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Edited by  
Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin

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# Images of Exile: Representations of the “Exile” and “Empty Land” in Sixth to Fourth Century BCE Yehudite Literature

JOHN KESSLER

## 1. Introduction: Foundational Concepts

Some fifteen years ago, biblical scholars were engaged in a vigorous discussion of a constellation of issues surrounding Israelite experience during the Babylonian and Early Persian periods. Debate swirled around matters such as the population of Yehud at various moments in the sixth and fifth centuries, the date, nature, and extent of the destruction of the Southern Kingdom by the Babylonians, whether or not the “exile” and “deportation” actually occurred (and if it did, its extent and effects), cult practice at the Jerusalem temple after its destruction, the dating and provenance of the biblical literature of the period, the sociological landscape of diverse groupings of Yahwists which the Babylonian invasions created, and the interaction between these various groups, to name a few.<sup>1</sup> In many ways the notion of the “empty land” stood at the centre of this discussion inasmuch as it was frequently asserted that the conceptualization of the land as empty was largely a fictional construct by means of which the Babylonian Returnees (or *golah*, that is, the descendants of those carried off into exile in the early sixth century) disenfranchised the population that had remained in Yehud during the Babylonian period as well as their descendants, and designated themselves as the only true heirs of the Israel of earlier tradition. Thus it became common to speak of the “myth of the empty land”<sup>2</sup>—that is, the *golah* Returnees’ counterfactual portrait of the land

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1 Cf. the survey of some of these issues in J. Kessler “Reconstructing Haggai’s Jerusalem: Demographic and Sociological Considerations and the Quest for an Adequate Methodological Point of Departure,” in *Every City Shall Be Forsaken: Urbanism and Prophecy in Ancient Israel and the Near East* (eds. L. Grabbe and R. Haak; JSOTSup 330; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 2001), 137-158; idem, *The Book of Haggai: Prophecy and Society in Early Persian Yehud* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 59-96.

2 Thus for example H. M. Barstad, “On the History and Archaeology of Judah During the Exilic Period,” *OLP* 19 (1988): 25-36; idem, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Book of Isaiah: ‘Exilic’ Judah and the Provenance of Isaiah* (Oslo: Novus Instituttet for sam-

as empty, which served as a vehicle through which to support their hegemonic ideology and claims. A variety of descriptions of this group were proposed. On one end of the spectrum stood the highly sympathetic depiction of this group by Daniel Smith-Christopher, who viewed their theological expression and polity through the lens of post-traumatic stress disorder, experienced as a result of the horrors of exile.<sup>3</sup> At the opposite end, numerous scholars viewed the *golah* Returnees as an exploitive elite who returned to a rather densely-populated Yehud and created the “myth of the empty land” as a vehicle by which to disenfranchise the autochthonous, non-deported Judeans, and achieve social, political, and ideological hegemony, to the total exclusion of all others.<sup>4</sup> Some have suggested that the *golah* Returnees were not in any way ethnically related to the earlier inhabitants of the land, but rather were Persian-appointed settlers who created the narrative of “early Israel” out of whole cloth and imposed it upon the local population.<sup>5</sup> Numerous other studies acknowledged the ideological function of the portrait of the land as uninhabited at the time of the return in certain texts (such as Jer, 2 Kgs, Ezra, and Neh),<sup>6</sup> while at the same time noting

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menlignende kulturforskning, 1997), 40-55; idem, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah During the ‘Exilic’ Period* (SOSup 28; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996); idem, “After the ‘Myth of the Empty Land’: Major Challenges in the Study of Neo-Babylonian Judah,” in *Judah and the Judeans in The Neo-Babylonian Period* (eds. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 3-20; R. P. Carroll, “Exile! What Exile? Deportation and the Discourses of Diaspora,” in *Leading Captivity Captive*, (ed. L. L. Grabbe; JSOTSup 278; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 62-79; idem, “The Myth of the Empty Land,” *Semeia* 59 (1992): 79-93.

- 3 Daniel Smith-Christopher, *The Religion of the Landless* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); idem, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).
- 4 Thus, among many others, R. Carroll, “The Myth of the Empty Land,” *Semeia* 59 (1992): 79-93; F. Gangloff, “Le ‘pays dévasté et dépeuplé’: Genèse d’une idéologie biblique et d’un concept sioniste: une esquisse,” *BN* 113 (2002): 39-50; E. Farisani, “The Israelites in Palestine during the Babylonian Exile,” *OTE* 21 (2008): 69-88.
- 5 Cf. T. M. Bolin, “When the End is the Beginning: The Persian Period and the Origins of the Biblical Tradition,” *SJOT* 10 (1996): 3-15; T. L. Thompson, *The Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); idem, “The Exile in History and Myth: A Response to Hans Barstad,” in *Leading Captivity Captive: The Exile as History and Ideology* (ed. L. L. Grabbe; JSOTSup 278; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 101-18.
- 6 Cf. P. R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.* (OTL; London: SCM, 1968); C. E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period* (JSOTSup 294; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); idem, “Ideology and Archaeology in the Neo-Babylonian Period: Excavating Text and Tell,” in *Judah and the Judeans in The Neo-Babylonian Period* (eds. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 301-22; H. G. M. Williamson, “Exile and After: Historical Study,” in *Faces of Old Testament Study*, 1999, among many oth-

the presence of counter motifs in these very texts as well as elsewhere in the HB.<sup>7</sup>

The work of Ehud Ben Zvi, who has written extensively on a variety of issues concerning the Babylonian and Persian periods, constitutes a significant piece of this scholarly literature. Four of Ben Zvi's observations deserve special note with reference to the subject of the present study. The first regards the literature produced in Yehud. Ben Zvi notes that, despite its being redacted and produced by a relatively small group of literati, this literature displays a remarkable diversity.<sup>8</sup> The second is the pervasiveness of the concept of "exile" in the litera-

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ers. Cf. also recently D. Rom-Shiloni, "Ezekiel as the Voice of the Exiles and Constructor of Exilic Ideology," *HUCA* 76 (2005): 1-45; idem, "From Ezekiel to Ezra-Nehemiah: Shifts of Group-Identities within Babylonian Exilic Ideology," in *Judah and the Judeans: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (eds. G. N. Knoppers, M. Oeming and O. Lipschits; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).

- 7 Thus for example, S. Japhet, "The Concept of the 'Remnant' in the Restoration Period: On the Vocabulary of Self-Definition," in *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 432-49; idem "Postexilic Historiography: How and Why?" in *From the Rivers of Babylon*, 307-30; H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Waco: Word, 1985); B. Oded, "Where is the 'Myth of the Empty Land' to be Found? History versus Myth," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (eds. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns), 55-74; P. R. Bedford, *Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah* (JSJSup 65; Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001).
- 8 E. Ben Zvi, "The Urban Centre of Jerusalem and the Development of the Literature of the Hebrew Bible," in *Urbanism in Antiquity: From Mesopotamia to Crete* (eds. W. E. Aufrecht, N. A. Mirau and S. W. Gauley; JSOTSup 244; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1997), 194-209; idem, "What Is New in Yehud? Some Considerations," in *Yahwism after the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Period* (eds. R. Albertz and B. Becking; STAR 5; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2003), 32-48. Cf. also the similar observations and excellent insights of N. Lohfink, "Was There a Deuteronomistic Movement?" in *Those Elusive Deuteronomists* (eds. L. S. Shearing and S. L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 268; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 60-62 (54). Lohfink's approach to the production of the biblical literature is quite similar to Ben Zvi's, in that both presuppose a limited number of 'literati' at work in the same chronological and geographical contexts. Similarly both are interested in the role of schools and the study of texts in the creation and re-reading of religious tradition. They differ, however, on the matter of the historical and geographical matrix in which such activity occurred. Ben Zvi favors Yehud in the fifth and fourth centuries as the primary milieu for literary production, while Lohfink stresses the importance of earlier activity among the Babylonian Diaspora, which would have been brought back to Yehud and continued in the libraries/schools of both Judah and Jerusalem. He therefore speaks of an 'exilic conversion movement' among the Eastern Diaspora ("Deuteronomistic Movement?" 62). I have added that such activity need not be excluded from the late sixth and early fifth centuries both in Jerusalem and possibly other centers in Yehud ("Reconstructing Haggai's Jerusalem," 151-56). Cf. also R. F. Person, *The Deuteronomistic School: History, Social Setting and Literature* (Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 56-63.

ture of Yehud, and the centrality of this concept (expressed in various ways) for Yehudite self-understanding.<sup>9</sup> Third, he correctly notes that in certain contexts the exclusivist language with reference to the totality of destruction and deportation found in these texts is stylistic and rhetorical, rather than strictly historical-descriptive. Thus, statements of totality should be seen as a form of synecdoche (whole for part, all for elite) referring to the deportation and return of elites.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, “official” policy to the contrary, mechanisms were created to incorporate the non-exiled population into membership in the *golah*.<sup>11</sup> This phenomenon is observable even in texts such as Ezra-Nehemiah where highly exclusivist language is used. Fourth and finally, biblical historiography ought to be viewed as manifesting both stability and fluidity with reference to the events that are described. As such, biblical representations of the past tend to reflect “malleability within limits.”<sup>12</sup> That is to say that generally speaking, while the expression of specific events may be highly fluid and susceptible to significant reshaping on the basis of ideological concerns, this fluidity does not involve complete freedom from the constraints imposed by common memory of the events themselves (or traditions regarding these events).

With these four considerations in mind I would like to proceed to a brief reconsideration of the biblical data regarding the “exile” and “empty land” and its function *vis-à-vis* the reconstitution of Israelite religious self-conception in the Persian period. My purpose will be to demonstrate that while the biblical materials do, in the main, portray the experience of exile and depopulation of the land as the *sine qua non* of belonging to the community which constitutes the heirs of Yahweh’s purposes for monarchic Israel (Judah and Israel), the *parameters of inclusion and exclusion*, and the *form and function* of the motifs of exile and empty land display a great deal of diversity and thus vary from text to text. Thus, far from forming a single monochromatic core narrative, the broader image of destruction/empty land/return is actually a composite

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9 E. Ben Zvi, “Inclusion in and Exclusion from ‘Israel’ in Post-Monarchic Biblical Texts,” in *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essays for G.W. Ahlström* (eds. S. W. Holloway and L. K. Handy; JSOTSup 190; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995), 95-149.

10 *Ibid.*, 121.

11 *Ibid.*, 111-12; 128-29; Cf. also my observations in Kessler, “Persia’s Loyal Yahwists: Power Identity and Ethnicity in Achaemenid Yehud,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 91-122 (107-12); and Japhet, “Remnant,” 438-45.

12 E. Ben Zvi, “Malleability and Its Limits: Sennacherib’s Campaign against Judah as a Case Study,” in *Like a Bird in a Cage: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE* (ed. L.L. Grabbe; JSOTSup 363; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 73-105.

one, consisting of diverse elements, frequently standing in tension with one another.

This chapter, then, will examine a series of texts dealing with these themes and seek to determine within each one the *polarities* of inclusion/exclusion, the *rationale and ideological justifications* for the emptying of the land, and the underlying metaphors which describe the emptying and repopulation of the land in the various texts. In pursuit of these matters I will ask the following questions of the various texts considered: who is accepted and who is rejected, and why? Who stays in the land and who departs, and for what reasons? What fate awaits those who remain and those who stay? What happens to the land and what happens in the land? As this is a brief preliminary study intended as a preface to a further reaching work, my analysis cannot be in any way comprehensive. Rather, I will survey a selection of representative texts manifesting the most prominent polarities, rationales, and underlying metaphors. Furthermore, the constraints of this study preclude a detailed analysis of these texts. Thus, I will focus primarily on the content of these texts as it relates to matters of exile, empty land, and restoration and I will offer only the most general of statements regarding the texts' origins and literary development. It may simply be asserted that these texts originated in or were re-read in Persian Yehud.

## 2. Yehud after 587

Before proceeding, it is important to comment briefly on the current state of our knowledge regarding the demographic situation in the land in post 587 Judah/Yehud. Whereas a decade or so ago it may have been possible to speculate that the Babylonian destruction was somewhat limited, and that for the population in general, life continued as normal,<sup>13</sup> such claims are rarely heard today. The important archaeological and demographic studies by Charles Carter<sup>14</sup> and, more recently, Oded

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13 Cf. Barstad, *Myth*, 61-71. Similar positions are held by E. Janssen, *Juda in der Exilszeit ein Beitrag zur Frage der Entstehung des Judentums* (FRLANT 69; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956); H. Kreissig, *Die sozialökonomische Situation in Juda zur Achämenidenzeit* (Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients 7; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1973).

14 Charles Carter, "The Province of Yehud in the Post-Exilic Period: Soundings in Site Distribution and Demography," in *Second Temple Studies 2: Temple and Community in the Persian Period* (eds. T. C Eskenazi and K. H. Richards; JSOTSup 175; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 107-45; idem, *The Emergence of Yehud*.

Lipschits,<sup>15</sup> based on extensive and careful analysis of recent surveys, archaeological investigations and other methodologies, have greatly clarified our understanding of the period. Lipschits' conclusion is essentially that the land, while not totally empty, suffered a severe devastation of its social and economic infrastructure. Jerusalem was largely destroyed, as was the surrounding territory. The shrinking of provincial boundaries left the Shephelah and significant tracts of the south outside the province.<sup>16</sup> The only region to escape extensive disruption was the Benjaminite territory, with its capital at Mizpah. This centre was likely the provincial capital under both the Babylonians and Persians, and remained so until the mid-fifth century.<sup>17</sup> While it is generally estimated that between 10 and 25 percent of the population went into exile,<sup>18</sup> widespread population loss was experienced through death, disease, and emigration to other regions. Lipschits estimates the population of Yehud to have been 30,000 at its maximal level in the later part of the Persian period, and approximately 28 percent of its level at the end of the Iron Age.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, levels during the Babylonian period and early return would have been much lower—a mere 10 to 20 percent of its level in the monarchic period. Thus while it would be inaccurate to say that the land was “totally empty,” it is not far from the mark to describe it as *fractured and relatively emptied*.<sup>20</sup> As noted

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- 15 O. Lipschits, “Judah, Jerusalem and the Temple,” *Transeu* 22 (2001): 129-143; idem, “Demographic Changes in Judah between the Seventh and Fifth Centuries B.C.E.,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (eds. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 323-76; idem, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005).
- 16 Cf. also A. Lemaire, “Histoire et administration de la Palestine à l’époque perse,” in *La Palestine à l’époque Perse* (eds. E.-M. Laperrousaz and A. Lemaire; Paris: Cerf, 1994), 11-53; idem, “Les transformations politiques et culturelles de la Transjordanie au Vie siècle av. J.C.,” *Transeu* 8 (1994): 9-27; idem, “Populations et territoires de la Palestine à l’époque Perse,” *Transeu* 3 (1990): 31-74.
- 17 Thus A. Lemaire, “Nabonidus in Arabia and Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (eds. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 265-98 (291-92).
- 18 Cf. T. Römer, *The So-called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical, and Literary Introduction* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 108-09. Römer notes that the majority of scholars hold to an estimate of between 5-10%, while R. Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (Studies in Biblical Literature 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature), 81-90, posits a much higher figure of about 25%. Furthermore, as is often noted, significant attention must be paid to population loss through emigration to surrounding provinces, and death due to war, famine and disease. Cf. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 94-95; Lemaire, “Les transformations politiques et culturelles,” 9-27.
- 19 Lipschits, *Fall and Rise*, 261-271 (270, table 4.3).
- 20 Lipschits notes, “These data do not leave any room for Barstad’s conclusions, expressed as the ‘myth of the empty land.’ The data further show unequivocally that

above, the language of totality need not indicate an absolute state of affairs, but rather may be used hyperbolically.<sup>21</sup> It may be appropriate to say, therefore, that the biblical texts thus offer diverse reflections on the reality of a *vastly devastated land*<sup>22</sup> rather than to say that such a perspective was “invented out of whole cloth.” Malleability, in this case, should be understood as tolerant of the portrayal of extensive devastation as total devastation, but not of the depiction of general stability as complete discontinuity.

Let us proceed then to an examination of several representative texts which set forth various polarities of exclusion and inclusion vis-à-vis membership in the community of Yahweh, on the basis of different rationales for destruction and emptying for the land and employ diverse metaphors and motifs for the experience of judgment and the path toward hope for the future.

### 3. Critical Texts Regarding the “Exile” and “Empty Land”

#### 3.1. Texts Favoring the 597 Exiles<sup>23</sup>

Recent scholarship has underlined that in its earliest formulation, the ideology favoring the Babylonian *golah* was exclusively focused on the 597 deportees. This was expressed in terms of approbation for Jehoiachin and the 597 exiles, and the rejection of the broader mass of all other Yahwists, (including those who remained in Judah, some of whom were exiled in 587).<sup>24</sup> We will explore how this radically exclusive bifurcation is attenuated in other traditions *infra*. Let us first examine the following two texts which manifest this earlier perspective in a highly explicit way.

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the destruction and exile were indeed historical events, described in their full harshness in the biblical historical record and reflected in the lamentations and prophecies of this period.” *Fall and Rise*, 27, n. 267.

21 Ben Zvi, “Exclusion and Inclusion,” 124, n. 81.

22 Ben Zvi explores the degree to which historical realities are alterable in his article “Malleability and Its Limits.” See note 11, above. Cf. also on this point, Oded, “Where is the ‘Myth of the Empty Land,’” 65-6.

23 On the history of this period cf. Albertz, *Exile*, 52-64.

24 Cf. esp. the article of C. Levin, “The Empty Land in Kings” in the present volume. Levin underlines his own work, as well as that of Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann and Hermann-Joseph Stipp, which has sought to demonstrate the transformation from an exclusively pro-597 perspective to a broader Babylonian *golah* exclusivism in various texts. On the exclusivism of the 597-deportees and their relationship to an exile edition of the Deuteronomistic History, cf. Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 162-3.

### 3.1.1. Jeremiah 24.<sup>25</sup> Inclusion of the 597 Exiles. Exclusion of Those Who Remain in the Land and the Egyptian Diaspora.

This programmatic and complex text is among the most explicit and foundational in the setting up of polarities between various groups of Yahwists in the late monarchic period and beyond. It clearly demarcates Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) and the members of the 597 deportation, who are viewed as constituting the kernel from which future hope will spring (the “good figs”), from all other Yahwists, who are viewed with the severest of contempt and rejection (“the bad figs”). The implications of this profound bifurcation have recently been explored by R. J. R. Plant, who provides a comprehensive survey of the various approaches that have been proposed regarding the perspective of Jer 24, and the redaction of Jeremiah as a whole.<sup>26</sup> Critical to the discussion is the great difficulty of understanding the relationship between the ultimate redactions of Jeremiah (MT and LXX), and ch. 24 which pronounces weal for the 597 Babylonian deportees and woe upon all others—that is to say, those remaining in the land after 587 as well as those then dwelling in Egypt (24:8).<sup>27</sup> The text allows for no future additions to the 587 deportees in subsequent deportations. What is more, those then residing in the land, named as Zedekiah, his officials, and the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land (24:8), will be driven to a variety of loca-

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- 25 The literary history of this chapter is extremely complex and greatly disputed. Some see it as originating in the period between 597 and 587: J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (2d ed.; New York: Doubleday, 1990); W. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); others as a product of the exilic period: J. P. Hyatt, *Jeremiah, Prophet of Courage and Hope* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958); E. Nicholson, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 1-25* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); and still others of the Persian period: W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986). Perhaps the *statu quaestionis* here can be expressed by Duhm’s remark, cited by McKane (616), that Jer 24 is “a historical riddle which cannot be completely solved.”
- 26 R. J. R. Plant, *Good Figs, Bad Figs: Judicial Differentiation in the Book of Jeremiah* (LHBOTS 483; New York/London: T & T Clark, 2008), 29-46. Plant surveys the approaches of K.-F. Pohlmann, C. R. Seitz, and N. Kilpp. His work is especially useful in its emphasis on the critical position occupied by the 597 exclusivism of Jer 24 for an understanding of the redactional history of Jeremiah.
- 27 Various scholars, such as Paul Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia* (2d ed.; Leipzig: Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung Scholl, 1928); Winfried Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1-25* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973) view the reference to those dwelling in Egypt as a redactional addition (as cited in McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 611). This indeed may reflect a literary history whereby this oracle was originally directed against the non-exiled population represented by Zedekiah, and later redactionally expanded. However this not need necessarily be the case. Space does not permit a fuller discussion here.

tions<sup>28</sup> where they will be utterly destroyed and be objects of shame, disgrace and the severest humiliation (24:9).<sup>29</sup> The vocabulary here draws on traditional covenant maledictions and strongly emphasizes the fact that the population has been rejected by Yahweh and stands under his wrath. The exiles to Babylon, by contrast, will be the objects of Yahweh's favour. He will return them to the land and plant them securely (24:6). The text portrays the central difference between the two groups as consisting in the Babylonian *golah's* future turning toward Yahweh with all their heart (24:7). The capacity for such a change is seen as rooted in their having been chosen by Yahweh and his act of giving them "a heart to know him" (v. 7a). Thus the underlying motif here is that of the future repentance (v.7)<sup>30</sup> of this community which serves to transform its destiny and to renew its relationship with Yahweh. This renewed relationship is affirmed by the use of the traditional covenant formula: "I will be their God and they will be my people" (v. 7).<sup>31</sup> Commentators frequently point out the associations between this text and the new, interiorized covenant of Jer 31:27–34, and the inward working of the Spirit of Yahweh in Ezek 36. It is essential to note, however, that in Jer 24 no mention is made of the present piety of this group, or their true knowledge of Yahweh.<sup>32</sup> They are clearly not without guilt, and, as such, experience banishment from the land (cf. Deut 28). Rather, the grounds of this group's acceptance lie in their future repentance, the capacity for which is given by Yahweh, with no explanation regarding the reason for this choice. As such the basis of Yahweh's favor of this group would appear inexplicable.<sup>33</sup> In sum, the rationale for the judgment of this group is their violation of the covenant, and the basis for their restoration is the capacity for repentance, a gift of Yahweh himself. No mention is made of exile as purging or purifying the land or community.

Several observations are relevant here. First, this text is the starkest biblical representation of a rigid bifurcation of the Yahwistic commu-

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28 בְּכִלְיֵהּ מִקְמוֹת אֲשֶׁר-אֶדְוִיתִם שָׁם

29 The deuteronomic theme of expulsion from the land followed by annihilation, central to Deut 28, will be discussed *infra*.

30 כִּי-יִשָּׁבוּ אֵלַי בְּכִלְיָם

31 Cf. Exod 6:7; Deut 14:2; 2 Sam 7:24; Jer 7:23; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 14:11; Zech 8:8.

32 A point stressed by M. Noth, "La catastrophe de Jérusalem en l'an 587 avant Jésus-Christ et sa signification pour Israël," *RHPR* 33 (1953): 81-102 (90). This is a highly significant point which I will develop later in my analysis of the outworking of the skimming and preserving motif in Ezra-Nehemiah.

33 The seeming arbitrariness of Yahweh's election of the 597 community is a vexing one and it forms the central focus of Plant's study. Cf. also the commentaries, which also vigorously engage this question.

nity affirming the inclusion of the 597 deportees and their descendants to the exclusion of all other Yahwists. As Plant has observed, this constitutes a crucial enigma regarding the dating of this oracle, and the redaction of Jeremiah as a whole. Second, this oracle regards the exile as occurring in two stages—a first stage, which, although certainly an act of judgment, was essentially an act of deliverance through which the good figs were preserved, then a second comprehensive and total judgment where the land is devastated and the remaining population exiled or destroyed, without hope of redemption. Simply put, in Jer 24, once the 597 exiles have been removed, the die is cast. Third, as noted above, the bifurcated destiny of the good and bad figs is puzzling since no present righteousness or repentance is predicated of the good figs, nor is there any stress on the evil of those who remain (cf. Jer 42:18; 44:1–30). Fourth, it may be appropriate to see this text as foundational<sup>34</sup> for the development of the underlying motif which will become central in Ezra and Nehemiah—that which I have described elsewhere as the skimming and preserving model, wherein a small, geographically circumscribed remnant of the nation is skimmed off and preserved, while the larger group is judged and cast off forever.<sup>35</sup> Thus in the implied narrative of the course of events from the sixth to fourth centuries as depicted in the biblical materials, Jer 24 sets the stage for the events described in Ezra-Nehemiah. Furthermore, while participation in the sufferings of exile constitutes a virtual *sine qua non* for inclusion in the future restoration in the majority of the biblical traditions,<sup>36</sup> the restricting of inclusion to those whose experience is geographically defined is limited to only some traditions. The preservation of a specific group in a specific place is thus an inherent constituent of the skimming and preserving metaphor regarding identity as a “true” Yahwistic community. This metaphor, as we shall see, runs from, Jer 24 and Ezek 33 to 2 Kgs 25 to Ezra-Nehemiah.

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34 Cf. Rom-Shiloni, “Ezekiel as the Voice,” *passim*, for the relevance of Ezekiel in the development of this perspective. Cf. her analysis of the diachronic development in “From Ezekiel to Ezra-Nehemiah.”

35 J. Kessler, “The Diaspora in Zech 1-8 and Ezra-Nehemiah: The Role of History, Social Location, and Tradition in the Formulation of Identity,” in *Community Identity in Judean Historiography: Biblical and Comparative Perspectives* (eds. G. N. Knoppers and K. Ristau; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns), 119-45.

36 On the exceptional case of Haggai, see *infra*.

### 3.1.2. Ezekiel 11:14–21. Reassurance of the Divine Presence with the Exiles of 597

This oracle deals with the claim of those who remained in Jerusalem following the 597 deportations *vis-à-vis* those who had been exiled. The post-597 remainees are portrayed as maintaining that the exiles had been rejected by Yahweh, and that therefore their lands now belonged to those who remained, and who by implication had not been rejected (11:15).<sup>37</sup> The oracle is a categorical refutation of such a claim. Ezekiel's oracle bears both significant similarities to and differences from Jer 24. Like Jer 24 it promises that the 597 deportees will return to the land (11:17), and will experience a renewed heart and spirit (11:19) and a renewed covenantal relationship with Yahweh ("then they shall be my people, and I will be their God" 11:17). However in contrast to Jer 24 the present text affirms Yahweh's presence with them, not in the future, subsequent to their turning, but in the present. Yahweh thus asserts that although absent from the land, these exiles are not deprived of his presence. Rather Yahweh will be a *טַעַם מְקַדְּשׁ*<sup>38</sup> to them (11:16) in their exile. The notion of Yahweh's freedom of movement, common in Priestly traditions, likely lies behind this assertion.<sup>39</sup> It should be noted, however, that strictly speaking this text does not exclude the non-deported population in Yehud, rather, it affirms Yahweh's presence with the *golah* and delegitimizes any attempt to appropriate their land and to view them as rejected. In sum, this text serves to underscore the Babylonian *golah's* status as a legitimate Yahwistic community, despite its experience of exile. However unlike Jer 24 it stops short of rejecting all other Yahwists. No explicit mention is made of the destruction or

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- 37 Cf. W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Herme-  
neia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 260-264; and J. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (NCB; London:  
Nelson, 1969), 94, who view it as originating in 597; and *pace* Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 20-  
48* (WBC 29; Dallas: Word, 1994), 163; and W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*  
(Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 143, who view it as a dislocated post 586 oracle.  
Cf. also D. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapter 1 - 24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerd-  
mans, 1997), 342-43, who situates it in the earlier period.
- 38 The translation of this phrase, generally rendered along the lines of the NRSV's "a  
sanctuary for a little while," and its implications are legion, and cannot detain us  
here. For a recent discussion cf. B. Oded, "Yet I have been to them *lemikdash me'at* in  
the countries where they have gone' (Ezek 11:16)," in *Sefer Moshe* (eds. C. Cohen, A.  
Hurvitz and S. Paul; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 103-114; cf. also  
Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 262; Andreas Ruwe, "Die Veränderung tempeltheologischer  
Konzepte in Ezechiel 8-11," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999),  
3-18.
- 39 On this motif cf. T. E. Fretheim, "Priestly Document: Anti-temple?" *VT* 18 (1968):  
313-329; D. M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches*  
(Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 136-40.

exile of those who remain, in contrast to Jer 24's two phases of judgment, noted *supra*. Indeed the future of the non-exiled population remains quite undetermined here—certainly nothing precludes future exiles joining their fellows at a later date.<sup>40</sup> However the mention of the land's "detestable things and abominations" (11:18) which the returnees must eschew lest they perish (11:25) does appear to intimate that upon their return the exiles will encounter such things in the land. This would seemingly imply that the non-exiled population is viewed as continuing to practice the ways which brought down judgment upon the land. Nevertheless, this is stated subtly at best. The motif of Yahweh's presence outside the land likely evokes broader Priestly notions of the dwelling of Yahweh with his people in the wilderness, and by implication suggests that those in exile constitute the true heirs of the original community in the wilderness. However such a concept lies undeveloped at this point.

In sum, this oracle asserts Yahweh's presence with the 597 exiles, without explicitly precluding all hope for others who reject the detestable practices which have provoked Yahweh to abandon his dwelling place and land. Through subtle implication the locus of hope is identified with those in exile, while the land is viewed as experiencing ongoing pollution until their return. No mention is made of the exile itself effecting a purification of the land or people (cf. Lev 26:43; 2 Chr 36:21).

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40 The reference to the Yahwists to whom Yahweh says "I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel" (11:17), poses an interesting question. Do we have here a reference to the broader Diaspora, and thus the origins of the 'gathering and scattering' motif anticipating the 'pan-Israelite' return of *all* exiles, whatever their location (on this see *infra*)? J. Lust ("Exile and Diaspora: Gathering from Dispersion in Ezekiel," in *Lectures and relectures de la Bible: Festschrift P.-M. Bogert* [eds. J.-M. Auwers and A. Wénin; BETL 144; Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1999], 99-122, esp. pp. 114-16), among others, has argued that such is not the case. Rather, he maintains that these words express a later addition to Ezekiel's oracle, reflecting the existence of a widespread Diaspora. Such an addition would reflect an expansion of the original oracle, limited to the 597 deportees, to include the broader Diaspora of a far later period. Yet, as we shall see, it is by no means clear that such thinking is necessarily late, as seen by its presence in Zech 1-8, Isaiah and Micah.

### 3.2. Ezek 33:21–29. The Explicit Inclusion of All the Babylonian Exiles and Exclusion of the Yahwists Remaining in Yehud.

Ezekiel 33:21–29 stands at a transition point between traditions affirming the inclusion of only the 597 exiles<sup>41</sup> to the exclusion of all others (as per Jer 24), and those open to the acceptance of those who would join them as a result of subsequent deportations. Strictly speaking, within the world of the oracle itself, the prophet addresses only the 597 exiles (despite the fact that the date of the oracle is clearly post-587).<sup>42</sup> However, the oracle's content is likely to have been redactionally configured to suggest inclusion not only of the 597 group but also of those who subsequently joined them. This seems to be inferred by the mention of the escapee (הַפְּלִיט מִירוּשָׁלַם) who arrives from Jerusalem (33:21), likely to be understood as one who has escaped the 587 destructions.<sup>43</sup> Here, as in Jer 24 (but different from Ezek 11:14–21) the oracle expresses a clear polarity: the acceptance of the Babylonian *golah* versus the rejection of those who remained in Jerusalem after 587. The latter group claimed that just as Abraham was one individual, yet he inherited the whole land, so they too, who dwelt in Jerusalem would inherit the land, while the exiles would be disenfranchised (33:24; cf. 11:14–21). The subsequent oracle expresses Yahweh's firm assertion that such will never be the case. This is underlined through the repeated sarcastic rhetorical question, "Will *you* possess the land?" (33:25, 26).<sup>44</sup> However unlike Jer 24, where the specific sins of the "bad figs" are not mentioned, here the sins of the Jerusalemite population, which constitute the ground of their rejection and render them ineligible to inherit the land, are listed in detail (33:25–26). These sins are close but not identical to the stan-

41 It is widely held that the 597 exiles would have been integrated into existing communities of exiles from the Assyrian deportations, but the text here is silent regarding them. On this cf. B. Oded, "Observations on the Israelite/Judean Exiles in Mesopotamia During the Eight-Sixth Centuries B.C.E.," in *Immigration and Emigration in the ancient Near East: Festschrift E. Lipinski* (eds. K. Van Lerberghe and A. Schoors; Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Department Oriëntalistiek, 1995), 205-12; idem, "The Settlements of the Israelite and Judean Exiles in Mesopotamia in the 8th-6th Centuries B.C.E.," in *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography Presented to Zecharia Kallai* (eds. G. Galil and M. Weinfeld; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 91-103; idem "Fundamentals of the Assyrian and Babylonian Policy of Exile in Connection with the Study of the Israelite and Judean Exiles in Mesopotamia," in *Homage to Shmuel: Studies in the World of the Bible* (eds. Z. Talshir, S. Yona and D. Sivan; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute/Ben-Gurion University Press, 2001), 298-318.

42 Cf. W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel II: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 25-48* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 192-93.

43 Thus Zimmerli, *Ezekiel II*, 192; and Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, 152.

44 Perhaps the divine outrage expressed in this question subtly evokes Abraham's own question in Gen 15:8, "How may I know that I will possess it?" בְּמַה אֶדְעֶה כִּי אֶרְשָׁנָה

dard more typical Priestly catalogue of primary sins deserving of severest punishment—idolatry, incest, and the shedding of innocent blood.<sup>45</sup> It is furthermore significant that here (*pace* Jer 24:9) no mention is made of the remaining population going into exile where, by implication, they may theoretically repent and be restored to a relationship with Yahweh (as in Ezek 11:17). Rather the land is to be emptied through the annihilation of those who reside in it and have defiled it.<sup>46</sup> Thus it appears that while Ezek 11:14–21 leaves open the possibility of the inclusion of further, post 597 exiles, Ezek 33 foresees only destruction for the post 587 population. The stress is placed on the desolation (*שָׁמָמָה וּמִשְׁמָמָה*) of the land (cf. Ezek 6:14; 35:3) and the absence of any one passing through it (*מֵאִיִּן עוֹבֵר*) 33:28).<sup>47</sup> The reason for Yahweh's judgment upon the nation is all the abominations which it has committed (*כָּל־תּוֹעֲבוֹתֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם*) 33:29), evoking the broader concept of the violation of the Priestly covenant (cf. Lev 26). In this text we encounter, in embryo, a motif which will become central in other Priestly understandings of the exile and empty land: that is the Priestly motif of "purgation and purification"—that is, the land's devastation and expulsion of its inhabitants, so that it might be cleansed from the violation it has suffered (cf. Lev 18:28; 20:22).

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- 45 J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 13-14, with bibliography; idem, "Idolatry, Incest, and Impurity: Moral Defilement in Ancient Judaism," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 29 (1998): 391-415; T. Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification and Purgation in Biblical Israel," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (eds. C. Meyers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 405-12; D. P. Wright, "The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity," in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel* (eds. S. Olyan and G. Anderson; JSOTSup125; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 150-181.
- 46 The vomiting out of the inhabitants who have defiled the land is a standard trope in Priestly theology; cf. Lev 18:24-25. A similar fate is likely implied in Ezek 11:21. It is noteworthy that in Ezek 11:16–17 the language of exile among the nations is reserved for the 597 deportees, while in the Deuteronomistic tradition such language generally refers to the community as a whole, which will receive the judgment it rightly deserves (cf. Deut 28:25; Jer 15:4; 29:18; 34:17).
- 47 This image stands somewhat in tension with that of Ezek 11:18 where the former exiles return to find that nothing has changed—the same abominations are still being practiced in the land—abominations that they, in turn, purge. The image of a land through which no one passes is used significantly elsewhere (Isa 34:10; 60:15; Zeph 3:6); cf. the related terminology in Zech 7:14.

### 3.3. Texts Expressing the Exclusion of the Egyptian Diaspora (Jer 40:7–41:18; 42:1–22; 43:1–13; 44:1–30).

The redactional history of these passages and their relationship to the redaction of Jeremiah has been extensively discussed, and cannot be entered into here. One general approach to the material, widely accepted in current scholarship, is that Jeremiah's original message, promoting submission to Babylon and holding forth hope for ongoing life with Yahweh in the land, lies at the root of the "non-dtr" portions of Jer 37–44.<sup>48</sup> This source (sometimes called the "Jeremiah Memoir") promoted submission to the Babylonians before the siege of Jerusalem, as well as before and after the assassination of Gedaliah.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, in the Jeremiah Memoir the negative characterizations of the remnant who escaped to Egypt are wholly due to their refusal to heed the word of Yahweh and remain in the land (Jer 42:7–22). Römer argues that this earlier perspective regarding those who remained in the land and subsequently fled to Egypt was transformed by the deuteronomistic redactors of Jeremiah into an all-encompassing condemnation of the Egyptian Diaspora especially in chs. 43–44.<sup>50</sup>

A careful reading of Jer 40–44 confirms the presence of these two distinct perspectives on the fault of the Egyptian Diaspora and the reason for the emptying of the land. In Jer 40:1–41:18, a passage reflecting the perspective of the Jeremiah Memoir on remaining in the land, submission to Babylon is a very real option.<sup>51</sup> However, after the assassination of Gedaliah fear of the Babylonians prevails, and all those remaining in the land seek to flee (41:16–18). When an oracle is sought from Jeremiah regarding flight into Egypt (42:1–6), the response is an offer of hope if the community remains in the land (42:10–12) but an overwhelming condemnation of any attempt to leave it (42:13–22). This is followed by a description of the people's refusal to heed Jeremiah's words and the departure of the community into Egypt (43:1–7). The pericopes which follow consist of a long tirade regarding the fate of this community (43:8–44:30). This section itself contains three oracles. The first (43:8–13) is addressed to the group of escapees who arrived in

48 Cf. T. Römer, "How Did Jeremiah Become a Convert to Deuteronomistic Ideology?" in *Those Elusive Deuteronomists*, 196–98; cf. also Lipschits, *Fall and Rise*, 339–348.

49 Lipschits, *Fall and Rise*, 350–351.

50 Römer, "How Did Jeremiah?" 197, states, "At the end of this new edition, chs. 43–44 present a very harsh criticism of the Egyptian Diaspora, which seems very well established. So we should date this second edition not earlier than the end of the exilic period, or, better, at the beginning of the Persian period."

51 Thus C. R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW 176; Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1989), 78–97 (79–81).

Tahpanhes under the leadership of Johanan. The second is a condemnation of the entire group of Judeans in Egypt for their corrupt religious practices (44:1–14). The third (44:15–30) concerns a dispute with the Judean community at Patros.<sup>52</sup>

Significant differences in emphasis may be noted between the oracles in 42:7–17 and 18–22 on the one hand, and the three in 43:8–44:30 on the other. In 42:7–17, 18–22, the land is emptied because the remnant left in place by the Babylonians refuses to heed the prophetic word through Jeremiah and leaves it. Yet this attempt at self-protection on the part of this group will be of no avail. Just as Jerusalem has been devastated (42:18) so the Yahwistic community in Egypt will be made a byword (42:18) because of the total devastation that will likewise fall upon it, due to its failure to heed the prophetic word. We note here that none of the sins of the Jerusalemite community, which resulted in Yahweh's destruction of it, are recounted with reference to the remnant of Judah (שְׂאֲרֵי־יְהוּדָה 42:15) of this text. The implication is surely that had the people remained in Judah, they would have known Yahweh's blessing (42:10–12).<sup>53</sup> However, by disobeying the word of Yahweh their God (לְבַלְתִּי שְׁמַע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם 42:13) and leaving the land, they bring down judgment upon themselves. From the perspective of this section, the land is empty because the remnant leaves it.

The situation is radically different in 43:8–44:30, a section containing several oracles. In the first oracle (43:8–13) judgment is pronounced against Egypt, announcing its conquest by Nebuchadnezzar. No mention is made of the empty land, nor of any specific rejection of the Diaspora members. However, their presence in Egypt makes them liable for death and deportation (42:11). The second oracle (44:1–14) stresses the total disaster which has come upon Judah, especially the depopulation of the land's cities (וְהָיָה חֲרָבָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְאִין בָּהֶם יוֹשֵׁב 44:2). The reason for this is given in the description of their corrupt religious practices (44:3), and their rejection of the prophetic word with which Yahweh confronted them (44:4–5). The devastation of the land is again men-

52 Cf. the analysis of P. Piovanelli, "Condamnation de la diaspora égyptienne dans le livre de Jérémie (JrA 50,8-51,30 / JrB 43,8-44)," *Transue* 9 (1995): 35-49 (47). Piovanelli provides a reconstruction of what he calls JrA (a reconstituted Hebrew text), based on the LXX, and JrB, his reconstitution of the Hebrew using the MT as well as other witnesses. On the Egyptian Diaspora cf. also A. de Pury and T. Römer, "Terres d'exil et terres d'accueil. Quelques réflexions sur le judaïsme postexilique face à la Perse et à l'Égypte," *Transue* 9 (1995): 25-34.

53 On this section as an example of 'counterfactual history' cf. E. Ben Zvi, "The Voice and Role of a Counterfactual Memory in the Construction of Exile and Return: Considering Jeremiah 40:7-12," in the present volume. I will briefly discuss Ben Zvi's proposals in my analysis of 2 Kgs 25:22-26, *infra*.

tioned in 44:6. Here, however, the Egyptian Diaspora is portrayed as being as corrupt as their Jerusalemite co-religionists (*pace* 42:18–22, where the sole fault of the community is rejection of the word of Jeremiah and refusal to remain in the land), because they worship the works of their hands and the gods of Egypt (44:8–10). The result is that the community will be utterly destroyed, except for a few survivors who may later return to the land (44:11–14).<sup>54</sup> The third oracle (44:15–30) responds to the members of the community who defiantly reject the prophet's word (44:15–19). The prophet then reiterates the earlier judgment of Yahweh, especially the devastation of the land (44:20–21) and condemns the Egyptian Diaspora to the same fate (44:22–23). This community is described as “Judah who is in Egypt” (כְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם 44:26).<sup>55</sup> Judgment is pronounced upon it, unto complete destruction (עַד-קְלוֹתָם 44:27). In sum, one may say that 43:8–44:30 describes the Egyptian Diaspora and the “bad figs” of Jer 24 in similar terms: both will share the same fate—utter rejection and destruction. As noted *supra* it is widely held that this section, especially ch. 44, represents an exilic deuteronomic revision of an earlier, Jeremiah memoir, transforming it into an exclusivist affirmation of the Babylonian *golah*.<sup>56</sup> Two perspectives are thus discernable in Jeremiah 40–44 regarding the polarities of inclusion/exclusion and the rationale for judgment. An earlier edition of these oracles, focusing on Jeremiah and his message of submission to Babylon, sets up the polarity of those who heed Yahweh through remaining in the land and obedience to the prophetic word versus those who do not. From this perspective the rationale for exclusion is abandonment of the land and refusal to heed the prophetic word. However this earlier polarity has been reconfigured to reflect a *golah*-centered orientation. As such the foundational point of separation becomes the approbation of the Babylonian *golah* and the exclusion of those remaining in the land and those in Egypt. At this level, the ground for this rejection is the corrupt religious practices of those in the land as well as those of the Egyptian Diaspora. As well, the (quasi-) total destruction of that community is predicted. Interestingly, in these oracles the affirmation of the Babylonian *golah's* inclu-

54 The mention of survivors and return here is surprising and complex, and goes beyond the scope of this study. On the textual issues in 44:14 cf. W. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26-52* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 278.

55 In an interesting parallel to this text, Zechariah speaks of “Zion who dwells in Babylon” (Zech 2:11[ET7]).

56 Cf. notes 52 and 53, *supra*. Piovanelli (“Condamnation,” 49), by contrast, sees it as a later rejection of the pretensions of Egyptian community with its temple and heterodox practices by the Jerusalemite priesthood.

sion in Yahweh's purposes is accomplished largely *e silentio*. No statement appears regarding the present piety or future turning of the Babylonian exiles—in fact they do not appear in this section at all.

### 3.4. Texts Insisting on the Full Emptying of the Land as a Result of Israel's Disobedience.

#### 3.4.1. Leviticus 26:14–45

This passage contains both an enumeration of maledictions for covenant violation and the expression of hopes for restoration<sup>57</sup> within the blessings and maledictions of Leviticus 26, itself a conclusion to Lev 17–26,<sup>58</sup> frequently designated as the Holiness Code.<sup>59</sup> Numerous scholars maintain that the text was produced in stages, following the catastrophe of 597.<sup>60</sup> Even some of those who affirm that the bulk of the chapter was originally formulated in the eighth century view our passage as having been reworked during the sixth century.<sup>61</sup> In this passage traditional curse vocabulary, frequently employing the horrific realities of siege warfare, is utilized to describe Yahweh's execution of the vengeance of the covenant (חֲרֵב נִקְמַת נִקְמֵי־בְרִית 26:25) upon the nation.<sup>62</sup> The land will be totally devastated, and all its inhabitants exiled (26:31–33). Several features of this passage are significant for our purposes here. First the text knows only one decisive devastation, not destruction in several stages as in Jer 24, Ezek 11 and 33. Second, no distinction is made between groups of exiles in various locations, or between those exiled and those who remain in the land. Completely

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57 On the structure of this section cf. J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas: Word, 1992), 456–62.

58 B. A. Levine, "The Epilogue to the Holiness Code: A Priestly Statement on the Destiny of Israel," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (eds. J. Neusner, B. A. Levine, and E. S. Frerichs; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 9–24.

59 The bibliography regarding H, and its relationship to P and the Pentateuch as a whole, is immense and cannot be engaged here.

60 Levine, "Epilogue," 25.

61 Cf. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3B; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2365. Milgrom views vv. 33b–35, 43–44 as an exilic interpolation to an earlier eighth century text, related to the reforms of Hezekiah. He states, "The same verdict, however, cannot be rendered for vv. 33b–35, 43–44, which feature the sabbatical theme. As argued in the NOTES on these verses [cf. *ibid.*, 2322–25, 2336–38], the neglect of the sabbatical year is introduced to account for the delay in the redemption of the exiles."

62 Cf. Levine, "Epilogue," 22–24, for a discussion of such language in both biblical and extra-biblical material.

unique, however, is the mention of the enemies who come to dwell in the land, and who will be appalled at its utter destruction (26:32).<sup>63</sup> The land will suffer complete devastation and be utterly empty. It therefore goes without saying that here there is no distinction made between those who are exiled and those who remain in the land (*pace* Jer 24 and Ezek 33). Restoration, however, is possible for those who have been exiled if they confess their iniquity and that of their ancestors, humble their hearts, and make amends (vv. 40–41).<sup>64</sup> Thus for Lev 26 it is clear that both repentance and the suffering of banishment are prerequisites for the renewal of the covenant and the restoration of Yahweh's favour.<sup>65</sup> Third, the land itself must recover the Sabbaths owed to it, and of which it has been deprived.<sup>66</sup> Levine summarizes the last two points succinctly: "According to v. 43, both the land and the people atone for their sins. The people atone through submission to God after the prolonged sufferings of exile; the land atones by "making up" for its neglected Sabbath years. The sabbatical theme, so prominent in the Holiness Code (Lev 23: 15ff.; 25:1–22; etc.), here is applied with cruel irony; because the land did not lie fallow every seventh year while the Israelites lived on it, as had been commanded, it will now lie desolate, bereft of its people."<sup>67</sup>

For our purposes, then, Lev 26:14–45 represents a text which utilizes the empty land motif in a distinct way. Unlike Jer 24, 40–44, and Ezek 33 which focus on distinctions between various Yahwistic groups, or Ezek 11 which stresses the presence of Yahweh with the 597 exiles, in Lev 26 the land is emptied out of theological and relational necessity. The just demands of the covenant require a complete devastation, and the possibility of renewal likewise cannot be achieved without the sufferings of exile, repentance notwithstanding. In this context, then the

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63 Hartley, *Leviticus*, 468, notes the stress of the *smm* root in the passage. The imagery here is similar to Ezek 33:25. Note the contrast between this portrayal and that of Ezek 11:18, which presupposes the ongoing practice of abominations in the land on the part of the local population.

64 On these elements and on the phenomenon of penitential prayer in general, cf. the essays in *Seeking the Favor of God, Volume 1: The Origins of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism* (eds. Mark J. Boda, Daniel K. Falk, and Rodney A. Werline; Early Judaism and Its Literature; Atlanta: SBL, 2006).

65 On the broader issues of sin repentance and forgiveness in biblical literature cf. M. J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and its Remedy in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009); R. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005); J. Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: The Ashan and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance* (Leiden: Brill, 1976).

66 A similar perspective is found in 2 Chr 36:21. The limits of the present study preclude a treatment of the perspective of Chronicles.

67 Levine, "Epilogue," 25.

overriding polarity is between those exiles who repent and those who do not. Out of theological necessity no one is left in the land. In support of this polarity, two primary motifs are employed: first, with reference to the people, the idea of the suffering of banishment as effecting a purging of the sins of the community, to be accompanied by their repentance; second, with reference to the land, the motif of Sabbath rest denied/Sabbath rest restored. These form an expansion of the Priestly purgation and purification pattern already seen in Ezek 33.

### 3.4.2. Deuteronomy 28:15–68

This section details the maledictions and judgments to which Israel assents in accepting Yahweh's covenant. As such Yahweh may rightfully bring these things upon the nation should it persist in covenant violation. The maledictions are sometimes seen as comprising three groups of threats (vv. 15–44; 45–57; 58–66).<sup>68</sup> One aspect of these maledictions involves complete "destruction" of the land such that the people ultimately perish (vv. 20, 22, 24, 48, 51, 61).<sup>69</sup> It is critical to note that the principal means through which the destruction of the population is effected is their removal from the land (28:24, 51, 63–64).<sup>70</sup> As Lust has demonstrated, the essence of the LXX's use of *διασπορα* (which in Deut 28:25 is used to translate אֲזַרְתָּ) is that of "dissipation and annihilation," or more precisely "annihilation and loss of identity through dispersion."<sup>71</sup> The theme of covenant violation bringing disaster, total loss of the land, exile, and subsequent complete destruction without mention of a remnant constitutes one significant stratum with the broader deuteronomistic perspective (cf. Deut 4:26; 6:15; 11:17; Josh 9:24; 23:13, 15–16; Jer 27:10). Thus, unless such language is viewed as merely rhetorical, one must assume that deuteronomistic thought may have at one time considered the possibility that Yahweh could potentially remove the people from the land, leaving it utterly desolate, and surrender those survivors of the disaster to their fate as victims of their enemies, a fate which would ultimately lead to their disappearance.<sup>72</sup> Some fea-

68 So J. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (JPSTC; Philadelphia/Jerusalem: JPS, 1996), 261-74. The literary history of the passage cannot be dealt with here. However it is widely argued that this section grew in several stages of accretions.

69 The primary verbs employed for the destruction of the people are עָבַד and שָׁמַד

70 Both terms for "land," אֶרֶץ and אֲדָמָה figure in these descriptions.

71 Lust, "Exile and Diaspora," 105, 110.

72 Could this perspective belong to Lohfink's 'Deuteronomistic Movement' of the Josianic period (Lohfink, "Deuteronomistic Movement?")? One can only speculate. However I do think that on the eve of the 587 destructions the Judean population in general and the deuteronomistic tradents in particular would have had no assur-

tures of Deut 28 stand in common with Lev 26: both see the devastation of the land as a necessary result of covenant violation; both see one single destruction; both see the land as totally emptied; neither speak of any preference for one group of Yahwists over another or use the motifs of exile and empty land to advance any exclusivist claims. However unlike Lev 26, Deut 28 sees no possibility of repentance for the people, nor sabbatical rest and renewal for the land. In Deut 28 (and in deuteronomistic literature in general) the land is the primary gift of the covenant.<sup>73</sup> When the covenant is violated beyond repair, the gift is revoked, the nation is deprived of the protection afforded by land and covenant, and it becomes subject to merciless exploitation and ultimate destruction.<sup>74</sup> The return to Egypt foreseen in Deut 28:68 deposits the few remaining survivors of the people exactly where they were before Yahweh came to their aid. R. Friedman's comment that one strand in deuteronomism tells "the story from Egypt to Egypt" appears quite appropriate in this regard.<sup>75</sup> Thus, in Deut 28 no true polarity is presented. The people as a whole are threatened with expulsion and destruction through assimilation and annihilation. The underlying motif is that of persistent covenant violation requiring the revoking of the gift of the land, and ultimately the destruction of the offenders. Any explicit mention of the polarity of inclusion of the Babylonian *golah* and exclusion of all others, so common in deuteronomistic literature, is absent from this section.

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ance of any form of national survival beyond the disaster that loomed before them. A. de Pury and T. Römer draw attention to the ongoing discussion in the critical study of deuteronomistic literature regarding the differences with the *dtr* texts over the possibility of restoration after disaster ("L'historiographie deutéronomiste: histoire de la recherche et enjeux du débat," in *Israël construit son histoire* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1996), 46. Perhaps the perspectives of Deut 30: 1-10 (restoration with return to the land) and Deut 4:25-31 (restoration in exile) constitute responses to the unexpected reality of the people's ongoing existence as an international ethno-religious community, markedly different from its earlier life during the monarchic period. Cf. Jeremiah's hope in Jer 32:6-15. On Yahwism's emergence as an 'international' religion cf. G. N. Knoppers, "Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change: The Judean Communities of Babylon and Jerusalem in the Story of Ezra," in *Community Identity in Judean Historiography* (eds. G. N. Knoppers and K. A. Ristau; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns), 147-71 (170-71).

73 This theme is well known. For a convenient summary cf. P. D. Miller, "Gift of God: Deuteronomic Theology of the Land," *Interpretation* 23 (1969): 451-465; M. E. Tate, "Deuteronomic Philosophy of History," *Review & Expositor* 61 (1964): 311-319; J. D. W. Watts, "Deuteronomic Theology," *Review & Expositor* 74 (1977): 321-336.

74 Cf. Tate, "Deuteronomic Philosophy," 314-16.

75 R. E. Friedman, *The Exile and Biblical Narrative: The Formation of the Deuteronomistic and Priestly Codes* (HSM 22; Atlanta: Scholars, 1981), 35, cited in de Pury and Römer, "Historiographie," 49.

### 3.5 The Babylonian *golah* as the sole repository of authentic Yahwism: texts describing a complete emptying of the land, and removal of the true Israel to Babylon

#### 3.5.1. 2 Kgs 25:22–26<sup>76</sup>

This penultimate pericope in the DtrH describes the attempt of the Babylonian appointee, Gedaliah, to encourage submission to the Babylonians and thus ensure ongoing life in the land (25:24). Remnants of the Judean royal house, however, assassinate Gedaliah and some of the Babylonians with him at Mizpah (25:25). Fearing reprisals, the entirety of the population (כָּל־הָעָם מִקָּטָן וְעַד־גָּדוֹל) (25:26) flees to Egypt. The land is left totally empty. The emphasis on totality is underlined by the fact that this pericope is placed after the comment that Judah had been exiled out of its land (2 Kgs 25:21).<sup>77</sup> Thus despite the validity of Ben Zvi's general arguments that at times the elite stands for the whole, here the text seeks to underline specifically that no remnant at all is left in the land. This depiction is often seen as an implicit expression of the exclusion of the non-exiled Yahwists which the post-520 returnees encountered at a much later date (if the land was empty of all Yahwists, the autochthonous population cannot be "Israel"). Discussion of such exclusionary measures is hotly debated, and cannot be engaged here.<sup>78</sup> However, the assumption that the depiction of the land as empty after 587 serves primarily and virtually exclusively as a means of disenfranchising the non-exiled population of a far later period (late sixth to mid-fifth centuries) is to assume more than is warranted. In fact several considerations speak against viewing it as a retrojected image of the conflicts of a later period. First, there is a very real dearth of evidence for extensive land tenure or returnee-remainee conflict in the late sixth century. It is extremely difficult to find any traces of it in the literature of the period.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore the demographic scope of the early returns

76 On the various historical and literary issues relative to the Gedaliah pericopae in 2 Kgs 25:22-26 and Jer 40:7-41:18, cf. C. Levin, "The Empty Land in Kings," in the present volume; and O. Lipschits, *Fall and Rise*, 333-347. Lipschits views the two accounts as likely stemming from an original, based on first-hand observations.

77 While many would see 25:21 and 25:26 as stemming from differing redactions (cf. C. Levin, "The Empty Land in Kings," in the present volume), these two descriptions of the emptying of the land were, in the end, allowed to stand in tandem.

78 For a survey cf. Kessler, "Reconstructing Haggai's Jerusalem," 138-42; and idem, "Persia's Loyal Yahwists," *passim*.

79 Cf. H. G. M. Williamson, "Comments on Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*," *JHS*, vol. 7, article 2 (available at <http://www.jhsonline.org>), who points out that there is very little evidence of intra-communal conflict in the late sixth century. See also, Bedford, *Temple Restoration*, 85-95, 104-10, 160, 279-80.

was extremely limited both numerically and geographically, the returnees settling for the most part outside the Benjaminite territory (the primary centre of the remaining population).<sup>80</sup> Second, to affirm that 2 Kgs 25:22–26 serves primarily as a returnee tactic to disenfranchise the remaining population is to imply that the text itself was largely a product of a much later period—a hypothesis difficult to sustain. Third and most importantly, 2 Kgs 25:22–26 serves a very real ideological purpose in the context of the DtrH: like Deut 28 it stresses that Yahweh's judgment has been fully executed, the gift of the land has been suspended, and violation of the covenant has left the people back where they languished before Yahweh's gracious intervention. No negative portrait of those left in the land is presented in 2 Kgs 25 (*pace* Jer 24; 44; Ezek 33). Fourth and finally, if it may be determined that the "exilic edition" of the DtrH was redacted at least in part by and for a Babylonian exilic audience,<sup>81</sup> presumably one of its preoccupations, (in conjunction with the other literature conserved, read, and reworked by the deuteronomistic writers in Babylon),<sup>82</sup> would have been to stress that despite Yahweh's full and comprehensive judgment on the nation, the Babylonian *golah* owed its existence to the mercy and protection of Yahweh. Reading 2 Kgs 25 with a highly exclusionary focus risks approaching it in the light of Jer 24, Ezek 33 and Ezra-Nehemiah and missing its primary assertion: the wrath of Yahweh has been fully spent, the land is empty, and the covenant and its gifts placed severely in doubt.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless the remnant reading/hearing this account remained alive and as such the possibility of repentance, renewal, and restoration was still a potential reality. Thus, in its most basic formulation, the total emptying of the land described here may be seen as the fulfillment of the judgments enacted against the people for their covenant violation, similar to the perspective of Deut 28. However, given that the text was clearly formulated and read by those who were now dwelling outside the land but who themselves had not perished, this text may secondarily be read as an affirmation of the *golah* as a remnant in the mid-sixth century.

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80 Cf. Lipschits, "Demographic Changes in Judah," 323-77 (346-66). Cf. also idem, *Fall and Rise*, 360-78.

81 Thus for example, Lohfink, "Deuteronomistic Movement?" 60-62; Römer, *So-called Deuteronomistic History*, 163-64.

82 This is a critical piece in Lohfink's argument ("Deuteronomistic Movement?" *passim*). His proposal of a group of exilic deuteronomistic literati closely parallel Ben Zvi's group in Yehud, but places them in an earlier period.

83 On the question of the fate of the covenant at this stage in the minds of the deuteronomistic school cf. G. N. Knoppers, "David's Relation to Moses: The Contexts, Content and Conditions of the Davidic Promises," in *King and Messiah* (ed. J. Day; JSOTSup 270; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 91-118.

Nothing, however, requires that these perspectives be read as an expression of the tensions which stressed relations between the *golah* returnees and non-deported Judeans of the later sixth and fifth centuries.

One further consideration reinforces this approach to 2 Kgs 25: 22–26. E. Ben Zvi has persuasively suggested that Jer 40:7–12, a text parallel to this pericope, be read as “counterfactual history”—that is, a stimulating reflection on what might have been had events unfolded differently.<sup>84</sup> Differences between the two passages notwithstanding, 2 Kgs 25:22–26 does indeed function in a similar way. What then would have been the purpose and impact of such a text on its mid-sixth C (or later) readers? Rhetorically, the brief narrative in 2 Kgs 25 (and to an even greater degree the parallel in Jer 40) reads very much like a tragedy.<sup>85</sup> Gedaliah offers the remnant the possibility of remaining in the land and continuing their existence under Babylonian suzerainty (25:24). However, remnants of the royal family assassinate the governor and provoke a wholesale flight to Egypt.<sup>86</sup> Jeremiah 40 greatly increases the drama by the warning Gedaliah receives regarding the plot against him, a warning he ignores (40:14). In any case, both narratives tantalizingly hold forth the possibility of hope through remaining in the land. In a sense, the (sympathetic) reader hopes (in vain) that the community will submit to the Babylonians in obedience to the preaching of Jeremiah—hoping that at the very last moment wholesale uprooting could have been averted and a remnant could remain in the land (yet knowing full well that this hope went unfulfilled). This of course leaves the question of how the *golah* could have retained its self-understanding as the sole locus of true Yahwism if an obedient remnant had stayed in the land. Counterfactual histories in a sense do not have to resolve such questions because they ultimately portray events which did not transpire. Gedaliah and the remnant in the land did not take heed, and thus that avenue of hope was blocked: the remainder of the population fled to Egypt and nothing more is reported about them. The land was desolate and empty. What hope was there for the future? The broader configuration of the DtrH, with its reports of the twofold exile to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:10–16; 25:11), and its concluding notice regarding Jehoiachin’s rehabilitation (2 Kgs 25:27–29) leave no doubt as

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84 Ben Zvi, “The Voice and Role of a Counterfactual Memory,” in the present volume.

85 A similar counter-factual and tragic narrative is that of the fate of Saul and his family in 1 Sam. Cf. J. C. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 16–44.

86 It is difficult not to see a pro-597-Jehoiachin and anti-Zedekiah voice in this implicit criticism of the actions of the remnants of the royal house provoking a flight to Egypt.

to where that future hope might lie. In sum, 2 Kgs 25:22–26 serves as the mid-point in the implied narrative continuum established by the sequential reading of Jer 24/Ezek 33/2 Kgs 25 and Ezra-Nehemiah. The land is left devastated and empty. Babylonian *golah* represents the community's only hope for the future. The skimming and preserving motif, noted earlier, is thus implicitly at play here.

### 3.5.2. Ezra-Nehemiah

The motif of *golah* exclusivism in Ezra-Nehemiah is well known and need not be rehearsed here. According to the dominant vision within this text, the returnees arrive in Yehud and encounter no remaining descendants of the inhabitants of the former Northern or Southern Kingdoms, but rather only the hostility of the "people(s) of the land" (who are identified as non-Israelites who have been settled in the land by the Assyrians, Ezra 4:2),<sup>87</sup> as well as the inhabitants of Samaria and other regional powers, who oppose the attempts of the *golah* group to restore proper Yahwistic worship and obedience (Ezra 3:3; 4:1, 4–6; 7–16; Neh 4:1–8; 6:1–8, 10–14; 13:6–8).<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, all foreign elements are extirpated from the community (Ezra 9:1–10:44; Neh 9:1–3; 10:30; 13:1–3, 6–9, 23–31) lest the "holy seed" (Ezra 9:2) be corrupted. Thus all non-*golah* Judean Yahwists are de facto excluded from participation in the community—they simply do not exist.<sup>89</sup> Yet it must be underlined that this dominant motif is subtly nuanced by various traces of a more inclusivist vision in the text. This "counter-movement" is especially evident in the reference to the *golah*'s inclusion of those (assumedly non-deportees) who had chosen to reject the practices of the

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87 The bibliography on the "people of the land" in Ezra-Nehemiah is immense. Cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 108; Bedford, *Temple Restoration*, 91, n. 7; Farisani, "Israelites in Palestine," 73–75.

88 The statement of S. Japhet sums up this dominant perspective, "What then, is the book's [i.e. Ezra-Nehemiah's] attitude to those Israelite groups who did not belong to the returning exiles, those who remained in the land, in Judah and Samaria? The answer is very simple: according to Ezra-Nehemiah there are no such people at all! ... Who, then, are the other inhabitants of the land, according to Ezra-Nehemiah? They are all foreigners." S. Japhet, "People and Land in the Restoration Period," in *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 110–11.

89 Scholars have debated the precise form which the restoration community took. Significant discussion surrounded the proposal of J. P. Weinberg that the *golah* formed a *citizen-temple-community*. Those giving qualified approval to such a proposal included Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 69, various scholarly critiques notwithstanding. For a fuller discussion cf. Kessler, "Reconstructing Haggai's Jerusalem," 139–40; and Bedford, *Temple Restoration*, 207.

local population in Neh 10:29 [ET 28] and Ezra 6:21.<sup>90</sup> Other potential indications of means of incorporation of the non-exiled population may be seen in the mention of Nehemiah's brethren in Yehud in Neh 1:3<sup>91</sup> and the listing of "returnees" by place names, as opposed to genealogy, in Ezra 2 and Neh 7.<sup>92</sup> This subtle shading of the text's dominant perspective may reflect the historical invariance noted by Ben Zvi and myself that the golah returnees could have functioned effectively in the context of Achaemenid imperial policy without incorporating some elements of the local population.<sup>93</sup> Quite frequently the exclusivist orientation of Ezra-Nehemiah is read either as an indication of land-tenure conflicts between the returnees and remainees,<sup>94</sup> or as evidence of an unremitting ideology of golah exclusivism, beginning in Ezekiel, extending through the DtrH, and Jeremiah to Ezra-Nehemiah.<sup>95</sup> Yet despite the fact that Ezra-Nehemiah does indeed at some level make familial descent/ethnicity a requirement for membership in the people of Yahweh,<sup>96</sup> this delineation must not be seen as completely impermeable.<sup>97</sup> The possibility of movement from one group to another may be seen in the subtle strategies of inclusion just noted, as well as by the

90 Sara Japhet ("People and Land in the Restoration Period," 115) describes the language here as "an excellent definition of religious conversion."

91 Japhet, "Remnant," 438.

92 Japhet, "People and Land in the Restoration Period," 111.

93 Ben Zvi, "Inclusion and Exclusion," 95-149; Kessler, "Persia's Loyal Yahwists," 109-112.

94 A suggestion which Ben Zvi and others have successfully called into question; cf. "Inclusion and Exclusion," *passim*, and the discussion in n. 82, *supra*.

95 Thus Rom-Shiloni, "From Ezekiel to Ezra-Nehemiah," *passim*.

96 Most especially in the use of terms such as the "holy seed" in Ezra 9:2, and the refusal to assimilate foreign women into the community via conversion; cf. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16; Waco: Word, 1985), 131-33.

97 Knoppers, "Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change," 168, states, "The identification of the exiles with Israel is thus not simply a slight against the Judeans who remained in the land during the neo-Babylonian period, but a privileging of the Diaspora in the continuing history of the Judean people. That the usage remains in place, even though several generations of returnees have lived in the land by the time Ezra arrives in Jerusalem suggests the primacy of the exilic designation as a symbol uniting the two communities [i.e. returnees in Yehud and the ongoing eastern Diaspora]. The returnees living back in the homeland derive their primary identity neither from their homeland nor from their eponymous ancestor but from their ancestral links to the Diaspora." Cf. also Bedford, *Temple Restoration*, 91-92, n. 7, who states, "That the basic reason for the exclusion of the 'people of the land' in Ezra-Neh (with the exception of Ezra 6:21 and Neh 10:29 [Eng v. 28]) was ethnic is clear from the use of this term alongside ethnic designations ... To be sure, some (much?) of this ethnic differentiation was fictionalized, for the descendants of the inhabitants of Judah who had remained in the land were ethnically the same as the repatriated Judeans." This being the case, doubt may be cast on the historical probability of a complete severance of all members of the returnees extended kinship group.

fact that the conflict in Ezra-Nehemiah seems to have been largely ideological in nature. As such issues of orthodoxy and orthopraxis are consistently presented as central to membership in the community of the temple (Ezra 7:21, 25–26; 10:6–10; Neh 10:28–30). Thus, as noted regarding Ezra 6:21 and Neh 10:29 [ET 28] at least for some groups, or at some moments, there appears to have existed a modality of inclusion through the rejection of the prevailing practices of the non-exiled population and association with that group and the acceptance of the authority of the *golah* in matters of faith and practice. This perspective, stressing the centrality of religious authority in the mid-fifth century conflict is reinforced by the recurring pattern in Ezra-Nehemiah of the Eastern Diaspora being the sole repository of the pure Yahwistic faith subsequent to the catastrophic events of 597 and 587. Accordingly, at each moment when the true knowledge of Yahweh is threatened, key religious figures arrive from the East and put things to rights. The details of this theme have been discussed by Bedford, Knoppers and myself,<sup>98</sup> and need not be reiterated here. The salient point to be emphasized however is that in Ezra-Nehemiah without exception it is only among the members of the Eastern Diaspora that knowledge of the “Law of Moses” (i.e. true Yahwism) has been retained (Ezra 3:2; 6:18; 7:6; Neh 1:7–8; 8:1, 14; 9:14; 10:29; 13:1). As Bedford so colourfully suggests, the reformers emerge from the East out of fear that the other members of the *golah* who have returned before them are at risk of assimilating to the local forms of Yahwism, and are thus “going native” and need to be returned to order by leaders from the East.<sup>99</sup> It is noteworthy that this retention of the true knowledge of Yahwism by the Eastern Diaspora is everywhere assumed in Ezra-Nehemiah, but not explicitly stated. Thus, as the text opens we encounter a broad swath of the population (Priests, Levites, leaders of the “ancestral houses” of Benjamin and Ju-

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98 Bedford, *Temple Restoration*, 309-10; idem, “Diaspora: Homeland Relations in Ezra-Nehemiah,” *VT* 52 (2002): 147-65; G. N. Knoppers, “The Construction of Judean Diasporic Identity in Ezra-Nehemiah,” in *Judah and the Judeans: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (eds. G. N. Knoppers, M. Oeming and O. Lipschits; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming); idem, “Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change”; J. Kessler, “The Diaspora in Zech 1-8,” 119-45 (127-37).

99 Bedford, “Diaspora: Homeland Relations,” 154, underlines the ongoing directive role the Eastern Diaspora played in the life of the *golah* in Yehud. Cf. however the criticism of his approach by B. Oded in “Exile-Homeland Relations during the Exilic Period and Restoration,” in *Teshurot Laavishur: Studies in the Bible and the ancient Near East, Hebrew and Semitic Languages* (eds. M. Heltzer and M. Malul; Tel-Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center, 2004), 153-60. Cf. also my analysis of the *golah* Returnees as a ‘Charter Group’ with an ongoing relationship to (yet with a certain independence from) the home community in the East in “Persia’s Loyal Yahwists,” *passim*.

dah,<sup>100</sup> and various members of the rank and file) whose hearts are stirred by Yahweh to undertake a return to the homeland, and re-establish proper worship (Ezra 1:1–3:7). Subsequently, Ezra emerges—a leader whose character is saturated with concern for Yahwism on two levels. First, objectively he is described as a “scribe skilled in the law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6). The terminology here likely refers not to his qualifications as a literate technician, but rather to his expertise in the content and meaning of the law.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, as Knoppers comments, “The story presupposes, of course, that the community in Babylon had a Torah scroll and that Ezra (and others) not only read (or recited) it but also made a point of studying it.”<sup>102</sup> As the narrative unfolds it is Ezra’s devotion to the law (as opposed to his priestly qualifications) which forms the basis of his activity among the repatriate community both in terms of his own actions (Ezra 7:23, 8:1–6, 8, 18) as well as the mission confided him by Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:25–26).<sup>103</sup> Second, not only is Ezra a model of careful attention to the law’s content and implementation, he is also an exemplary model of diaspora piety.<sup>104</sup> Ezra 7:10 highlights this personal aspect of his character: his teaching of the “statutes and ordinances in Israel” (וּלְלַמֵּד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל הַקִּיּוּמִים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים) is rooted in his own personal “setting of his heart to seek the Torah of Yahweh and to carry it out.”<sup>105</sup> These are highly loaded terms which carry with them, by implication, a great richness of Persian-period (and later) Torah piety.<sup>106</sup> A similar emphasis can be seen in Ezra’s refusal of an imperial guard out of concern for the reputation of Yahweh before a Gentile ruler, a stock diasporic trope (Ezra 8:21–23; cf. Gen 41:15–16; Dan 3:13–28; 4:1–37). His piety is reinforced by his fasting and seeking Yahweh’s protection for his journey (Ezra 8:23; cf. 2 Chr 20:3 where fasting and seeking Yahweh occur together).<sup>107</sup> Similarly, he leads the community in acts of

100 רָאשֵׁי הָאֲבוֹת לַיהוּדָה וּבְנֵימָן: On the nature of these collectives cf. Knoppers, “Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change,” 162, with bibliography.

101 Thus M. Leuchter, “Ezra’s Mission and the Levites of Casiphia,” in *Community Identity in Judean Historiography: Biblical and Comparative Perspectives* (eds. G. N. Knoppers and K. Ristau; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 173–74, 184–85. Leuchter perceptively points out the Levitical-Deuteronomistic traditions employed in the depiction of Ezra’s role in the text. Cf. Also, Knoppers, “Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change,” 156–57.

102 Knoppers, “Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change,” 156.

103 Thus Leuchter, “Ezra’s Mission,” 173–76.

104 Cf. my fuller discussion in “The Diaspora in Zech 1–8,” 131–32.

105 הֵכִין לְבָבוֹ לְדַרוֹשׁ אֶת־תּוֹרַת יְהוָה וּלְעָשׂוֹת: on seeking Yahweh cf. note 103, *infra*.

106 Cf. Ps 1; 19; 119; Deut 6:4–9.

107 On fasting cf. Isa 58:3–6; Joel 1:14; 2:12, 15; Zech 8:19; Neh 9:1. Seeking Yahweh is a profoundly significant term in Chronicles for wholehearted devotion to Yahweh, involving both obedience to Torah and personal piety, cf. 1 Chr 10:13–14; 16:11;

confession and repentance (Ezra 10:1, 11; Neh 9:3, 37). Similar characteristics may be seen in the life of Nehemiah (Neh 1:4–11; 4:4–5; 6:9, 10–16; 13:14–19). Further indications of the assumption that the knowledge of Yahweh had been preserved in the diaspora may be seen in Ezra's pause at the Ahava to summon a contingent of Levites from Casiphia (Ezra 8:15–20).<sup>108</sup> In his detailed study of this text Leuchter proposes several indications that the Levites of Casiphia likely functioned primarily as teachers and interpreters of the law, as found elsewhere in Deuteronomistic traditions, in contrast to other Zadokite priestly groups.<sup>109</sup> He suggests that this role likely carried a significant pietistic component as well.<sup>110</sup> In sum, the basic polarity in Ezra-Nehemiah is thus between those who are possessed of a true knowledge of Yahweh, and those who are not. This is expressed in terms of the inclusion of the Babylonian golah (that is the descendants of the 597 and 587 deportations who have returned to Yehud, as well as, by extension, their co-religionists in the East)<sup>111</sup> versus the exclusion of other Yahwists in the Levant, most specifically the Samaritan community and those in Yehud with connections to it (cf. Neh 4:1–2, 7; 6:2, 14; 13:7–9; 28). Although a certain ethnic component may be involved in this polarity, the most foundational element of this distinction is ideological and religious.

That which is most significant for our purposes here is the way in which Ezra-Nehemiah reflects the culmination of the skimming and preserving motif alluded to above. Jeremiah 24, whatever its date of redaction, foresees the day when those taken into exile in Babylon—who at the time manifested no fidelity to Yahweh, and were therefore, in their deportation, suffering the just consequences of their evil

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22:19; 28:9; 2 Chr 12:14; 14:4; 15:2, 13; 17:3; 19:3. On the emergence of the phenomenon of personal piety in the Persian period cf. the comments of Carr, *Fractures of Genesis*, 231, with bibliography.

108 It is likely that Casiphia was an important cultural and religious centre for the Eastern Diaspora, but unlikely that it was a place of animal sacrifice. Cf. H. Mantel, "Dichotomy of Judaism during the Second Temple," *HUCA* 44 (1973): 55–87 (83); J. Blenkinsopp, "The Social Roles of Prophets in Early Achaemenid Judah," *JSOT* 93 (June 2001): 39–58 (50–51). Cf. also Knoppers, "Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change," 157, n. 31.

109 Leuchter, "Ezra's Mission," 178–86.

110 Leuchter ("Ezra's Mission") deems Casiphia to have been "a center for prayer and study" rather than a cultic site (182), noting that "[t]he scribal process itself—both textual composition and the exegesis of earlier traditions—became a potent devotional act during the exile, offering ... an avenue away from the discourse that still placed the Zadokite priests at the top of the pecking order" (181).

111 Cf. Knoppers, "Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change" and "The Construction of Judean Diasporic Identity in Ezra-Nehemiah," *passim*.

deeds—would be given a “new heart” and return to true obedience and worship (Jer 24:6–7). A similar emphasis may be found in Ezek 33. Kings 25:22–26 describes the emptying of the land through the exile of the leaders and scribes, as well as the artisanal, military, and priestly classes to Babylon, and the flight of the miserable poor to Egypt. No specific mention is made in these sources of how the Babylonian *golah* retained their knowledge of Yahweh, or of their repentance.<sup>112</sup> However in Ezra-Nehemiah we discover a community which indeed manifests the requisite repentance and knowledge of Yahweh<sup>113</sup> and brings that knowledge back to the land.<sup>114</sup> This brings the skimming and preserving motif full circle. Yahweh has seen to it that the true knowledge has not been lost—it has been retained within the ranks of the Babylonian *golah*. It therefore behooves those members of other Yahwistic communities to recognize this, purify themselves, and associate themselves with the *golah*. In my own opinion, the clear ideological focus of *golah* exclusivism, together with the more accurate evaluations of the socio-demographic situation of Yehud (significant continuity in Benjamin, loss of territory in the south and west, destruction and decline in the Judean highlands) and the absence of any real evidence for land-tenure conflicts (especially in the late sixth C) renders the reading of Ezra-Nehemiah as evidence of political or economic power politics extremely questionable. However such reconstructions continue to be produced.<sup>115</sup> Such analyses are only really plausible if one posits (as is commonly done) that the bulk of the population stayed place after the deportation of the elite, followed by the return of the latter some years later. Yet, as we have seen, more recent archaeological investigation renders such a reconstruction extremely suspect.<sup>116</sup> However if, following Lipschits, one posits the survival of one less-than-central-region (Benjamin and northern Judea), and a greatly devastated and shrunken core (central Judea), followed by the return of a small population to the centre, followed again by population loss in the Benjaminite territory, the idea of a small group of returnees seizing control and subjugating (both politically and ideologically) the large group of remainees lacks credibility. Furthermore, when one considers the ideological/religious

112 Cf. on this the dated but still interesting reflections of Noth, “Catastrophe de Jérusalem,” 99.

113 Cf. Mark J. Boda, *Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9* (BZAW; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999).

114 On the positive role of the Persian Empire in this retransmission of the traditions cf. the comments of R. Person, *The Deuteronomistic School*, 56-63; and Kessler, “The Second Year of Darius and the Prophet Haggai,” *Transeu* 5 (1992): 63-84.

115 See recently Frédéric Gangloff, “Pays dévasté,” *BN* 113 (2002): 39-50.

116 Lipschits, *Fall and Rise*, 185-271; idem, “Demographic Changes in Judah,” *passim*.

focus of Ezra-Nehemiah, the *golah*'s need for the assistance of the non-exiled population, the strategies of inclusion perceptible in these exclusivistic texts themselves, the historical improbability of the returnees successfully imposing their narrative upon the unwilling local population,<sup>117</sup> and the reality that the non-exiled population and the returnees were ethnically related at a distance of only two or three generations,<sup>118</sup> hypotheses of a radical power grab and disenfranchisements of great swaths of the population need to be abandoned as inadequate, if not irresponsible.<sup>119</sup>

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117 Cf. E. Ben Zvi, "Exile, Empty Land and the General Intellectual Discourse in Yehud," in the present volume. Cf. also F. E. Deist, "The Yehud Bible: A Belated Divine Miracle?" *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 23 (1997): 117-142.

118 The possibility of ongoing connections between remainees and exiles during the Babylonian period is often overlooked. It is commented upon by Noth, "Catastrophe de Jérusalem," 98-102.

119 I point to a recent example in this regard, the article by F. Gangloff, noted above. The translations which follow are my own. He affirms that, "only a tiny margin of the population—the highest levels of society—was deported. The majority of the population who made up the middle class—merchants, artisans, and those who adopted a rural lifestyle, such as farmers and nomads—continued to lead a normal existence, even if several major urban centers suffered severe damage during the Babylonian destructions" ("Pays dévasté," 40). He then goes on to describe the ideology of the "Judean-Persian" group, that is, the *golah* (44). He summarizes the ideology of Ezekiel and Ezra-Nehemiah, describing it as a "a sectarian and racist ideology [which] introduced a subtle distinction between the 'people of the exile'—a race purified in Babylon, saved, and prepared to return—and the 'people of the land'—an impure race, idolatrous and destined for destruction, which led to the superiority of the 'Babylonian exiles' over the 'people of the land' themselves, either subservient or condemned to disappear in order to leave place for the 'true Israel'" (48). He similarly concludes, "At the time of the 'return from exile', when Ezra and his group—the people of exile—return and seize power, they encountered a certain opposition on the part of the local Judean community which frustrated their attempt to take control of the temple, and to seize the reins of power. Nevertheless, very quickly the 'people of the land' were denigrated by a campaign of ideological defamation, skillfully orchestrated by the 'Persian exiles' party, which sought to depict them as idolaters, Canaanites, apostates, assassins, impure; simply put, making them a menace to be cast aside, and denying them any part in the future reconstruction of the temple and the city" (50). Aside from containing several anachronisms (he seems to slide between the late sixth and mid-fifth centuries), inconsistencies, and other factual problems it is very hard to see the tone or content of these comments as judicious historiographical conclusions drawn from the available data. In a sense, Gangloff is taking up a long stream of earlier writing seeking to characterize the *golah* as a repressive elite. Oded, "Where is the 'Myth of the Empty Land,'" 69-11, cites the following *sobriquets* with which the *golah* community has been tagged: "chauvinistic," "social oppression," "an ideology of occupation and control," "repressive elite," "Ideological imperialism," "Talibanism," "Leninism." He also rightfully decries historical writing in which "the present political conflict is quite openly projected onto the past" (56). This polemical aspect of Gangloff's article somewhat

### 3.6. Texts Anticipating the Full Return of all those Scattered in Yahweh's Judgment.

A striking alternative to the skimming and preserving theme just described is a variation of it, which I will describe as the "scattering and gathering" motif. It is a "pan-Israelite" perspective in that all who have been scattered in Yahweh's anger will be re-gathered in his renewed compassion. While it has been suggested that this perspective reflects a later reinterpretation of the skimming and preserving motif, in light of the presence of Yahwists in many corners of the Levant, Egypt, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia,<sup>120</sup> it appears to me that like the skimming and preserving motif, it has a long history and reflects a significant traditional-historical development. In this section I will briefly examine several texts which feature this important motif.<sup>121</sup>

#### 3.6.1. Zechariah 1–8

As I have argued elsewhere, both major sections of Zech 1–8—the Sermonic Frame (1:1–7; 7:1–8:23) and the Visionary-Oracular Complex (1:8–6:15)—contain an implied narrative continuum.<sup>122</sup> In this implied narrative the people of Yahweh are described in the past, present<sup>123</sup> and future manifestations. The various constituent elements of Zech 1–8 manifest a profoundly "pan-Israel" perspective. The text remembers the destructive activity of the nations who have "scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem" 2:2 [ET 1:19] and looks for the future re-gathering of "the House of Israel and the House of Judah" (8:13) "from the East and the West" (8:7). The state of the land prior to the arrival of the returnees is described as depopulated (7:7), devastated (7:14), and devoid of eco-

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obscures the value of several of his observations regarding the subtle difference between various traditions regarding exile and empty land.

- 120 As suggested for certain redactional additions in Lust, "Exile and Diaspora," 113-22.
- 121 Cf. also on this motif, Rom-Shiloni, "From Ezekiel to Ezra-Nehemiah," *passim*. The idea of the inclusion of Gentiles within the community of Yahweh frequently features in texts displaying this general perspective (Zech 2:15 [ET 11]; Isa 19:23). The analysis of this theme lies outside the scope of the present study. On this cf. U. Rappaport, "Les Juifs et leurs voisins à l'époque perse, hellénistique et romaine," *Annales-Histoire. Sciences Sociales* 5 (1996): 955-74 (964-69).
- 122 J. Kessler, "Diaspora and Homeland in the Early Achaemenid Period: Community, Geography and Demography in Zechariah 1-8," in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Persian Period* (ed. Jon L. Berquist; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 137-66. Fuller support for the various exegetical, literary-critical and text-critical points made in this present, brief summary, can be found in detail in this article. Cf. also Kessler, "The Diaspora in Zech 1-8," 119-45.
- 123 That is, the prophet's present—the late sixth to mid fifth centuries.

conomic activity (7:14; 8:10). It is noteworthy that while much attention is given to matters of repopulation, the language of the text does not insist on total depopulation in the manner commonly found in the deuteronomistic and priestly traditions. Similarly, in contrast to those aspects of the deuteronomistic tradition which envisage an ongoing Yahwism away from the land (Deut 4:25–32; 1 Kgs 8) and the similar perspectives in Ezra-Nehemiah, and supremely Esther (which envisages a vigorous life in diaspora away from the land), Zech 1–8 views Yahweh’s ongoing purposes in the Persian Period as incomplete apart from the return of the *entire* diaspora population to dwell in Yehud. These purposes have begun with the return of some of the diaspora members to Yehud, and the rededication of the temple, but there is an eager expectation of the completion of Yahweh’s restorative activity through the re-gathering of the exiles. Hence the “empty land” motif in Zech 1–8 serves primarily as remembrance of the time of Yahweh’s anger (1:1–7). Now, with the dawning of a new age, the first fruits of which were the renewal of Yahwistic worship in Yehud (Zech 3) and the presence of a repentant community (1:1–7), the full reversal of the scattering was soon to come. Thus, here we find an underlying conceptual model different from the skimming and preserving motif found in Jer 24 and Ezra-Nehemiah, or the covenantal judgment motif in Deut 28, or the purging and purification motif in the Priestly literature. Rather, here the true Israel consists of *all* the former inhabitants of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, and their descendants. All were scattered in Yahweh’s judgment, and now all will be re-gathered in his renewed mercy.<sup>124</sup>

### 3.6.2. The Isaianic Corpus

The motif of vast devastation followed by the scattering and ultimately re-gathering of all Israel is similarly a highly important motif in the Isaianic corpus. Examples include Isa 6:11–13; 11:11, 16; 14:2; 43:1–7; 44:24–28; 45:12–13; 48:20–21; 49:19–26; 51:9–11; 60:1–22; 62:1–8; 66:10–16, 18–20.<sup>125</sup> Recent interpretive strategies focused upon the thematic unity of this corpus have called attention to pervasive themes which run throughout.<sup>126</sup> The motifs of devastation and return are highly signifi-

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124 Kessler, “The Diaspora in Zech 1-8,” 124-27.

125 This list is far from exhaustive.

126 Cf. for example the essays in R. F. Melugin and M. A. Sweeney, eds., *New Visions of Isaiah* (JSOTSup 214; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

cant: all Israel will be re-gathered, return in repentance and renew the land (cf. 11:11).<sup>127</sup>

As a specific example of this let us examine the case of Isa 5–12, and more particularly 6:1–11:16.<sup>128</sup> Among the several themes which run through this section and bind it together are those of devastation and depopulation on the one hand, and restoration and repopulation on the other. Blenkinsopp insightfully comments that the return from Babylon and Egypt “is a major motif in the later stages of the Isaianic tradition.”<sup>129</sup> Critical in this regard are Isa 6:11–13 and 11:11–16, which, like bookends, introduce and then resolve the matter of the exile and empty land in the section. The dating and literary history of both of these texts is disputed,<sup>130</sup> yet this need not detain us here, since whatever their precise origin they would have clearly been read with keen interest in the context of Yehud. In 6:11–13, in response to the prophet’s lamenting cry “How long?” with reference to his commission to preach to hardened hearers, Yahweh indicates that the people’s unresponsiveness will continue until cities lie devastated and without inhabitant, houses are devoid of people, the land is utterly desolate, and Yahweh sends everyone far away, leaving utter emptiness in the land.<sup>131</sup> While allusions to the devastation of cities and depopulation of the land are quite common in descriptions of Yahweh’s judgment in a great variety of traditions, it is the final clause—the reference to utter emptiness and forsakenness—that gives the Isaianic presentation its particular cast. The use of the עָזַב root<sup>132</sup> in the Isaianic corpus carries with it a sense of

127 Lohfink (“Deuteronomistic Movement?” 60–63) suggests the pervasiveness of a ‘shuv’ theology in all the literature of the exilic and early Persian periods.

128 Cf. O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12* (OTL; London: SCM, 1983), 114–15, for a major division at 9:6. On the larger unit as consisting of chs. 5–12, cf. M. Sweeney, *Isaiah* (FOTL; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 140–41. Exile is first alluded to in 5:13.

129 J. Blenkinsopp *Isaiah 1–39* (AB 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 268.

130 Kaiser (*Isaiah*, 115–16) views them as post-587/6 expansions. Sweeney (*Isaiah*, 136–39) views 6:12–13 as deriving from the eighth-seventh centuries (both pre- and post-701), while 11:10–16 reflects a Josianic redaction (204–06). C. R. Seitz (*Isaiah 1–39* [Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1993], 57–59), argues for the substantial Isaianic origin of 6:11–13 and views 11:10–11 as a reflection on the failures of earlier hopes in light of the reign of Manasseh, yet still from the monarchic period (98–105), while 11:12–16 reflect hopes for restoration of the Israelites in Assyria and Egypt in Isaiah’s own day (106–08). Blenkinsopp (*Isaiah 1–39*) views the allusion to deportation in 6:12 as a post 587 insertion, but views the rest of 12–13 as consistent with the situation immediately following 701. Similarly he views 11:10–16 as post 587 reflections (267–68).

131 שָׂאוּ עָרִים מֵאִין יוֹשֵׁב וּבָתִּים מֵאִין אָדָם וְהָאָדָמָה תִּשָּׁאָה שְׂמָמָה וְרַחֵק יִהְיֶה אֶת־הָאָדָם וְרֹבֵה הַעֲזוּבָה בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ

132 In Deuteronomistic traditions, refers to the covenant which has been forsaken; see Deut 29:25; 31:16; Jer 5:19; 7:13. In Priestly thought עָזַב refers to the people’s forsak-

profound sadness—an almost melancholic yearning for that which used to be, but has been squandered away. Thus the land is lost and forsaken like an egg left behind by a mother bird (10:14) or like a woman cast off or widowed (62:4). The emphasis therefore falls on the tragedy of the people's obdurate state and its catastrophic results. It is highly significant to note that the basic polarity here is between the prophet as messenger of Yahweh and the population *in toto* who reject him. Unlike Jer 24 and Ezek 11 and 33, there is no favored or excluded group. Furthermore, unlike the texts just mentioned, as well as Deut 28 and 2 Kgs 25, there is no indication given as to the fate of the population: do they perish or go into exile, and if the latter, where? Even the tenth that is spared (likely a reference to Judah)<sup>133</sup> will be ultimately burned. The enigmatic reference to the Holy Seed (6:13), as Sweeney points out, does not reflect a fully-developed remnant theology. Rather, it is to be read as an assertion of ongoing punishment or as a faint affirmation of hope beyond judgment.<sup>134</sup> In 11:11–16, however, the situation is radically reversed. Here we find the motif of a second exodus, in which Yahweh recovers the “remnant of his people” (v. 11). The geographical locations in which they are to be found extend like spokes of a wheel outward from Yehud in every direction,<sup>135</sup> although in v. 13 special attention is given to Egypt and Assyria (cf. Isa 19:23). In v. 12 it is clear that the descendants of the exiles from both Israel and Judah are intended. Here we have a fully orbed example of the scattering and gathering motif we have seen in Zech 1–8. The people of God consist of all the descendants of Israel, Benjamin, and Judah. All have disobeyed and as a result judgment has come upon all. Yet, faithful to his nature, judgment is not the last word. Yahweh will gather again those who have been scattered, and re-settle them in the land. We notice here the highly schematized vision of these texts. There is no distinction between various groups of Yahwists based upon their geographical location, their redemptive sufferings, or their fate during the period of Yahweh's judgment upon the land. Neither is there any explicit mention of their repentance or responsiveness to Yahweh (*pace* Jer 24). The empty land motif thus functions to demonstrate the grief and sadness of the nations' failure. Conversely, the promises of the land's repopulation testify to the majesty of Yahweh's grace. Like Zech 1–8 there is no

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ing of the land in connection with its purification of it, and so that it might enjoy its Sabbaths: Lev 26:43.

133 Thus among others, Seitz, *Isaiah*, 58.

134 Judgment: Sweeney, *Isaiah*, 138; Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1985), 76. Hope: Seitz, *Isaiah*, 59.

135 Cf. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 180.

ultimate acceptance of the validity of the ongoing existence of a diaspora. Yahweh's purposes will only be fulfilled by a full and total return. The emptiness and desolation of the land therefore functions not as a polemical exclusionary tactic against dissident Yahwistic communities, but as part of a grander sweeping portrait of Yahweh's activity in history. It is therefore easy to see why the presence of the limited community in Benjamin during the Babylonian period is obfuscated: exile is both a testimony to the completeness of Yahweh's judgment (cf. Isa 40:1) and a prerequisite for return. Rather than disturb the symmetry of this ideological concept with a discussion of the case of the non-exiled Judean population, their existence is simply passed over.

### 3.6.3 The Book of Micah

Like, Isaiah and Zech 1–8, Micah reflects a clear and sustained pattern of scattering and gathering. Key to this motif in Micah are Mic 2:12–13; 4:6–7; 9–10 and 5:6–8 [ET 7–9]. All have been dated to various periods.<sup>136</sup> Micah 1:2–16 introduces the theme of Yahweh's judgment which will fall upon Samaria, Jerusalem and Judah. Micah 4:10 adds a specific reference of exile to Babylon. As a result Israel is reduced to a weak and dispersed remnant (2:12; 4:7; 5:6 [ET 7]; 7:18).<sup>137</sup> However, this state of affairs is not the people's final destiny. The series of texts just noted promises a full and complete restoration of the situation that obtained before the catastrophic judgment of Yahweh. Micah 2:12a begins this theme which will be developed throughout the book. Here the verbs אָסַף and קָבַץ describe Yahweh's action of re-assembling and re-uniting the nation.<sup>138</sup> The people are described as "Israel" or the "remnant of Jacob" and their future unity<sup>139</sup> and numerical greatness<sup>140</sup> are stressed (cf. Hos 1:11; Isa 11:12–13). Similar themes are pursued as the book progresses. Mic 4:6–7 and 5:6–7 [ET 7–8] reiterate Yahweh's determination to gather the people. However, a new element is added to the scat-

136 Cf. the discussions in H. W. Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990); and W. McKane, *The Book of Micah* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) *in loco*.

137 On the meaning of "remnant" in Micah cf. Wolff, *Micah*, 124.

138 Cf. the use of these verbs together in Isa 11:12; 43:9; Ezek 11:17 to describe return from exile. While קָבַץ is used extensively in this sense (cf. Isa 60:4; Jer 23:3; 29:14; 31:8, 10; 32:37; Ezek 20:35, 41; 28:25; 34:13; 37:21; Hos 1:11; Zeph 3:19; Zech 10:8), it is used less frequently in this sense. Although as Wolff point out (*Micah*, 72), it may carry the sense of 'welcoming home'.

139 יְהוּדָא אֲשֶׁר־נִבְּרָה

140 תְּהִימְנָה מְאֹדִים

tering and gathering motif: a stress on the weakness of the remnant,<sup>141</sup> which, by Yahweh's hand will be transformed into strength. This movement from weakness and affliction to power and might is one that is unique to Micah.<sup>142</sup> Yahweh has treated his people harshly and they have become feeble and powerless (4:6). Yet those who have previously been weak will be made strong (4:7). Their prowess will be like that of a young lion. Their adversaries will be unable to withstand their might (5:7 [ET 8]).

Several comments are in order here. First, Micah represents a clear illustration of the scattering and gathering motif seen elsewhere; the land is empty because all the people of Yahweh have been scattered in his anger and all will be re-gathered in his renewed compassion. The specific identity of the community to be re-gathered is difficult to determine, since its origins<sup>143</sup> and the locations of its sojourning<sup>144</sup> are obscured in the text. To this end the renewed community is designated as "Israel" and "Jacob" and "remnant of Jacob" (Mic 2:12; 5:7). There are no polarities of inclusion/exclusion. No groups of Yahwists are designated as reprobate. All the remnant of Israel/Jacob will be re-gathered and restored.<sup>145</sup> Second, special emphasis is placed on the weakness and powerlessness of "Israel." Distinctive of the book's perspective is the characterization of the remnant as those who are lame, banished, afflicted, and cast off by Yahweh (4:6-7). The rhetorical impact is likely one designed to evoke sympathy for those whom Yahweh has punished, despite the fact that the fault was their own. Third, this emphasis on the present weakness of the community leads to hope for future national prowess, described in images replete with violence (4:13; 5:7

141 On the vocabulary of affliction and weakness here, cf. McKane *Micah*, 128-30.

142 Cf. on this Ben Zvi, *Micah* (FOTL 21B; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), 70.

143 Ben Zvi (*Micah*, 110) insightfully comments, "even the implied past of the speaker is not described in the text in such a way that it must be tied to any particular historical event, be it 701 BCE, 587 BCE, or any disaster to Israel. Indeed, the text suggests that the readers are to contextualize rather than historicize when they approach the text."

144 Mic 4:10 explicitly mentions a return from Babylon. However, the motif of gathering normally implies a wider dispersion; cf. Jer 23:3; Ezek 11:17. Yet, interestingly the more common phraseology of dispersion to various "lands, peoples or nations" (cf. Lev 26:33; Deut 4:27; 28:64; Jer 46:28; Ezek 12:15; 20:33; 22:15) is missing in Micah. The mention of Israel "among the nations" in 5:6-7 [ET vv. 7-8] is ambiguous, since it is unclear whether the image is that of the Diaspora (cf. LXX) or of the nation surrounded by enemies. On this cf. McKane, *Micah*, 169. On the book's polyvalence in general cf. Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 7. Zech 1-8 similarly oscillates between a focus on the Babylonian exiles (Zech 2:10-14 [ET vv. 6-10] and the broader Diaspora (Zech 7:14; 8:7).

145 Note the MT's emphasis in 2:12b יְהוָה

[ET 8]). This too is a distinctive of the book's presentation.<sup>146</sup> Thus, instead of emphasizing notions of depopulation, followed by emptiness and repopulation as in (Zech 1–8 and Isaiah), the focus here is upon re-gathering as a prelude to national power and dominion. Fourth, this vision of re-gathering is unconditional, dependent entirely on Yahweh's choice and activity.<sup>147</sup> What is more, Israel's restoration is described apart from expressions of communal repentance and reformation, so commonly seen elsewhere (Jer 24:7; Zech 1:1–7; Lev 26:40; Neh 9:2).

### 3.7. Haggai: No Exile and No Empty Land

As final perspective on the exile and empty land motifs, I would briefly draw attention to the book of Haggai, where such themes are strikingly absent, as has often been noticed. No polarities of inclusion/exclusion are evidence in the book. The book features no "other" from whom the true people of Yahweh are to be distinct.<sup>148</sup> *Pace* numerous attempts, no conclusive evidence may be adduced which suggests that the "historical Haggai" was a non-exiled Judean and representative of the non-exiled land owners.<sup>149</sup> No distinction between members of the community may be asserted on the basis of the term "remnant" in 1:13.<sup>150</sup> What is more, nowhere is the land described as devastated or depopulated.<sup>151</sup> This is a remarkable phenomenon in a Persian period text. The primary matters dealt with in the book are the sorry state of the temple (1:1–15; 2:1–9) and the future of the Davidic promise in light of the subaltern status of the province and its governor (2:20–23).<sup>152</sup> In my own opinion the grounds for this obfuscation of the sixth-century realities which so preoccupied other texts of the period lies in the book's restorationist

146 Cf. on this Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 134–35.

147 Cf. Wolff, *Micah*, 88.

148 Cf. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 263–64.

149 As suggested by W. A. M. Beuken, *Haggai-Sacharja 1-8: Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der frühmachexilischen Prophetie* (SSN 10; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1967), 335–36; and Bedford, *Temple Restoration*, 273.

150 Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 140–42.

151 However, the formulation of 1:2 does suggest that the population needed to come to Jerusalem to build, and thus likely lived at a distance; cf. D. Barthélemy, ed., *Critique textuelle de l'ancien testament. Tome 3 Ezéchiel, Daniel et Les 12 Prophètes* (OBO 50/3; Fribourg/Göttingen: Editions Universitaires/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 924.

152 On this cf. J. Kessler, "Haggai, Zerubbabel and the Political Status of Yehud: The Signet Ring in Hag 2:23," in *Prophets, Prophecy and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism*, (eds. M. H. Floyd and R. Haak; LHBOTS 427; New York and London: T&T Clark, 2006), 102–19.

impulse, its unrelenting goal of underlining the success of the prophet Haggai and by implication the ongoing importance of prophecy for the Persian period,<sup>153</sup> and its overall "alternative voice."<sup>154</sup> The fact that the book of Haggai could completely sidestep such profoundly formative concepts as the exile and empty land testifies to the fact that the concept of the malleability of historical representation could extend even to the point where the events were not mentioned at all!

## 4. Conclusions

I conclude the present discussion of these various texts with the following observations regarding two areas of special relevance to this study: 1) the use of the motifs of "empty land and exile" in the various biblical texts considered, and 2) implications regarding the presence of thematic, ideological and theological diversity in the context of sixth to fourth century Yehudite literature.

### 4.1 General Observations Regarding the Utilization of the Motifs of "Exile" and "Empty Land"

First, the motifs of the "exile" and "empty land" do indeed find their rooting in the significant devastation and loss of population and territory experienced by the Southern Kingdom during the early years of the sixth century when it passed from the status of a vassal kingdom to that of a Babylonian province. While it is certainly true that the land was not totally empty, and various forms of social, political, and religious activities were carried on especially in the Benjaminite territory, to view as "pure mythology" the significant devastation of major centres, the loss of life through famine, disease and casualties of war, the loss of population through either exile or flight to surrounding territories, and the loss of territory is highly inaccurate. These realities, for which sound evidence exists, formed the backdrop for the malleable treatment they receive in various texts and traditions.

Second, the motifs of the "exile" and "empty land," where present in various texts, cannot be viewed in a monochromatic fashion. We

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153 For a development of these points cf. Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 255-57, 276-79.

154 Cf. J. Kessler, "Tradition, Continuity and Covenant in the Book of Haggai: An Alternative Voice from Early Persian Yehud," in *Traditions in Transition: Haggai and Zechariah 1-8 in the Trajectory of Hebrew Theology* (eds. M. H. Floyd and M. J. Boda; LHBOTS 475; New York and London: T&T Clark, 2008), 1-39 *passim*.

have seen that various texts describe the emptying of the land and its loss of citizenry in diverse ways, make differing theological points, create different polarities, rest on multiple theological underpinnings, and employ related but distinct metaphors and underlying conceptions. These include covenantal destruction (Deuteronomy 28), covenantal wrath followed by purging and cleansing (Leviticus 26), skimming and preserving (Jeremiah 24, 2 Kings 25, Ezra-Nehemiah), scatter-scattering and gathering (Zechariah 1–8, Micah, Isaiah) and silence (Haggai). Thus although the concepts of exile and empty land constitute a central aspect of the self-defining narrative of Persian period Yahwism, this concept is a composite image, a cord made of many distinct strands.

Third, only in a limited number of instances is the notion of the empty land evoked with reference to conflicting claims between various groups of Yahwists. More frequently it figures as part of the larger relational dynamic involving Yahweh, his people and his land. The themes in all the various texts and traditions have as their subtext the more foundational question of the form, nature, and status of the relationship between Deity, land, and people—clearly the burning questions of the sixth to fourth centuries and beyond. Thus it is highly reductionistic to view the themes of “empty land” and “exile” as mere counterfactual claims created to support the claims of one group of Yahwists over another in matters of land tenure or socio-economic privilege. Rather, these themes, as expressed in various biblical texts, are expressions of the divergent ways in which theological traditions present within the restoration community sought to come to grips with the past and express openness to the future.

Fourth, the virtual omnipresence of the motifs of exile and empty land in their various forms bears witness to the utter centrality of this trope for the identity of the various Yahwistic communities of the sixth century and beyond. Rather than the expression of exclusionist socio-religious forces, the success of this motif in shaping the biblical literature more likely lies in its profound ability to encapsulate and express (even for those who had not themselves gone into exile)<sup>155</sup> the foundational dynamics of what it meant to be the people of Yahweh in the Persian and Hellenistic world: a people who lived and moved, failed

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155 Many relatives and descendants of those populations who have experienced the horrors of war and genocide—of which there are many in the modern world—rightly feel themselves to have been victims of these atrocities as well, by extension. Thus it is not unlikely that the non-deported population would choose to include themselves by proxy in the motifs of cleansing, purifying, and renewing so prevalent in the concept of empty land and return. Cf. Ben Zvi “Exile, Empty Land,” *passim*, in the present volume.

and succeeded, and experienced the cross-currents of Yahweh's judgment and mercy, constantly unfolding in the changing realities of life, both in diaspora and homeland.

#### 4.2 Implications of the Presence of Thematic, Ideological and Theological Diversity Regarding the "Exile" and "Empty land" in the Sixth to Fourth Century Yehudite Literature

It is generally agreed that most if not all of the texts we have considered (or significant portions of them) were variously composed, redacted, read, and re-read in the context of the small community of Persian period, especially its very small group of literati.<sup>156</sup> How then are we to make sense of the presence of such thematic, ideological, and theological diversity in their corpus of literature? Several considerations, I believe, form the context for this phenomenon.

First, it is commonly admitted that theological diversity is one of the most basic characteristics of the HB as a whole. It should therefore be no surprise to find it in the literature of Yehud.<sup>157</sup> Second, the membership of the Yehudite reading community was likely quite diverse, both in terms of theological traditions and geographical location during the Babylonian and early Persian periods. This is generally admitted, but one may cite as examples the great variety of traditions rhetorically employed in the oracles of Haggai (generally accepted as proclaimed close to the dates attached to them), which include priestly, deuteronomistic, Sinai, and Zion traditions, to name just a few,<sup>158</sup> as well as the likely presence of both returnees and remainees among Haggai's community.<sup>159</sup> One might similarly point to evidence of both deuteronomistic and priestly traditions in Ezra-Nehemiah.<sup>160</sup> Thus it is not surprising that a diverse reading community accepted the inclusion of diverse traditions. Third, as Steck in particular<sup>161</sup> and the *traditions-*

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156 Ben Zvi, "The Urban Centre of Jerusalem," 194-209; Kessler, "Reconstructing Haggai's Jerusalem," 137-158.

157 J. Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); O. H. Steck, "Theological Streams of Tradition," in *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament* (ed. D. A. Knight; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 183-214.

158 Cf. Kessler, *The Book of Haggai*, 91, 271-75; also idem, "Reconstructing Haggai's Jerusalem," 154-55.

159 Bedford, *Temple Restoration*, 273-75.

160 Cf. Leuchter, "Ezra's Mission," 192-95, with bibliography.

161 Steck, "Theological Streams," *passim*. Steck's article is *hors pair* in its examination of the nature of *traditionsgeschichtliche* investigation and its relationship to both *Über-*

*geschichtliche* approach in general<sup>162</sup> emphasizes, theological traditions flow through chronological change in a quasi-independent fashion, and demonstrate their own individual responses to the new situations they encounter.<sup>163</sup> Thus it is to be expected that the various traditions represented in the community would express their own individual responses to the dramatic changes which occurred from the sixth century onward. Fourth and finally, it is important to consider the expectations of the reading and writing community in Yehud: what exactly did they see themselves as doing? To be sure, at one level they would have understood themselves as collecting significant national and ethnic traditions of an earlier period. However at a deeper level, especially as it relates to the prophetic books, they saw themselves as inscribers of sacred texts—texts which explicated the relationship between the community and its God.<sup>164</sup> This being the case, given that it was to be expected that the Deity's knowledge, plans and purposes should far surpass human thought and comprehension (cf. Isa 55:8–9), there was likely no expectation of complete rational and logical consistency.<sup>165</sup> The wisdom and knowledge of God and the growing authority of received tradition left room for a "waiting on God" for the resolution of the various enigmas which inevitably emerged when the texts and traditions were placed

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*lieferungsgeschichte* and form criticism. It is similarly highly insightful in its analysis of that which constitutes a religious tradition and how traditions are used in both the composition of biblical texts and in prophetic preaching.

- 162 On the use of religious traditions and the *traditionsgeschichtliche* method of analysis, cf. D. A. Knight, "Tradition History," ABD 6:633–38.
- 163 Cf. also J. A. Tollington, *Tradition and Innovation in Haggai and Zechariah 1-8* (JSOTSup 150; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).
- 164 Actually these two are part of a larger whole. As James Sanders has noted, the essence of that which constitutes an authoritative tradition (the 'canon' before there is a Canon) is the act of repetition. That which shows itself to be instructive and trustworthy is repeated, and thus becomes anchored in a community's repertoire of resources upon which it may draw in times of crisis. J. A. Sanders, "Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon," in *Magnalia Dei* (eds. G. E. Wright, F. M. Cross, W. E. Lemke, P. D. Miller; Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), 531-560 (541-43).
- 165 Cf. James Linville's insightful essay, "The Myth of the Exilic Return: Myth Theory and the Exile as an Eternal Reality in the Prophets," in the present volume. Linville, drawing extensively on the fields of sociology of religion and religious anthropology, underlines that the presence of tensions and anomalies in a community's religious traditions is not only inevitable, but a key constituent element of religious traditions in general. He summarizes that we "would be wise to look for irresolvable tensions in the depictions of the exile" in the literature of Yehud. Thus in contrast to much later exegesis, these divergences were not viewed as inconsistencies and problems to be solved. Cf. also Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 244.

next to one another. Thus the tension which emerged when these traditions were read together was likely not seen as a reason to dismiss them but to revere them and to find hope in them, and supremely to go on reading and studying them in search of a fuller knowledge of Yahweh, his plans and purposes.