 45:1 Cyrus' success was insured by the Judaean God when Yahweh grasped his hand:

> Thus says the Lord to Cyrus...
> Cyrus whom he has taken by the hand
> to subdue nations before him
> and undo the might of kings....

The Yahweh-Marduk-hand metaphor may also be related to the polarity of Yahweh and the Babylonian gods. Yahweh's active, saving power is seen in marked contrast to the powerlessness of Marduk where, in the latter instance, the king is obliged to seize the immobile hand of an inert god.

While the above is the second of two references to the Persian king by name, the first reference to Cyrus by name is his "calling" into the service of Yahweh: "I say to Cyrus, 'You shall be my shepherd to carry out all my purpose....'" (44:28). Allusion to Cyrus is also found in 41:25 as the "one from the north" and the "one from the east" whom Yahweh roused to action. If this passage can also be dated to 545 or 544 B.C.E., its meaning would not relate to the geographical order of his conquests but rather to his first consolidated kingdom: "east" of Mesopotamia referring to the Persian kingdom and "north" referring to the Median.[239] The second half of the verse 41:25 describes a military leader who then "marches over viceroys as if they were mud, like a potter treading his clay." The reference to "viceroys"

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[239]Herbert, 38; Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, describes this language as "traditional" in the Ancient Near East: "the north being the realm from which God and hence his messenger, appears, alongside the more direct pointing to the east, to Persia," 113. S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 161, provides another explanation in a footnote attributed to J. Skinner: "The terms are poetic; the north is the region of mystery and the east the region of light."

(*s'ganim*) or "governors" seems to be an explicit one and evidence that a state of war existed.[240]

Cyrus, the "servant" of Yahweh, the "chosen one in whom I delight" (42:1), began his military campaign as the instrument of the Judaean God but, in the verses that follow, the Persian has additional deeds to perform in order to fulfill God's agenda. Consequently, Cyrus is depicted in terms of potentialities, e.g., "he will plant justice on earth, while coasts and islands wait for his teaching" (42:4). God as the potter (here, the one who molds his own creations), a metaphor often employed by Second Isaiah as well as Jeremiah, is particularly apt. Yahweh's full historical purpose has not yet been revealed to or through Cyrus. Cyrus will "bring captives out of prison, out of the dungeons where they lie in darkness" (42:7), i.e., he will free the exiles but, as yet, no hint is given as to the restoration of the exiles to Jerusalem or the rebuilding of the temple. These verses seem to have been composed by the prophet when Cyrus was preparing his attack on Palestine.[241] Similarly, 51:5 must have been composed during this period, however, slightly later: "My victory is near, my deliverance has gone forth and my arms shall rule the nations; for me coasts and islands shall wait and they shall look to me for protection." The first part of this clause has been attributed to the moment when Phoenicia allied herself with Persia; the latter part of the clause seems to validate that Cyrus was recognized as the ruler of the lands along the Mediterranean coast prior to the fall of Babylon. Indeed,

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[240]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, writes that these provincial governors were those of the western provinces and that the "attack in preparation would fall on Syria"; he attributes the date as 544 or 543 B.C.E., 51.

[241]*Ibid.*, 59.

the "arms" ruling the nations may refer to governors over the coastland provinces whom Cyrus had by this time already appointed.[242] That Cyrus' military campaign continued, as Yahweh's surrogate on earth,[243] is reflected in a song of praise of his victories (42:10-13). Earlier, islands and coastlands "trembled," now, their inhabitants "sing a new song to the Lord"; evidence points here to a date closer in time to 540 B.C.E. rather than 544.[244] Among those exultant over the progress of Cyrus' campaign is the tribe of Kedar occupying "wilderness," "towns" and "villages," an area in the Syro-Arabian desert situated on a main route to the south, east of Jordan and Edom.[245] Not surprisingly, Kedar was one of the kingdoms formerly attacked by Nebuchadrezzar II (42:11).[246]

With the armies of Cyrus apparently marching in a southerly direction, possibly toward the residence of Nabonidus in Teima, Second Isaiah's metaphoric reference to the sounds of a desert storm ("I will cry like a woman in labor, whimpering, panting and gasping" - 42:14) and the drying of wadis and oases ("I will turn rivers into desert wastes and dry up all the pools" - 42:15) may well have been a contemporary reality. Indeed, if a severe drought, as the result of a sandstorm, threatened the oasis at Teima, the

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[242]*Ibid.*, 60.

[243]Is. 42:13: "The Lord will go forth as a warrior, he will rouse the frenzy of battle like a hero; he will shout, he will raise the battle-cry and triumph over his foes."

[244]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, states definitively that "no conjectural explanation is likely to alter that approximation much," 62.

[245]Wigoder, 589-90.

[246]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, defines these three areas (wilderness, towns and villages) as "what is known of the geographical sense of *midbar*"; the author also concurs here with other sources in identifying "Sela" as the archaeological site of Petra in present-day Jordan, 61-62, 165-66.

Babylonian army and the security of Nabonidus would have been seriously weakened.[247] Epigraphic evidence in the form of an archival text from Uruk, dated 545-44 B.C.E., reveals the existence of serious famine in Uruk.[248] Whether or not the famine was limited to Uruk and whether or not the famine was the result of sporadic armed conflicts between Elamites and the Babylonians or, possibly, the result of climatic conditions or another reason, is unknown. In any case, two Babylonian inscriptions (nos. 13 and 14) written between 543 and 541 B.C.E. suggest that the famine was of long duration and was prevalent throughout Babylonia.[249]

In theological terms, Cyrus, as an agent of Yahweh, was not a new phenomenon. As seen in the Book of Jeremiah, Nebuchadrezzar II had also been assigned by God to serve as the instrument to mete out the Judaeans' punishment. Second Isaiah alludes to God's use of a foreign nation to affect human history in 40:1-2. The prophet is instructed by God to "speak tenderly to Jerusalem and tell her this, that she has fulfilled her term of bondage, that her penalty has been paid; she has received at the Lord's hand double measure for all her sins" (40:2). Here, Jerusalem is not a geographic site but, rather, the people Israel wherein God dwells. The "hand of God" is Babylon which unjustly doubled the punishment that God had intended. The three generations of exile -- those who had been instructed by Jeremiah to build houses, plant gardens, marry and beget and seek the welfare of the cities to which Yahweh had carried them (Jer. 29:4-7), now were encouraged not only

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[247]*Ibid.*

[248]Beaulieu, 202-203.

[249]*Ibid.*, 42, 202-203.

to prepare themselves for a return to Judah but to aid and abet the Persians in their quest to conquer Babylon (41:11-12).

The voice of a speaker (or speakers) is recorded in 40:6-8 and 40:3-5. In the former instance, a "voice" is instructed to "cry out" or to proclaim publicly that "all flesh is grass" and, as grass naturally "withers," so will mankind fade away when "the Lord blows upon them." Viewed in its contemporaneous context, Babylonia could easily be construed as the "grass [that] withers, the flowers [that] fade" since the power of Yahweh had been invested in Cyrus.[250]

Speaking in metaphors, the prophet, Second Isaiah, and perhaps his associates, seem to be engaged in treasonous activities.[251] The voice heard in the second instance (40:4-5) directs the listeners to "prepare a road for the Lord through the wilderness"; that voice can be seen as seditious. The description of how this road should be constructed conforms to the method employed by Achaemenid rulers for military purposes, whereby roads were actually built by cutting through the hills:[252] "Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill brought down; rugged places shall be made smooth and mountain-ranges become a plain" (40:4). The use of the words *arava* and *midbar* in the Hebrew text, alludes here to the Wadi Arava, the tract of land

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[250]While "all flesh is grass" and "grass withers" are ostensibly references to humans, Second Isaiah call to mind "the pretensions of the seemingly all-powerful Babylonian empire," Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 51.

[251]The risks associated with sedition have been offered as reason for the anonymity of Second Isaiah: "Predictions of the victory of Cyrus and the fall of Babylon, together with satire directed at the Babylonian imperial cult, even when circulating in the restricted ambient of the Jewish ethnic deportees, could not have been free of risk. Earlier prophets who preached sedition had been tortured and executed by authorities," Blenkinsopp, 184. In fact, Second Isaiah was harshly treated because of his pronouncements (50:4-9, 53); see Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 35.

[252]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 65-66; Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 50.

east of Jordan, to the Se'ir mountain range and to the Sinai peninsula, a wilderness comprising desert and barren hill country.[253] The description of such a trek to an audience in Babylonia would be known to them as being very similar to the route previously taken by Nabonidus to Teima.[254]

Similar anti-Babylonian propaganda may have also been circulated within Judah.[255] Cyrus, the "arm" of Yahweh, should not instill fear in those who were left behind in Judah; instead, Cyrus should be seen as God's shepherd who will gather his "flock," the exiles, and bring them home: "Raise it [your voice], be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah...." (40:11). In this instance, Second Isaiah seems to speak to both the exiles and those in Judah. He encourages the exiles, reassuring them that God "gives vigor to the weary, new strength to the exhausted" (40:29) and he speaks to all "men of Israel" of the role they must play in Babylonia's demise, i.e., to take to the hills, (and here the meaning is less clear) either to fight or to help cut roads through the mountains, to insure that the Persian troops may pass in safety:[256] "I will make of you a sharp threshing-sledge, new and studded with teeth; you shall thresh the mountains and crush them and reduce the hills to chaff," (40:15).

As a change agent, the message and activities of the prophet were not always welcomed among the exiles: "I did not hide my face from spitting and insults" (50:6), declaims Second Isaiah. At one point, it appears that the prophet was in hiding ("the man who walks in dark places with no light" -

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[253]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 65; for a discussion of different points of view, see 169.

[254]*Ibid.*, 65-66.

[255]*Ibid.*, 66-67.

[256]*Ibid.*, 68-69, 173-74.

50:10), possibly driven underground by his own people or by the Babylonian authorities.

Whether derided by his own community or in hiding, Second Isaiah's hope at this juncture, was that the Persians succeed in their drive toward Teima and in forcing the Babylonians from the west; that hope was realized.[257] Evidence of the Babylonians' withdrawal and escape by sea are reflected in 43:14:[258] "For your sakes I have sent to Babylon; I will lay the Chaldeans prostrate as they flee, and their cry of triumph will turn to groaning." The southern trade routes from east to west that Nabonidus had sought to control from his base in Teima were now lost to him. Corroboration of a Babylonian withdrawal in the face of a Persian incursion may be attested as follows:[259] "Toilers of Egypt and Nubian merchants and Sabaeans bearing tribute shall come into your power...." (45:14). That is, three wealthy nations will show their appreciation to Cyrus for driving the Babylonians from their sphere of political and economic activity.[260] Propaganda in support of a pro-Cyrus party within Babylonia (47:1-15 and

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[257]*Ibid.*, 71. Smith suggests that Second Isaiah, in some way, assisted the Persians in their drive toward Teima but he does not provide any explanation of "how."

[258]Ibid., 71-72. Smith translates 43:14 as follows: "For your sake I have sent to Babylon and have brought south all their divining priests, and the Chaldeans whose cry is in the ships," 71. The author reasons that since every army movement was accomplished in the company of diviners and that an escape by sea would have occurred either from the Gulf of Aqaba or an eastern port on the Red Sea, the evidence is ipso facto. Smith's translation, however, is questionable.

[259]*Ibid.*, 72.

[260]These nations, Egypt, Nubia and Sheba, are also cited together in 43:3, possibly not a precise historical footnote but, rather, an allusion suggesting that a rich ransom would be required to deliver the Judaeans from their exile. See Ackroyd, *Israel Under Babylon and Persia*, 117.

48:15) must have been composed at a point in time when Cyrus' conquest of Babylon could assuredly be predicted.[261]

Nabonidus returned to Babylon in 543 B.C.E. The motivation for his return is unclear but may be the result of a combination of factors. Among these are the fear of a Persian attack on Teima, political factors related to his son, Belshazzar, in whose care Nabonidus left the governance of Babylon, and a zeal for implementing religious reforms.[262] Of the four literary texts that attest to the reign of Nabonidus,[263] two have particular relevance to the closing regnal years; these are the "Nabonidus Chronicle" and the "Verse Account of Nabonidus."[264] A broken entry in the Nabonidus Chronicle of the thirteenth year suggests that armed encounters or disturbances between the Babylonian and Persian armies occurred in the Uruk region in 540-539 B.C.E.[265] The chronicle entry for the seventeenth year of Nabonidus' reign is almost entirely intact, however, so that the events preceding the conquest of Babylonia can be followed. The two noteworthy events are, first, the celebration of the New Year's festival and, second, the gathering of the gods of the Babylonian pantheon from around the country to the capital, presumably for their protection--to prevent the statues from falling into the hands of the Persians. According to the Nabonidus Chronicle of the seventeenth year, the

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[261]Blenkinsopp, 186

[262]Beaulieu, 203.

[263]*Ibid.*, 4.

[264]The Verse Account, an overtly biased record of Nabonidus' reign and a glorification of Cyrus, was probably composed by the Marduk priesthood. Nonetheless, several aspects of the Verse Account are corroborated by the Babylonian king's own chronicle and, thus, proves useful for understanding this period; see Beaulieu, 219.

[265]*Ibid.*, 219-20.

king took an active role in the New Year's festival for the first time since his ten-year residence in Teima. In addition, offerings were distributed to all of the temples in the kingdom. In the same inscription the transport of the various temple gods to Babylon is recorded.[266] Second Isaiah vividly captures a similar scene where, not the gods from the provinces but, the primary gods of Babylon are carried along the processional way[267]: "Bel[268] has crouched down, Nebo has stooped low: their images, once carried in your processions, have been loaded onto beasts and cattle...the gods themselves go into captivity," (46:1-2). Here, the polarity of Yahweh and the Babylonian gods is starkly portrayed. Second Isaiah ridicules and contrasts Bel and Nebo, themselves "dumb beasts" that must be hauled to their own temples, to Yahweh who has carried Israel from birth.[269]

Second Isaiah, communicating the message of Yahweh, demonstrates an awareness of Cyrus' progress, likely informed by Cyrus' agents in Babylon[270]: "I summon a bird of prey from the east, one from a distant land to fulfill my purpose...I have a plan to carry out, and carry it out I will...I bring

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[266]*Ibid.*, 220.

[267]Second Isaiah and members of the exiled community must have witnessed the pomp of the New Year celebration, particularly the elaborate processional that occurred when Nebo (Nabu), the son of Bel (Marduk), was transported to Babylon from her sister-city, Borsippa. Nebo, whose presence in Babylon was requisite for the observance of the New Year rituals, was carried along the canal connecting the Borsippa temple to Babylon, probably in a richly decorated wagon and making many stops along the way. A street similar to the Processional Way was constructed for the deity's visit; see Marzahn, 45-46.

[268]McKenzie, 86, writes that Bel, the "Akkadian cognate of Hebrew *baal*, is not a proper name but a title, 'lord.'" After the second millenium B.C.E., the title was ascribed to the Babylonian god, Marduk.

[269]*Ibid.*, 87-88.

[270]Morton Smith, "II Isaiah and the Persians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 (September-December 1963), 417.

victory near, it is not far off," (46:11,13). Just as the last gods of Akkad entered Babylon, Cyrus succeeded in penetrating northern Babylonia and defeated the people of Akkad in a decisive battle at Opis on the Tigris River.[271] In the same month, Cyrus proceeded to Sippar, strategically situated for control of the canal system; Sippar surrendered without a battle. Cyrus dispatched Ugbaru, the governor of Gutium, with a contingent of the Persian army, to Babylon. Nabonidus fled the city for Borsippa.[272] Second Isaiah anticipated Babylon's fall: "Down with you, sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon. Down from your throne, sit on the ground, daughter of the Chaldeans, never again shall men call you soft-skinned and delicate," (47:1).

Descriptions of the fall of the capital city, Babylon, appear in several texts. The Nabonidus Chronicle records that on the sixteenth day of Tashritu (September-October), "Ugbaru [Gobryas][273] the governor of Gutium and the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without a battle."[274] On the third day of the following month of Arahsamnu (October-November), "Cyrus entered Babylon,"[275] and was welcomed by the population as a peace-maker.[276] The lack of resistance to the Persians may be attributable to any number of factors: Belshazzar, ordered by Nabonidus to deploy his troops along the Tigris in

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[271]Beaulieu, 220-21. In *Texts*, S. Smith writes that "Greater Babylonia" was defined by the great wall of Nebuchadrezzar II that ran from Sippar to Opis, 103. Beaulieu, however, questions the existence of such fortifications.

[272]S. Smith, *Texts*, 104-105; Beaulieu, 224-25, 231.

[273]Balcer, 74-77; see this paper, n. 205.

[274]S. Smith, *Texts*, 117.

[275]*Ibid.*

[276]Roux, 357-58.

defensive positions, faced "overwhelming numerical superiority";[277] or, morale may have reached a nadir when reports arrived in Babylon recounting the massacre of the population of Akkad,[278] the capitulation of Sippar and the flight of Nabonidus from his capital.[279] It is also possible that the enormous hostility of the priesthood and population, as reported in both the overtly biased Verse Account and the propagandist Cyrus Cylinder, may have thwarted any organized resistance.[280]

One aspect of Ugbaru's entry into Babylon is not mentioned in the Nabonidus Chronicle, the Verse Account, or the Cyrus Cylinder but is referenced in 45:1 of Second Isaiah. Depicted in this passage ("Ungirding the loins of kings, opening doors before him and letting no gate stay shut") is the Babylonian custom (most likely adopted from the Assyrians) of fastening to the city gates with chains client kings who had revolted. Fettered in such a humiliating position, these captive royals were forced to open and shut the gates upon command.[281] While Second Isaiah suggests that Cyrus unchained such captives in other nations, more than likely in Babylon, his agent Ugbaru freed them so that they voluntarily opened the gates for their liberators.[282]

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[277]*Ibid.*, 357; S. Smith, *Texts*, describes Ugbaru's entry into Babylon as "by strategem," but does not elaborate.

[278]"Cyrus....burnt the people of Akkad with fire, he killed the people," S. Smith, *Texts*, 117.

[279]*Ibid.*, "On the 14th, Sippar was taken without a battle. Nabonidus fled," 117.

[280]"Without combat or battle, he [Marduk] caused him to enter Babylon, his city. He saved Babylon from oppression," Beaulieu, 225.
For further description of the easy fall of Babylon to the Persian armies as found in Greek and Jewish sources, see S. Smith, *Texts*, 100-107 and Beaulieu, 225-31.

[281]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 73; translation of 45:1 is taken from *JPS Hebrew-English TANAKH*, 951.

Chapter 40 seems to have been composed immediately following the Persian defeat of Babylonia but preceding the issuance of the Cyrus Proclamation.[283] At this point, Second Isaiah was confronted with a community punished beyond that which it deserved (40:2), one that saw clearly the fragility and transience of life (40:6-70), and one that distrusted the rulers of the world (40:23). The exiles were a despised people: "[One] whom every nation abhors, the slave of tyrants" - 49:7 and "Time was when many were aghast at you, my people; so now many nations recoil at the sight of him, and kings curl their lips in disgust" - 52:14-15. Their condition was not a reflection of God's disfavor; rather the Judaeans had brought themselves low by their own disobedience. For this reason, the issue of idolatry is raised repeatedly throughout Second Isaiah: "an image which a craftsman sets up and a goldsmith covers with plate....[made of] mulberry wood" (40:19-20); "those who make idols are less than nothing" (44:9); and the absurdity of the man who plants a tree to be used for fuel for warmth and for baking and cooking and for fashioning into a god so that, in the end, he is "worshipping a log of wood" (44:14-20).

The length of the exile, coupled with the power and rich material culture of Babylonia, no doubt, had worn down the faith of a number of the exiles.[284] Whether those attracted to idolatry comprised a few individuals or more significant numbers is impossible to ascertain; what is clear, however, is

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[282]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 73 adds that "the prophet seems to have seen them [these captives]" and that these freed prisoners opened the gates for Cyrus on his triumphal entry.

Another interpretation of this passage, a more generalized one, may suggest the disarming of the gates of Babylon and other cities already captured by Cyrus; see Whybray, *Second Isaiah*, 105.

[283]S. Smith, *Isaiah XL-LV*, 143-44.

[284]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 134-35.

that though some may have adopted (or continued their) pagan practices, the self-identified nation of Judaeans remained Yahwistic.[285] The admonitions of Second Isaiah may have been intended to purge from the community the very last vestiges of idol worship or to purge any syncretistic tendencies from the cult of Yahweh.[286] Even Zoroatrianism, the faith of Cyrus,[287] which shared some features with the cult of Yahweh, may have attracted followers among the exiles. In 50:11, Second Isaiah admonished those "who kindle a fire and set fire-brands alight" by saying "go, walk into your own fire...lie down in torment"; presumably the prophet chastised those who engaged in the Zoroastrian practice of fire veneration.[288]

Published in Nisan (April-May 538 B.C.E.) seven months after the fall of Babylon,[289] the Cyrus Proclamation[290] must have appeared to be the fulfillment, in part, of the prophecies of Second Isaiah. As expressed in the proclamation, the Persian conqueror did not oppress but, rather, "liberated"

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[285]Kaufmann, in his provocative *History*, maintains that "[t]he direction of religious change was always from idolatry to monotheism, never the reverse," 26.

[286]*Ibid.* Kaufmann writes "that neither Ezekiel or Deutero-Isaiah accuses the people of participation in the public worship of Babylon is decisive and instructive. The idolatry of the exiles was domestic and private," 29.

[287]W. D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein, ed., *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge 1984), 281-82.

[288]*Ibid.*, 313-14.

[289]Menahem Haran, "The Literary Structure and Chronological Framework of the Prophecies in Is. XL-XLVIII," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 9 (Leiden 1963), 143-44; Bright, *History of Israel*, 361-62.

[290]W. D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein posit that the words of the Cyrus Cylinder "were clearly composed by Babylonian priests, but must have been approved by Cyrus; and the spirit of religious tolerance which they show appears also in his famous edict to the Jews" found in Ezra 1:2, 287-88.

the inhabitants of Babylon and, what is more, he promised to restore all exiles to their "former habitations."[291] Themes in the proclamation that parallel ideas found in Second Isaiah are apparent, particularly the ideas that Marduk or Yahweh chose and empowered Cyrus to defeat the Babylonians:

> Cyrus Cylinder: "He [Marduk] scanned and looked [through] all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler willing to lead....and ordered him to march against his city Babylon;
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> Second Isaiah: "I summon a bird of prey from the east, one from a distant land to fulfill my purpose" - 46:11, it is "he whom I love shall wreak my will on Babylon...." - 48:14;

and that this "chosen" ruler would restore the exiles to their land:

> Cyrus Cylinder: "I [also] gathered all their [former] inhabitants and returned [to them] their habitations";
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> Second Isaiah: "He shall rebuild my city and let my exiles go free" - 45:13.[292]

Of course, similar ideas and similar language can be found in other ancient documents; the phraseology of public proclamations often was formulaic.[293] Another explanation has been forwarded to elucidate the close affinity between the two texts, i.e., that propagandists in Cyrus' employ would have "inspired" the material common to both Second Isaiah (specifically, chapters 40-48) and the first half of the Cyrus Proclamation. The differences

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[291]Pritchard, *ANET*, Vol. 1, 208.

[292]*Ibid.*, 207-208.

[293]Dependence on a "Babylonian court style" is cited as an hypothesis; see M. Smith, "II Isaiah," 415.

that exist between the two are attributable to the tailoring of the material to the interests and aspirations of the different audiences.[294]

The similarities found in the writings of Second Isaiah and the Gathas, seventeen hymns attributed to the Achaemenid religious prophet, Zarathushtra,[295] are also apparent. The parallels found in these writings occur primarily in chapters 40-48 and in Yasna 44; both works devolve from the concept of one God, an "eternal beneficent Being" who is the "Creator of all things."[296] In addition, the similarity in the writing (or oratorical style) of Second Isaiah and the Gathas is evident in the use of a series of rhetorical questions requiring the answers of "I am" or "I do."[297] The evidence that Cyrus' agents working in Babylon may have influenced Second Isaiah has been deduced from certain elements found in the prophecies of the latter that formerly were not seen in the Judaean culture; this evidence is, primarily, the Persian cosmology of the Yasnas.[298]

Whatever the origin of his words,[299] Second Isaiah employs resonant metaphors that must have had a profound effect on his audience and, as a

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[294]*Ibid.*, 417-18. M. Smith writes that "Cyrus was famous for his use of subversion and is commonly thought to have used it for his capture of Babylon. His agents would hardly have neglected the opportunity offered by disaffected groups like the Judean exiles," 418.

[295]Davies and Finkelstein, 279.

[296]*Ibid.*, 282-83; M. Smith, "II Isaiah," 419-20.

[297]The Yasnas, a series of questions addressed to Ahura Mazda of which the expected answers are "I am" or "I do," are liturgical writings found among the Zoroastrian Gathas; see M. Smith, "II Isaiah," 419.

[298]*Ibid.*, 419-20; Davies and Finkelstein, 282-83; Davies and Finkelstein, in recognizing the parallels between verses in Yasna 44 and Second Isaiah, acknowledge that the interpretation that Second Isaiah borrowed from this Gatha "depends on the date ascribed to certain of the Psalms," 283.

[299]In *Exile and Restoration*, Ackroyd writes that "[i]t is idle to speculate here again whether the political events provoked the prophecy or the prophet's insight read the events.

persuasive and articulate community leader, he powerfully demonstrated again and again his knowledge of contemporary political events within a world context, evidence of a finely tuned political sensibility. Perhaps, most important, in a world in which God (or the gods) were held as infinitesimally bound to daily life and to fate, the prophet's contention that the Judaean God was the one, universal God,[300] insinuated meaning into the exiles' predicament and hope for their collective future and, not coincidentally, their national aspirations.

In Second Isaiah's blueprint for the coming restoration, one significant element is missing: that of the reinstitution of the Davidic monarchy.[301] The dynamic of the theme of salvation, a product of the interweaving of past history (what has happened) to the message of Second Isaiah (what is now or about to happen) should result in complete restitution for the exiles.[302] Yahweh's judgment had been delivered; the ransom had been paid in double; and the exiles were to be gathered from the four points of the compass (43:1-7) and restored to Jerusalem. Once restored, what of their political system? The prophecies of Jeremiah promised that Yahweh "will make a righteous branch of David spring up" (Jer. 33:15) and that "David will never lack a successor" (33:17). Ezekiel prophesies that the "Lord God...will take a slip from the lofty

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The interlinkage between prophecy and event is really more subtle than a simple time sequence," 131-32.

[300]M. Smith, "II Isaiah," 418-20. The author offers that Second Isaiah may have borrowed some cosmological motifs from Persian material and identifies numerous similarities between Second Isaiah and Zoroaster's Gathas.

[301]McKenzie, xvi-xvii; Blenkinsopp, 191.

[302]John B. White, "Universalization of History in Deutero-Isaiah" in *Scriptures in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. Carl D. Evans, William W. Hallo and John B. White, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series 34 (Pittsburgh 1980), 185.

crown of the cedar and set it in the soil" (Jer. 17:22), an allusion to the reinstatement of the Davidic line following the exile. Ezekiel also projects a vision of a theocracy at whose head is a prince (Ezek. 46). It is curious then that no promise of the restoration of the Davidic dynasty is found within Second Isaiah. Indeed, by the period of the exile, the historical connection between Israel's kings and the prophets as "executors of the divine will and mediators between God and the people was well established."[303] Direct references to the period of the monarchy in Second Isaiah, in fact, are few. The name of David occurs in 55:3-5 but only as a demonstration of Yahweh's past faithfulness and love. It appears that Israel, "a light unto the nations," will not have a king at her head: "rather it is the whole people who will now be united with Yahweh, as David had been in the past, in an everlasting covenant."[304]

As in the line of the prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, before him, Second Isaiah sees God as the One who directs human history; he expands upon the concept of the apprehension of God in history. Second Isaiah also presents the exiles with a program for action. This program has as its parallel the return from the Egyptian exile to the national homeland led by Moses. Though God does act in history, the words of Second Isaiah make clear nonetheless that the Judaeans themselves were responsible for their condition of exile (50:1):

> The Lord says,
> Is there anywhere a deed of divorce
> by which I have put your mother away?
> Was there some creditor of mine

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[303]Blenkinsopp, 190.

[304]Whybray, *Second Isaiah*, 51.

to whom I sold you?
No; it was through your own wickedness that
you were sold
and for your own misconduct that your mother
was put away.

The punishment of exile was significant, however, only if it were seen in the context of the ultimate purposes of Yahweh, i.e., that Yahweh's purpose would be effected through the Judaeans. They were to accept God's will and be obedient to God's commandments and, by so doing, God would renew God's covenant with the Judaeans and then, in turn, promote God's agenda for the entire world.[305] In this way, the punishment of exile was seen to be a disciplinary action in which the future of the Judaeans would be assured.[306]

The message of Second Isaiah to the exiles, after fifty years of "captivity," their hope languishing, was "one of acceptance and of the realization...that it is in the moment of apparent failure that God is in reality at work."[307] What Yahweh was about to perform on behalf of the Judaeans, Second Isaiah proclaimed, was analogous both to the omnipotent act of creation and to the redemption from Egypt: "Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great abyss, and made the ocean depths a path for the ransomed" (51:10) and "Though he led them through desert places they suffered no thirst, for them he made water run from the rock, for them he cleft the rock and streams gushed forth" (48:21). Second Isaiah's allusions to the creative God, active in history, expressed and engendered hope for the

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[305]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 126-27.

[306]*Ibid.*, 126.

[307]*Ibid.*, 128.

future.[308] Here, the theme of "first and last things" (*ri'shonôt*-former things and *'aharonôt*-last things)[309] carries within it the message that the God of the "first" prophecies (Creation, the Flood, the Exodus) made known to the world these earlier prophecies and fulfilled them. God's reliability thus established, God's new prophecies, communicated through the medium of Second Isaiah, would undoubtedly be fulfilled as well.[310]

The drama of past events (powerfully illustrated by the *ri'shonôt*, the "first things") provided a backdrop for the contemporary drama -- the fall of Babylon. In this way, Second Isaiah set the stage to herald his last mission, i.e., to encourage the exiles' departure from Babylon just as their ancestors had once departed from Egypt: "Come out of Babylon, hasten away from the Chaldeans; proclaim it with loud songs of triumph, crying the news to the ends of the earth; tell them, 'The Lord has ransomed his servant Jacob'," (48:20) and "Away from Babylon; come out, come out, touch nothing unclean," (52:11). The *hadashôt* or "new things" relate chiefly to the words encouraging the return to Judah, so that the "new thing" in 43:14-21 is a renewal of what Yahweh had done in the past.[311] Significantly, these prophecies appear to derive from the political realities on the ground;[312] the

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[308]*Ibid.*, 130.

[309]Parallel with the concept of "last things" is *hadashôt* or "new things," i.e., the new prophecies that Yahweh will effect contemporaneously through human agents, see Haran, 127-55. Haran suggests that prophecies on the theme of "first and last things" may have been an underlying reason for joining the work of Second Isaiah, chapters 40-55, to the work of Isaiah, as found in chapters 1-39, 140.

[310]*Ibid*, 135.

[311]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 130.

[312]*Ibid.*, 131.

passages were probably uttered some time between the fall of Babylon and the first return.[313]

While the prophecies of Second Isaiah are attached to the realpolitik, they are not limited by them.[314] In the theological sense, the demonstration of the saving power of Yahweh was not intended solely for the edification of the Judaeans. The idea of Yahweh as the universal God--God's deliverance witnessed by "the whole world from end to end" ("The Lord has bared his holy arm in the sight of all nations" - 52:10), carries with it profound eschatological implications. God's purpose may be effected through Israel but is not limited to her; God's power reaches to the ends of the earth[315]:

> It is too slight a task for you, as my servant,
> to restore the tribes of Jacob,
> to bring back the descendants of Israel:
> I will make you a light to the nations,
> to be my salvation to earth's farthest bounds. (49:6)

Moreover, when the nations of the world witness God's choice of Israel once again, they will acknowledge Yahweh as the one true God: "Thus says the Holy One, the Lord who ransoms Israel....When they see you kings shall rise, princes shall rise and bow down, because of the Lord who is faithful, because of the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you," (49:7).

The final vision of the prophecies of Second Isaiah centers not merely on Cyrus' restoration of the exiles but a glorious return to Judah ("[the

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[313]Haran, 141-44. Furthermore, Haran writes that the return must have occurred during the reign of Cyrus, i.e., between 539 and 529 B.C.E., 142-43.

[314]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 130-31.

[315]*Ibid.*, 136.

nations] shall bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders" - 49:22). Other elements of this vision include the repopulation of the country ("enlarge the limits of your home, spread wide the curtains of your tent....re-people cities now desolate" - 54:2, 3), a luxurious rebuilding of Jerusalem ("I will set your stones in the finest mortar and your foundations in lapis lazuli....your boundary-stones shall be jewels" - 54:11-12), and even the development of a Judaean Empire[316] ("your descendants shall dispossess wide regions" - 54:3). Second Isaiah, like Jeremiah,[317] speaks of a "new covenant" with Yahweh; Second Isaiah's context, however, implies that this covenant belongs to the final phase in the development of the relationship between Yahweh and Yahweh's people: "I will make a covenant with you, this time for ever [sic]" - 55:3. This prophetic vision is a grandiose one, perhaps hyperbolic; nonetheless, the words of Second Isaiah must have renewed the hopes and reinformed the vision of the exiles.[318]

Second Isaiah prophesied to a third-generation community that, on some level (e.g., economic), must have enjoyed a measure of integration into

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[316]Julian Morgenstern, *The Message of Deutero-Isaiah in its Sequential Unfolding* (Cincinnati 1961), 9.

[317]Jeremiah 30:22 - "So you shall be my people and I shall be your God." The Book of Ezekiel also addresses the subject of the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and the exiles. Since the Judaeans had violated the Sinaic covenant, Ezekiel suggests that a "new" (replacement) covenant will be established between the exiles and God: "I will treat you as you have deserved, because you violated a covenant and made light of a solemn oath. But I will remember the covenant I made with you when you were young, and I will establish with you a covenant which shall last for ever [sic]" - 16:59-60.

[318]Morgenstern maintains that the exiles, now in the third generation, had "adjusted themselves sympathetically to their new environment and began to feel completely at home. Jerusalem was only a memory, hallowed perhaps, but a memory none the less...They were now Babylonians in birth, culture and spirit," 21. The Murashu Archive cited above (in the Ezekiel chapter), although from a later period, attests to the economic integration of the Judaeans, but the retention of the name syllable *"e l"* (of God) helps to confirm the maintenance of a community identity apart from the dominant culture.

Babylonian society and yet remained an identifiable community. Evidence for what kept them apart from the majority culture is only suggested by the prophet. He forcefully calls for observance of the distinction between "clean" and "unclean"; related rituals may have promoted religious or cultural taboos that, in turn, maintained a barrier between the exiles and the Babylonians: "Away from Babylon; come out, come out, touch nothing unclean. Come out from Babylon, keep yourselves pure, you who carry the vessels of the Lord" - 52:11. In this prophesy, the perpetuation of a cultic community is suggested by the existence of "the vessels of the Lord," i.e., ceremonial objects connected to the cult. Concern for purity is also manifested in the emphatic separation of the circumcised from the uncircumcised (52:1). His call to "let the wicked abandon their ways" (55:7) is a warning to any backsliding idol-worshippers.

The efficacy of the message of Second Isaiah may be seen in light of the prophet's connection to his immediate predecessor, Ezekiel. His spiritual heir, Second Isaiah restates and reinforces the eschatological message of Ezekiel as contained in Ezek. 40-48[319]: the temple will be rebuilt on a grand scale, emphasis will be on the purity of the cult and the justice of the people, and on the patrimony of the tribes. The contextual historical moment of Second Isaiah' message, however, is even more powerful than that of Ezekiel: Cyrus, the "redeemer," as proclaimed in the Cyrus Cylinder, is poised to enable the fulfillment of these prophecies.

The period of the return that follows is a history of the realization of a renewed communal life in the national homeland and of late prophecy during the Persian period. While the military and political success of Cyrus

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[319]Kraus, 231.

that led to the demise of Babylonia provided the historical opportunity, Second Isaiah had kept passionately alive the hope and the vision for the return to Jerusalem; his words found their resonance within the exiled Judaean community.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The history of the Babylonian Exile proved to be a watershed in the history of the ancient world: a conquered nation, forcibly taken into exile, did not disappear from the annals of history. After three generations in exile, the Judaeans or, at least, a small portion of the exiled population returned to Judah under the leadership of Ezra and, later, Nehemiah. Moreover, those that remained behind in Babylonia retained their distinct identity as a religious community for centuries onward where they produced such writings as the Babylonian Talmud.[320] This thesis posed the question of how this tribal people maintained its integrity outside of its ancestral land; how it sustained its national self-concept without its political institutions; and how this people perpetuated its national theology without its sacred space. The answers may be discerned from the Books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah.

In these writings, the prophets offered profound insights that would enable the Judaeans to endure the profound national traumas of defeat, deportation, and life in exile. These strengths lay in their understanding of

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[320]The Babylonian Talmud was written during the first half of the third century C.E. through 499 C.E. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1978 ed., s. v. "Babylonian Talmud" by Eliezer Berkovitz and The Editors, 755-56.

the contemporary political milieu, their intellectual ability to interpret synchronous events and, then, establish a theological rationale underpinning the covenantal relationship with their God -- all in light of the catastrophe of exile. To persuade their audience, the prophets had to evince charismatic leadership; their visions, their speeches, their gifts of oratory are demonstrated in the collected writings of their three books. Their very profession, by definition, outside of traditional political or social institutions, allowed for a radical departure in the interpretation of the experiences of the Judaeans from the "what was" and "what is" to the "what will be."[321]

The prophet Jeremiah, who catalogued the Judaeans' sins and chastised them accordingly, saw the proverbial "handwriting on the wall." Preaching in Judah during the years 622-586 B.C.E., Jeremiah had close relationships with the royal guard and his activities were known to the successive reigning kings, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, the latter even consulting in private with the prophet. Although a treasonous notion, he warned of the coming defeat of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. At the same time, however, he promised a "new" covenant with Yahweh, a compact that would offer forgiveness and protection and that would endure. While the Exile was a catastrophe for the corporate entity, Jeremiah, through his prophecies, introduced the notion of individual accountability. The Judaean people, the prophet assured, will be cleansed in exile, one person, one generation at a time. Perhaps, most important, he encouraged them to adjust to their situation in Babylonia--to build houses, to marry and to beget children among

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[321]In "Acculturation: Revitalization Movements," Wallace describes the collective institutions of a society as "the mazeway," 266-67. The concept of the mazeway derives from a holistic view of society that includes human and nonhuman subsystems and is definable as "a network of intercommunications," 266.

the alien nation. Ultimately, after the cleansing fire of exile, the people would be restored to Judah and, as if to underscore this promise for the future, Jeremiah travelled from Jerusalem to his home in Anathoth specifically to purchase land. Moreover, the God that spoke to Jeremiah, an omnipotent force who worked in history, acted not only on behalf of his covenantal people but also spoke through these actions to the nations of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon. Jeremiah projected the message not of merely a parochial God, but a God who concerned himself with the fate of other nations as well as the interests of Israel.

Ezekiel, the prophet of fantastic visions, was among those carried into exile, probably among the cortège of King Jehoiachin in March 597 B.C.E., the first tranche of the deportation. His prophecies, offered between 593 and 573 B.C.E., provide insight into the mindset of the Judaeans in captivity. A subject of the conquering nation and deported there as well, Ezekiel dated his prophecies, significantly, according to the regnal years of the Judaean king, Jehoiachin, imprisoned in Babylon. On behalf of his people, Ezekiel expressed the abiding belief in the continuity of the Davidic line and, in this way, helped to sustain the community's hope of a national restoration. Speaking to a people humbled by its exiled status, Ezekiel nonetheless characterized Judah as a power with which to reckon, for its God, Yahweh, was the *force majeur* behind world events--a concept implicit in Ezekiel's oracles against the nations. Moreover, in the consolation of his people, Ezekiel restated, by way of explanation, the raison d'être of its predicament, i.e., disobedience to God; from the perspective of Ezekiel, particularly grievous was the people's commission of cultic sin or idolatry.

Unlike Jeremiah who had severely chastised the community, Ezekiel acknowledged past misdeeds but, then, consoled and encouraged the exiles. He, too, suffered their punishment. He lived and travelled among them in communities along the Kebar River, including Tel-Abib. During a period of relative stability in Babylonia, Ezekiel seems to have enjoyed freedom of speech and, his audience, the freedom of assembly. He met with the elders of the community, a leadership group that appears to have organized itself even though the condition of exile had stripped its members of official status and recognition. Ezekiel preached to his people of extraordinary visions sent to him by Yahweh that served to edify the times. It is striking that in the Temple Vision, Ezekiel is depicted as being the sole mediator between the temple priesthood and God. A parallel is observed in Babylonia where Ezekiel served as the sole conduit between the *people* and God.

In the ancient world, where deportation was synonymous with the disappearance of a people, the dominant power of the host culture typically absorbed the new arrivals. The material richness of the Babylonian culture must have been very attractive to the Judaeans, a defeated people. While they may have been influenced by some Babylonian elements as reflected, for example, in the borrowed metaphors and vocabulary of Ezekiel (and later Second Isaiah), the Judaeans were not wholly seduced. Rather, they adapted. The vivid pictures that Ezekiel's visions painted, replete with imagery derived from the immediate surroundings, contained a core of meaning that connected the Judaeans to their history and projected a future for the entire community bound up with their land, their king and their God. In fact, the powerful impact of Ezekiel's visions derives from the syncretic imagery that he projected.

Speaking in Hebrew to his audience, Ezekiel immediately and powerfully distinguished the Judaeans' own cultural tongue from the Babylonian Aramaic. The prophet connected his audience with the ever-present reality of their situation and, at the same time, reconnected them with their own religious and historical traditions. Moreover, Ezekiel's vision of the future made the nation whole again. Yahweh would ingather all the tribal remnants -- all of God's chosen people, not only the exiles in Babylonia but those lost with the exile of the Northern Kingdom and those "vine-dressers" left behind in Judah. In the Chariot vision, the parallel made between the Babylonian experience of exile and the Egyptian enslavement and Exodus served to connect the Judaeans with their historical past and, at the same time, underscored the promise inherent in the Judaeans' contemporary predicament: sometime in the future, the Judaeans would be restored to their homeland.

The rationale for the exile, the purification of the community, is a fundamental theme in Ezekiel. The emphasis on what is "holy" and "unholy" and what is "clean" and "unclean" may have provided an important barrier to the assimilation of the community. In the same way, the significance Ezekiel attached to outward markings of difference, such as circumcision and the observance of dietary restrictions, also may have contributed to the distinctiveness of the Judaean community from its host. Far from their sacred space in Jerusalem where ritual could be conducted, Ezekiel exhorted the people to follow the "time-bound" observances of the Sabbath and Passover in lieu of the "space-bound" requirements of the cult. Thus, despite evidence of the Judaeans' social and economic integration

(albeit the evidence derives from the Murashu Archives of a later period)[322], these observances or rituals may have contributed both to preventing assimilation and to erecting additional barriers between the exiles and the majority culture of Babylonia.

The restoration also promised a new order of things. For example, Ezekiel described in the "new Jerusalem" differentiated roles within the priesthood, one role for the Zadokites, another for the Levites. Ezekiel also depicted a slightly altered political system for, while in his visions he projected the re-establishment of the Davidic monarchy, he spoke not of a king (*melech*) at the head of the restored state, but of a prince (*nas'i*) whose connection to the line of David, if any, is unclear. What is clear is that the future kingdom would comprise not just Judah but the former Northern Kingdom as well; moreover, all twelve tribes would be re-established in accordance with their historic patrimony.

Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel reinforced the theme that the sins of the generations can be purified through the fire of exile. Ezekiel carried the theological message one step beyond that of Jeremiah, however: the God-driven, "historical" relationship was not only about a people and its god, rather, it was a story with a divine purpose revealed within a *world* context.[323] Furthermore, Ezekiel preached that "right relationships" must be put in order, i.e., the purification and organization of the people and the land, the re-establishment of the monarchy, and the rebuilding of the Temple.

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[322]The Murashu tablets may be more telling in what they do not reflect, i.e., none of the documents that contain Jewish names was signed on the Sabbath or on a Feast Day. See Zadok; Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Judaism (Babylonian)," s. v. Moshe Beer, trans. Mehahem Erez, 1081.

[323]Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 117.

These elements thus ordered, and the exiles properly restored to their sacred city, Yahweh (i.e., Yahweh's omnipotence) will be made known to many nations. Through his message, then, Ezekiel conveyed to the Judaeans that their history was endowed with theological purpose and meaning, even while living in an "unclean land."

Through his visions, Ezekiel provided the rationale for and the inherent meaning of Israel's continuity. In exile, the prophet acted as the people's "watchman" and he comforted and consoled them. He exhibited leadership--with exemplary oratorical skills and as a survivor of (or victor over) his own physically challenging ordeals. Above all, Ezekiel transcended and transformed the exilic experience. He raised up his people with the message and the promise of real, not metaphoric, resurrection -- embodied in the Return.

The third prophet of the exilic period, Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55) presented a vision that promised momentous change for the Judaean people. Living amidst a period of political and military upheaval that resulted in the rise of the Persian Empire, Second Isaiah provided the Judaeans with comfort, consolation and hope in a new future. He offered his people a vision of their restoration to their national homeland--they who were virtually powerless would be empowered. Yahweh, their God who affects human history, acknowledged that their punishment had been paid twofold and would restore them. Similar to the earlier generation of Jeremiah (when Yahweh had employed Nebuchadrezzar as the instrument to punish the Judaeans for their disobedience to Yahweh's laws), now Yahweh would effect their release through his chosen agent, Cyrus. Second Isaiah assured them that nothing

would thwart their deliverance: "You will look for your assailants but not find them," (41:12).

Employing the metaphor of a widely known Babylonian ritual, Second Isaiah graphically depicted the means by which Yahweh instilled his power in Cyrus, i.e., the description of Yahweh taking Cyrus by the right hand--the symbolic endowment of power that was enacted on every new year at the *akitu* festival when the king grasped the hand of Marduk and thereby ensured prosperity and well-being for the coming year. Moreover, Cyrus is described as God's "anointed," perhaps an allusion to the Davidic line, and as God's "shepherd," an allusion to the leadership of Moses as he led his flock out of Egypt and, perhaps, an allusion with an even older provenance, that of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Bestowed with the awesome power of Yahweh, the prophet predicted, Cyrus would defeat Babylonia and then would free the exiles. Mirroring the Exodus from Egypt, Yahweh would build the exiles a road through the desert for their return to Zion.

Inherent in the message of Second Isaiah is the theological rationale for both the "despised" status of the exiled nation and the promise of redemption. Second Isaiah taught that Judah-in-exile should be seen as evidence of God's continuing love, not as evidence of the powerlessness of the Judaean God; the people caused their own exile as a result of their own disobedience to God's statutes. God's might, in fact, would be manifest not just in relationship to the Judaeans, but would be revealed as God works in *all* of human history. Second Isaiah described a world in which God's power and love of the people Israel will be recognized by other nations so that, in the final analysis, God will be seen and acknowledged as the universal God.

The events that would precipitate the universal recognition of Yahweh are the fall of Babylon and the redemption of the Judaeans; then would Yahweh's power be self-evident in all the world. In addition, a new (or renewed) covenant with the Judaeans would again restore the special relationship between this people and its God -- "this time [to last] forever." In his visions, Second Isaiah, in fact, predicted a new world order -- one that goes beyond the contemporary military victories of Cyrus, a world in which Israel would be seen as the paradigm: "I will make you a light to the nations" (2 Is. 49:6).

The words of Second Isaiah helped to make sense of a tumultuous period; his prophecies found resonance in the events of the day and reflected the influence of or an influence upon contemporaneous documents, such as the Cyrus Cylinder and the Persian Gathas of Zoroastrianism. In both Second Isaiah and the Cyrus Cylinder, Nabonidus or the Babylonians is/are seen to have ruled harshly; also, in both texts God or Marduk was angered and consequently punished, respectively, his own people.

The prophet seems to have been connected with seditious activity -- speaking out against the Babylonians and helping to foment opinion among his community that the advent of Cyrus and the Persian army was not only a positive development but that the Persian king was a "liberator" rather than a "conqueror."[324] In the Cyrus Cylinder a similar process is cited wherein the Babylonian god, Marduk, also summons a faraway redeemer.[325]

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[324]"I summon a bird of prey from the east, one from a distant land to fulfill my purpose. Mark this; I have spoken, and I will bring it about...I will grant deliverance in Zion and give glory to Israel," (2 Is. 46:11,13).

[325]Cyrus Cylinder: "He scanned and looked (through) all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler...(Then) he pronounced the name of Cyrus (Ku-ra-as), king of Ashan," in Pritchard, *ANET*, 315-16.

Whether or not Second Isaiah was directly influenced by Cyrus' agents in Babylonia or by direct contact with Zoroastrian teachings, of course, remains conjecture. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the Jewish prophet heard a magus speaking both of the power of Ahuramazda, the one eternal Being and "'Creator of all things through the Holy Spirit' (Yasna 44.7)," and of the Persian god's use of Cyrus as the instrument to accomplish his will.[326] No doubt, however, Second Isaiah "saw the [Persian] Supreme Being according to his own faith as Yahweh."[327]

While Jeremiah and Ezekiel looked forward to a future time, Second Isaiah brought prophetic eschatology (the prophecy of "the last things") more sharply into focus. Jeremiah specified that the period of exile would be completed after seventy years and a return to Judah would ensue (Jer. 29:10); Ezekiel quantified the punishment of exile as one day for each year of the nation's iniquity (Ezek. 4:4-7). Although "specified" and "quantified," the two prophets were vague regarding Yahweh's final act of salvation.[328] For Second Isaiah, the time of the "final" or "last things"[329] was identified with a real historical event, the rise of Cyrus. Thus, God's great act of deliverance brought the future into the present.[330]

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[326]Davies and Finkelstein, 283.

[327]*Ibid.*, 283.

[328]Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Eschatology (Early Jewish)" by George W. E. Nickelsburg, 581.

[329]The "final" or "last things" is defined as the "time when the course of history will be changed to such an extent that one can speak of an entirely new state of reality"; see Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Eschatology (Early Jewish)," 575.

[330]*Ibid.*, 581.

Within the prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, echoes are found of the three traditional convenantal promises -- the patriarchal, the Sinaitic and the monarchical each containing expectations involving the future.[331] While Jeremiah and Ezekiel provided the explanation for God's punishment and the promise of redemption, Second Isaiah offered the theological rationale for the "purpose" for which the covenants would be renewed: Israel was consecrated to be a model community for the world. If Israel were to become a paradigm, she would have to survive the Exile.

The challenges to the survival of the people Israel, a defeated, minority community living among a materially prosperous nation (one that was particularly hospitable to assimilation) were enormous, calling into question, the relevance of their peoplehood, their cult and their God, Yahweh. Situated in Babylonia, the Judaeans, a "cognitive minority," were faced with three options: (1) surrender, i.e., assimilation; (2) "defiance"; or (3) engagement in a "cognitive bargaining process," i.e., adaptation without assimilation.[332] The reformulation necessitated by the third option, adaptation, was successfully accomplished by the three prophets who were the focus of this study.[333]

With the evidence at hand, the key element in the maintenance of the exiles' group identity and national-religious aspirations thus appears to be the exceptional leadership of the prophets -- Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah. Each, in turn, experienced a series of visions or revelations and each engaged

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[331]Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "Eschatology (OT)," David L. Petersen, 577.

[332]*Ibid.*, 19-24; Gowan, 146.

[333]Wallace, 270. In its initial form, reformulation occurs in the mind of an individual; such insights are not the result of group deliberations. Wallace writes: "With very few exceptions, every religious revitalization movement with which I am acquainted has been originally conceived in one or several hallucinatory states of a single individual," 270.

in reformulating, and thereby revitalizing, the theological basis for the group's raison d'être and their distinctive identity, apart from the majority culture. Each was endowed with excellent communication skills and his words were invested with a missionary spirit. Each prophet promised the exiles that they would be the beneficiaries of Yahweh's care and protection and that good would derive from their continued identification with the people Israel.[334]

Although much of the period of the Babylonian Exile remains clouded over for lack of corroborative contemporaneous sources, the insights provided by the Books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, examined together with the available epigraphical and archaeological evidence, permit critical insight into the social, political and religious dimensions of the exiled Judaean community, often within a world context. In sum, the three prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, collectively enabled the survival of the people Israel in exile. Until new evidence is discovered, the prophetic leadership of the exiled Judaeans must be considered the primary factor in the revitalization and continuity of the Jewish community and, perhaps, the key to 2,500 years of survival in diaspora.[335]

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[334]While Wallace's study, "Acculturation: Revitalizing Movements," focused on Native North American communities, the model that he developed for analyzing minority groups within a majority culture and focusing con charismatic leadership, is especially apt, 270-76.

[335]The adjective, "Jewish," derived from the noun "Jews" (*Yehudim* in Hebrew and *Yehudin* in Aramaic), here, is used in the sense of the descendants of those exiles who returned to Judah from Babylonia; see Davies and Finkelstein, 219. For a discussion of additional definitions of the term, see Davies and Finkelstein, 219-33.

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