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Exile: History, Interpretation, and Theology

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Exile: History, Interpretation, and Theology

Daniel Smith-Christopher

One of the most prolific fields of research in biblical studies in the twenty-first century – in both Old and New Testament studies – is the analysis of biblical texts in relation to the events of the Neo-Babylonian conquests of Judah. The first conquest led to a surrender in 597 BCE, which was followed by a second, destructive, conquest of Jerusalem and surrounding areas in 586 BCE. Both conquests were accompanied by substantial deportations of Judeans into the Mesopotamian heartland.

In addition to continued debates on about the historical events themselves, and the challenge of reading different biblical texts in relation to these historical events, the 'exile' has also been the focus of ongoing discussions in biblical theology. This attention to 'exile' has taken two different forms: through an analysis of the theology of the texts themselves in their own times; and through modern theological reflections on 'exile' as a theme. The latter approach appears in twenty-first century proposals for a (mainly Christian) biblical theology, which takes these historical events seriously, and examines how they inform contemporary Christian faith and practice. Finally, discussion on 'exile' themes in theology now incorporates scholars in both Old and New Testament work.

Keywords: Bible, Conquest, Israel, Babylon, Assyria, Prophetic books, Pentateuch, Diaspora, Remnant, Migration, Exile, Empire, Resistance

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1 Introduction – reflecting on violent events: the modern rise of ‘theologies of exile’

> [E]xile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. (Edward Said, 1984)

Readers of the Old Testament, including those with an interest in the role of the Bible as a source of inspiration for Christian faith and practice, have long noted that there are a variety of ways one can ‘read’ these texts. One could, for example, sift through the texts with a particular question in mind in an effort to ‘mine’ them for insights, in hopes of accumulating a ‘biblical perspective’ on the topic at hand. There is still a steady stream of publications that are the result of these kinds of textual ‘hunting and gathering’ expeditions, although the criticisms of this kind of approach are many – and important: what about the historical context of these various passages? What about historical changes evident between older and more recent passages? What about differences of perspective between sources, genres, and writers?

Another important approach is rooted in the task of assessing the impact of major historical events associated with biblical texts – both in terms of human experience and in terms of questions of religious faith (then and now). The most obvious question of this kind is ‘do we know what happened?’, as the historical events reported in the Bible are often beyond the reach of what can be verified either textually or archaeologically. However, with the texts we have, scholars can often discern a sense of the impact of historical events on ancient peoples, even if the events themselves are only partially understood. Therefore, this task is not understood as merely ‘doing history rather than theology’. In fact, an ‘event-based’ approach can be highly suggestive for biblical theology, as scholars ask how ancient Hebrews’ religious responses to events can inform modern thinking about contemporary faith and practice. This has resulted in a new emphasis on the diversity of biblical voices, and thus a diversity of responses to these events, as will be briefly surveyed below.

A significant older example of this is found in studies that were focused on the ‘exodus’ not only as a description of ‘events’ but also as a biblical theme. The recognition of ‘exodus’ as a theme has often driven a religious perspective among readers of biblical texts – a perspective that has come to be deeply concerned with justice for the oppressed. One need only cite the overwhelming presence of references to Moses and themes of ‘crossing the Jordan’ in the lyrics of African-American ‘Spirituals’ (one of the most important literary and religious artifacts from American slavery, cf. Peters 1993; cf. Glaude 2000). The Moses stories also influenced the centrality of ‘exodus’ themes in twentieth-century liberation theology (Croatto 1981).

However, another theological movement concerns the study of ‘exile’ as a centrally significant – even defining – historical event and theme for the people of the Bible. The unprecedented violence of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – wars, climatic fluctuations (and the failure to respond to them), and economic devastation, especially as events which drive millions into involuntary (or ‘forced’) migrations and movement around the world – has created a context for the rise of ‘theologies of exile’ in the contemporary world.

Evidence for this significant shift in biblical studies is not difficult to find. For example, in his book on Old Testament theology, Walter Brueggemann states: ‘It is now increasingly agreed that the Old Testament in its final form is a product of and a response to the Babylonian Exile’ (Brueggemann 1997: 74). Similarly, Jean-Philippe DeLorme writes: ‘The deportation that followed the first Babylonian invasion of 597 BCE […] represents one of the most significant stages in the history of ancient Israel’ (Delorme 2019: 121), events for which there is ‘sound evidence’ (Kessler 2010: 347). Mark Leuchter categorically states that any modern scholar attempting to minimize the impact of the exile is ‘simply incorrect’, and that the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple ‘was accompanied by massive social disruptions across all corners of Judah’ (Leuchter 2007: 202). Similarly, Hyun Chul Paul Kim argues that exile was the ‘single-most significant event in understanding the Hebrew Bible’ (Kim 2013: 45). William Schniedewind argues that the conquests and forced migrations of the Hebrew people in the eighth and sixth centuries (following the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests, respectively) are the backdrop to the beginnings of Hebrew as a written language (Schniedewind 2013: 77). Finally, in the opening lines of his major work on the exile, Rainer Albertz writes:

> Of all the eras in Israel’s history, the exilic period represents the most profound caesura and the most radical change. Its significance for subsequent history can hardly be overstated. Here the religion of Israel underwent its most severe crisis. (Albertz 2003: 1)

These events cast a long shadow. Contemporary scholars are coming to agree that the majority of the Old Testament, and all of the New Testament, were written and/or edited under the conditions of military conquest, exile, and forced migration which originated in the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests and exiles (‘exile’ in 1 Pet 1:1; ‘Babylon’ in 1 Pet 5:13; 1 Pet 6; references to ‘Babylon’ in Revelation, etc.). Therefore, the Bible takes its present shape amidst diaspora communities outside the land of Israel and among groups living under foreign occupation in the coastal Mediterranean Hebrew homelands. Even texts which are based on pre-exilic events or figures, such as the eighth-century BCE prophet Micah, show the signs of later exilic or post-exilic reflection on exile (‘you shall go to Babylon’ in Micah 4:10, for example). Thus, many (and likely most) biblical texts are

written – and thus need to be 'read' – at least partly as a response to these events. As David S. Vanderhooft has argued, '[t]he effects of this trauma on the literary deposit of the Hebrew Bible can scarcely be overstated' (Vanderhooft 2016: 133). If we accept that 'exile' is an issue which is equally theological and historical, what are the theological questions that these events raise?

Different 'streams' of modern biblical scholarship are involved in these questions. First, work continues in articulating the differing religious responses to exilic and post-exilic events found in the biblical texts, with a focus on the time of origins of the texts themselves (Middlemas 2007; Albertz 2003; most recently Rom-Shiloni 2021). Secondly, a number of scholars are concerned with the implications of this emerging focus on exile for contemporary (mainly Christian) faith communities who are seeking to listen to diverse scriptural voices for guidance and wisdom. Within this second group, some scholars focus on the experiences of the Israelite exiles themselves, while others highlight the relevance of scriptural emphasis on exile leading to a concern for the care of modern 'exiles', relating to the worldwide crisis of refugee and forced migration in the modern world.

In order to helpfully summarize a growing body of work which defies a brief summary, this article will proceed in two major sections. First, a brief consideration of selected biblical texts will shed light on the historical events themselves, including diverse voices from biblical texts which likely represent different groups of Judeans. This is followed by a consideration of the work of a select number of modern biblical theologians, who continue to propose ways of listening to these diverse biblical voices in the construction of Christian faith and practice.

1.1 Understanding the exile events in history: archaeology and biblical texts

It is helpful to organize a historical survey of the biblical texts related to events of the exile according to a three-part structure: (a) discussions of the deported communities, (b) discussions of the communities who remained in Judean territories, and (c) discussions of the events in the early Persian period (e.g. after 539), following the Persian conquest of Babylon. Before doing so, however, a summary of the historical events themselves will prove useful.

Although we refer to the 'Babylonian' exile in reference to the rise of the Neo-Babylonian empire, many historians insist that we place these events in a historical sequence beginning with the renewed ferocity of the Neo-Assyrian empire under Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BCE) and the Assyrian conquests of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722. The later Neo-Assyrian ruler, Sennacherib (who ruled 705–681 BCE), engaged in a widely attested military campaign against Judah and Jerusalem in 702–701. This weakened Judean defences (especially the coastal Lachish armory) prior to the Babylonian

incursions and caused serious damage to the surrounding countryside (Faust 2012: 149–150). Almost a century later, at the battle of Harran in 609 BCE, the Neo-Babylonian armies reduced the remaining Neo-Assyrian forces to ruin, and later Nebuchadnezzar faced Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish in 605. In short, the long eighth–seventh centuries of Assyrian incursions are not only a backdrop to the rise of the Northern Prophets Amos and Hosea and Judean prophets Micah and Isaiah (all of whose books show signs of being edited under the impact of the later exilic events). The Assyrian incursions are also important background for understanding the impact of the Neo-Babylonian invasions of the early sixth century, because there is a legacy of traumatic military events long before the actual destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 BCE.

After his victory over an Egyptian army at Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar II became emperor of the Babylonian empire in 605 (Vanderhooft 2016: 127). Delayed by events in the imperial heartland, Nebuchadnezzar did not return to his ‘Western campaign’ until the early sixth century. Finally, in 597 BCE, the expansionist Neo-Babylonian empire pressured Judah into a surrender. Most historians assume that Nebuchadnezzar’s goal was to have easier access for future invasions of Egypt, invasions which never transpired. In this early surrender, Jerusalem was spared, but a significant number of people were taken as prisoners of war, sometimes simply referred to as ‘exiles’, or ‘deportees’. They were taken from Jerusalem and the surrounding villages, and included young King Jehoiachin and his immediate circle, who were resettled in the Babylonian heartland.

In captivity, Jehoiachin and his immediate retinue appear to have been housed in Babylon itself. If the last four verses of 2 Kings are to be taken at face value, he was eventually treated with some deference by the Babylonian authorities. In a notable case of archaeology aligning with biblical history, a cuneiform record of Jehoiachin’s presence in Babylon was discovered in the ruins of Babylon during Robert Koldewey’s digs between 1899–1917. Often referred to as the ‘Weidner text’, these are cuneiform ‘ration lists’ which list supplies for numerous recipients, including Jehoiachin and five of his sons not mentioned in the Bible (Alstola 2020: 28). While some scholars refer to the listed amounts as ‘generous’, it is difficult to be certain without knowing the total number of people involved.

This first deportation following the surrender of Jerusalem seems to have emphasized taking an ‘upper’ and ‘skilled’ class of Judeans (2 Kgs 24:14, 16), leaving only the ‘poorest of the land’, although 2 Kings also suggests some looting of valuables in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 24:13). The Babylonians placed Jehoiachin’s uncle Mattaniah on the throne in Jerusalem as a client-king, changing his name to ‘Zedekiah’ (name changes were used to symbolize superiority over a client ruler).

Some ten years after Jehoiachin's surrender (587 or 586 BCE), Zedekiah tried to revolt. The prophet Jeremiah appears to have strongly condemned any idea of revolt (cf. Jer 28). Passages in Jeremiah suggest that this ill-advised policy was at least partly encouraged by Egypt, but with strong local support. If Egypt had in fact promised assistance, it never arrived. The Babylonian response to Zedekiah's revolt was far more severe than the response to Jehoiachin's surrender in 597 BCE. Jerusalem was destroyed, including its centrally important temple. Many fled or were killed in the battles, and another wave of deportees were taken. Zedekiah's own family was killed, and he was taken prisoner 'in chains' (2 Kgs 25:7).

Jeremiah 52:28–30 is often presumed to refer to a third wave of deportation, although it is sometimes argued to be a much smaller group (for discussions attempting to make sense of the various numbers given, and the number of events, see Ahn 2011; Nelson 2015: 166; and Alstola 2020: 14).

For a more nuanced understanding of these events, we can also look beyond the biblical texts. Cuneiform documentation from Babylonian sources have been available for some time, and it is not difficult to construct a basic picture of Neo-Babylonian ideology regarding military expansionism and conquered nations. For example, in a series of cuneiform royal texts in the form of prayers (described collectively as 'C41'), usually called 'building inscriptions', Nebuchadnezzar II asks Marduk (the patron god of Babylon) to recognize his efforts on Babylon's (and thus Marduk's) behalf. In these building inscriptions, Nebuchadnezzar boasts about the peoples he has conquered, then states that he forced them to build monumental structures in honour of Marduk. Nebuchadnezzar claims to impose the 'forced labour basket' on all the far-flung nations, at the command of Marduk:

> (All the widespread peoples), the governance of whom I exercise at the command of Marduk, my lord, and who carried mighty cedars from the mountain of Lebanon to Babylon, my city – all the peoples of the wide inhabited regions whom Marduk, my lord, bestowed upon me, I subjected them to corvée to build Etemenanki and I imposed the tupšikku [work basket] upon them. (Cited in Vanderhooft 2018: 95)

Historians have come to understand that Nebuchadnezzar heavily financed his empire with wealth stolen from conquered lands, and that the state was dependent on 'forced labour and military service' (Jursa 2014: 120–121).

Finally, before considering some of the biblical texts, it is important to take note of recently published cuneiform tablets that mention Judeans living in exile. These cuneiform business texts (essentially receipts and contracts) are referred to collectively as the 'Al-Yahudu' texts, as they often mention a residential community of deported Judean families,

translated colloquially as ‘Judah-town’. The texts date from 572, at the earliest (during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar), until 477, thus into the Persian period (Alstola 2020: 125). The striking feature of these texts is the significant number of Judean names involved in business transactions, showing Judean exiles and their descendants engaging in routine economic exchanges. There is still considerable controversy about how much these texts actually reveal of what life was like among exiled communities more widely.

Some historians have made expansive comments about how these texts force us to ‘readjust our vision of this crucial period’ (Delorme 2019: 72). Others remain sceptical of some interpretations of what is, at present, minimal evidence about daily exilic life. A good example comes from texts dealing with a family with the name ‘Ahiqam’. The family appears to have succeeded in business – but Dalit Rom-Shiloni points out that this family gained its wealth only by the third generation, well into the Persian period. She warns against painting overly cheerful pictures of exilic prosperity, noting that ‘such a small amount of data may in fact indicate the difficulties of relocation, rather than fast acculturation into Babylonian economical life’ (Rom-Shiloni 2017: 127). Berlejung concurs, arguing that settlers and former soldiers among the Judeans were, upon arrival in Babylonian territories, ‘highly vulnerable’ (Berlejung 2017: 104). Additionally, Caroline Waerzeggers cautions that the cuneiform documents themselves represent official record-keeping and thus the watchful eyes of government officials (Waerzeggers 2015: 187).

Finally, it should be noted that Judeans were never described as ‘higher functionaries’ in the cuneiform documents (contrary to the literary traditions of Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah, for example), but only ‘minor officials’ (Alstola 2020: 203). Clearly the majority of deported Judeans were placed on government-owned lands, essentially as ‘share croppers’ – working assigned land and in exchange paying taxes and/or providing military or other service personnel (Alstola 2020: 109; Waerzeggers 2015: 181). All of this aligns with a view, noted by Stökl (Stökl 2015a: 226), that the resettlement policy conforms with the Babylonian concern to redevelop lands that had suffered devastation in wars against Assyria and Elam.

This article will now examine some central examples of biblical texts thought to be written by Israelites and Judahites in response to exile, to see how they compare with these extra-biblical materials. Note, however, that virtually all modern approaches agree on the diversity of these textual responses, which we can only briefly summarize here.

1.1.1 The impact of the exile: the deported

1.1.1.1 The book of Ezekiel and the initial deportation of 597 BCE

The first deportation, following the surrender of young King Jehoiachin, is identified in 2 Kings and Jeremiah as somewhat selective: it specifies ‘officials, warriors, artisans, smiths’ (2 Kgs 24:13–15). Jehoiachin and his retinue were taken, including religious

personnel and land-owners, and the land was reassigned by the occupying Babylonians. It is thus often argued that this represented an exile of the Jerusalem ‘elite’. Notably, according to the opening verses of the Book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel himself was among these first exiles that accompanied Jehoiachin.

There is considerable contemporary interest in some details in Ezekiel that suggest that the prophet was aware of, and interacting with, elements of Neo-Babylonian language, culture, and context as an exile. Thus, Vanderhooft observes a consensus in Ezekiel scholarship that the prophet’s activity took place mainly in Babylonia (Vanderhooft 2014: 100). Delorme concurs: ‘the book of Ezekiel is one of the prime sources for studying the impact of the exile as well as the social dynamics within this group of exiles’ (Delorme 2019: 122). Ezekiel, therefore, has come to be seen as a ‘representative voice’ of this first deportation. It is in the book of Ezekiel, for example, that we first learn of a community of exiles living together. The book mentions ‘gatherings’ of elders with Ezekiel, suggesting that his proclamations gained a serious following among deported people in their communities (Ezek 8:1; 14:1; 20:1, etc.). Some have seen the recovery of the ‘business receipts’, noted above, as rather significant confirmation of Ezekiel’s allusions to communal gatherings.

The present form of the book of Ezekiel is characterized by a series of (often rather striking) visions, but also by descriptions of publicly demonstrative ‘prophetic actions’. Virtually all of these prophetic actions portray elements of the exilic experience: Ezekiel builds a model of Jerusalem under siege and then eats impure food as those in besieged cities are forced to do (Ezek 4); he cuts his hair in a manner that reminds people of forms of death and destruction in war – fire, sword, flight (Ezek 5; cf. Jer 7:29), or packing ‘an exile’s bag’ before forced migration (Ezek 12). Like these actions, the visions also reflect the Babylonian experience. For example, the visionary return to Jerusalem to see the sins of the people which brought on the punishment of exile (Ezek 8–9), or the hopeful vision of restoration that constitutes the entire final fifth of the book (Ezek 40–48). Earlier questions about the ‘mental health’ of Ezekiel have now been largely replaced by an interest in reading Ezekiel (and other texts from exile) in dialogue with ‘trauma studies’. Such readings have been suggestive of the ways Ezekiel struggled with the challenges of exile (Poser 2012; Carr 2018; Janzen 2019; Boase and Frechette 2016; Becker, Dochhorn and Holt 2014).

Some scholars of Ezekiel have pointed out the ways that the book reflects a particularly ‘priestly’ reaction to the exile, drawing on the prophet’s background as a young Zadokite priest in Jerusalem. Andrew Mein, for example, refers to the ‘ritualized’ rhetoric of the book as Ezekiel tries to provide guidance that is clearly informed by temple-centred concerns such as purity (Mein 2001: 260). Similarly, Sweeney emphasizes Ezekiel’s use of language related to the purity of the Temple, referred to as ‘purgatory’ language, for speaking about

the experience of exile (Sweeney 2013: 9–15). However, all of these observations could be equally valid whether the book reflects an imagined experience of exile or actual lived experience among exiles in Babylon.

Finally, it is now also thought that Ezekiel interacts with his Neo-Babylonian context in certain clear ways. A number of scholars have presented lists of interesting ‘loan words’ in Ezekiel, likely derived from his Babylonian linguistic context. Possible lexical influences include terms for monetary units, ‘assigned quotas’ (for delivery of goods), neck-stocks, credit, ‘manumission’ of slaves, etc. (Stökl 2015a: 244–247). Many of these loan words are from the lexica of commerce and policing, areas with which foreign-born deportees would become familiar rather quickly. Vanderhooft observes that:

> in a context characterized by the psychological stresses of forced migration, members of the self-identifying Judean community must have looked to intellectual experts of their community, such as Ezekiel, to decode and communicate the content and perhaps shortcomings of the institutions and ideas characteristic of Babylonian life. (Vanderhooft 2014: 119)

Related to this, there have been arguments suggesting that Ezekiel drew on what he saw as well as what he (and others) heard. Shawn Aster argues that some of Ezekiel’s imagery of God draws on carved illustrations of Mesopotamian gods in ubiquitous images of ‘glory’ (‘Melammu’ in the Akkadian language; Aster 2015). Christoph Uehlinger argues that the four beasts in Ezekiel’s early visions in chapters 1 and 10 are versions of Mesopotamian imagery (Uehlinger 2015a; Uehlinger 2015a, cf. Stökl 2015a: 247). Similarly, Smith-Christopher has noted that seventy percent of the uses of the word ‘demut’ (an intentionally vague term meaning ‘something like’) in the Old Testament appear in Ezekiel. This perhaps reflects Ezekiel’s intentional choice of an imprecise term, suggesting a struggle to make sense of his surroundings (Smith-Christopher 2020).

Casey A. Strine, along somewhat different lines, argues that Ezekiel draws on Mesopotamian gestures and motifs that are used as ‘authenticating elements’ (especially the phrase ‘as I live’, and a symbolically raised hand). Citing especially Ezek 17:1–24; 34:1–16; 20:32–44, Strine argues that even if these ‘gestures’ used by Ezekiel are Mesopotamian

> [I]t is evident that the book of Ezekiel adopts and adapts them in order to defend one of its central theological concepts: despite external signs that YHWH was defeated by Marduk, Judah’s patron deity remained powerful, in control of his people, his land, and even foreign leaders. (Strine 2013: 230)

Thus, a theology of exile drawing on Ezekiel would take careful note of the fact that Ezekiel is engaged in teaching Judahite exiles but is occasionally using terms and imagery – about money, work requirements, and the equipment of restraint – familiar to captives in Babylon. At the same time, Ezekiel draws on the higher authority of God, describing visionary experiences that reassure the exiles of God's continued intention and presence, even providing blueprints for a reconstructed Israel in a future day of reconstruction (Ezek 40–48).

Notably, the above approach is similar to the impact of 'empire studies' in New Testament research. These studies focus on how conquered, minoritized, or diaspora cultures engage with dominant cultures, and can raise important questions. For example, New Testament scholars wonder if Paul's allusions to 'peace and security' in an early text like 1 Thess 5:3 are ironic (even sarcastic) references to Roman propaganda about how the empire is bringing 'peace' and/or 'security'. Adam Winn argues that the New Testament use of titles which are frequently applied to Jesus, such as 'son of God', 'saviour', 'lord', and 'king' 'were all commonly attributed to Roman emperors. When in Mark's Gospel a Roman centurion bestows on Jesus the title 'Son of God' (Mark 15:39), a title that such a figure would commonly bestow on his emperor, the Graeco-Roman reader would at least pause to consider whether a subversive message was intended, namely, if Jesus is Son of God then is Caesar not? (Winn 2016: 6–8). Thus, and similarly, Old Testament texts are being 're-read' in the Babylonian context as well.

1.1.1.2 Isaiah, 'Second' Isaiah, and perhaps a 'Third' Isaiah?

If Ezekiel is often read to represent an early exilic voice, 'Second Isaiah' (Isa 40–66) is read as a voice near the end of Babylonian rule, anticipating the Persian conquests. Thus, Second (or Deutero-) Isaiah has long been considered an exilic/post-exilic work. This text is thought to have been subsequently attached to material from the eighth-century prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem – for whom the book was named despite extensive additions from other sources. There is an explicit Persian-period reference to Cyrus in Isa 45:1, and a striking change of tone between Isaiah 39 and 40. These have long convinced biblical scholars that chapter 40 onwards contains a second voice, written much later than the material in Isaiah 1–39 where we find traditions assigned to the eighth-century prophet Isaiah. There is widespread agreement about 'Second Isaiah' being an early Persian-period voice, but the possibility of a third and even later voice (or collection of voices) in Isaiah 56–66 remains more controversial.

The tone of Isaiah 45 seems to be anticipating the arrival of Cyrus, but not his actual conquest of Babylon. Therefore it may be possible that the voice called 'Second Isaiah' was also among the Babylonian exiles in the years just before 539 BCE. Cyrus, it should

be recalled, conquered Babylon (largely without violence) in 539 BCE, and inaugurated the 'Persian period' from then until the conquests of Alexander the Great in 333 BCE.

Beyond this older consensus, however, focus on Deutero-Isaiah's exilic context has drawn attention to other notable passages, in a similar manner to the way empire studies impact readings of Ezekiel and the New Testament. For example, a key text that has long attracted considerable interest is the mention of Babylonian gods apparently seen in a public procession in Isa 46:1–2. These kinds of processions would have been part of the annual Babylonian 'Akitu' festival in Nissan, and involved 'processional omens' which featured the gods Marduk and Nabu (as reported in the Isaiah text, cf. Schaudig 2008: 561). References to the god Bel 'bowing' or the phrase 'Nebu stoops' may involve more than simply satire from the writer of Second Isaiah. Hanspeter Schaudig points out that any swaying of the statues would have received close attention from the Babylonians, who would see such 'accidents' as terrifying omens, but which would have delighted their captive exiles (Schaudig 2008: 568, cf. Vanderhooft 2016: 132). Similarly, Aster has argued that sections of Isaiah 1–39 reflect and even satirize imperial Assyrian texts and motifs (Aster 2015).

Thus the Babylonian sections of Isaiah simply carry on the tradition of satirizing the exiles' captors. In sum, reading some of these allusions to surrounding hegemonic power as potential provocations, criticism, and even resistance (the latter especially in light of the influential work on 'peasant forms of resistance' in Scott 1987; 1992) alerts historians to the fact that there are many varieties of 'resistance' that do not involve open conflict, and that these are as significant for theological reflection as they are for historical analysis.

The most famous debates surrounding Deutero-Isaiah, however, are surely the famous 'Servant Songs' of Isa 42:1–9, 49:1–13, 50:4–11, and 52:13–53:12. While some scholars read all four of these passages as sharing a common concern, it is more common in recent work to divide them into different categories and thus propose that they have different referents, rather than all referring to the same person or theme. The central passage of concern is the most famous 'suffering servant' passage, Isa 52:13–53:12, which has a strong emphasis on suffering – even suffering for the benefit of others.
The standard Jewish tradition is to interpret all 'servant' passages according to the identification provided in Isa 41:8–9, namely that the 'servant' is Israel ('Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend') in verse 8, with the added identification in verse 9 ('you whom I took from the ends of the earth') representing the figure as a collective reference to the exilic community itself throughout the 'suffering servant' passages. The 'suffering' theme is therefore understood as a significant indication of exilic perceptions of the experience of exile, and a creative way to interpret suffering as having some meaning for the future. Theologically, this need not discourage Christians who traditionally read the 'suffering servant' passages as predictions about Jesus. On the

contrary, the passage provides theological and biblical grounds for the very concept of suffering for others that undergirds virtually any Christian theology of the cross.

Finally, is there a 'Third' Isaiah? Bradley Gregory argues that the voice normally called 'Third Isaiah' (traditionally chapters 56–66, though some suggest 49–66) represents a 'post-exilic' reinterpretation of the words of Second Isaiah which come from Babylon's exile community. Significantly, Gregory argues that the voices identified as Third Isaiah are using themes from the previous section precisely because these latter voices have

> perceived a theological continuity between Israel's situation in exile and his own situation, one facilitated by the dual consideration that postexilic Israel was practicing the same kinds of sins that led them into exile in the first place […] and the fact that the metaphor for exile in Deutero-Isaiah, debt-slavery, was a concrete problem in his own day. (Gregory 2007: 487–488)

Therefore, Gregory argues: 'Isaiah 61:1–3 may represent one of the earliest attestations of the phenomenon of understanding the exile as an ongoing state, that is, understanding the exile theologically rather than just historically' (Gregory 2007: 488).

1.1.1.3 Genesis and Moses: the Pentateuch as an exilic text

The traditional 'Documentary Hypothesis' of Julius Wellhausen proposed that the finished product of the Pentateuch was an exilic work, completed by priests. Recent studies raise serious complications on the various 'groups' represented in the composition of the Pentateuch. More and more of these texts are being considered exilic in origin, or at least as being radically 're-read' (and thus edited) in exilic contexts. For example, scholars ask how exilic-era texts in the Pentateuch 'interact' with the exilic, or even culturally Babylonian contexts. These questions have led, for example, to renewed attention to the likely Neo-Babylonian references in the book of Genesis. Similarities have long been noted between the opening lines of Genesis and the Babylonian creation epic 'Enuma Elish', or between the flood narrative of Genesis 6–9 and chapter 11 of the Epic of Gilgamesh. However, recent attention suggests that something more subversive may be operating in these references. Vanderhooft, for example, points to Gen 1:2, with its references to 'storm vs. sea' motifs echoing a scene in the Enuma Elish where the storm-god Marduk conquers the sea-god Tiamat.

With this reading, the Genesis text (placed at the prime position of the opening narrative) can be read as clear evidence of Judean familiarity with this epic Babylonian story. The Enuma Elish played a central role in the annual 'Akitu' Festival – a celebration that effectively served as a reaffirmation of imperial Babylonian ideology. It celebrated 'the king's political prerogatives' and served as 'the basic framework of Babylonian

religio-political thought in the imperial era' (Vanderhooft 2016: 132). By challenging the Babylonian story with a Hebrew story that denies both the centrality of imperial kingship and that violent conflict is central to creation, the storytellers of Genesis engage in ideological conflict (even resistance). The narrative of Genesis, in direct contrast to the Enuma Elish, denies that warfare is endemic to the universe and its divine origins. The dialogue between Genesis and Babylonian culture goes beyond the creation story, including the Patriarchal and Matriarchal narratives as well.

Jean-Pierre Ruiz, for example, marshals important studies of refugee 'forced dishonesty' (lying to secure food or supplies in refugee camps, etc.) as a new way to read texts such as Genesis 12, 20, and 26. In these stories, Abraham and Isaac tell their (silent) wives to 'say you are my sister' when they pass as refugees into foreign territories (e.g. Egypt, Philistia, Canaanite societies) and face the dangers of official surveillance (Ruiz 2011: 57–70). Similarly, Jacob employs 'trickster'-style cleverness in relation to misleading authority figures like Laban, reminding us of Judith's subterfuge, Tobit's night-time practices to avoid Assyrian authorities, and Esther and Nehemiah's fear of confronting authorities. All of these are classic elements of 'low status' peoples negotiating their tenuous relations in foreign contexts with (typically hostile) foreign authorities. All are set in the circumstances of exile and its aftermath. As Eftihia Voutira and Barbara E. Harrell-Bond have written strikingly, based on their research on contemporary refugee societies, '[t]o be a Refugee means to learn to lie' (Voutira and Harrell-Bond 1995: 216).

The theologically rich potential of these discussions is not to be missed – especially in an era when religious justifications for national power threaten values of toleration, justice, and inter-cultural co-existence. A powerful tradition of suspicion and resistance toward secular power – especially unjust, racist, violent, or cruel secular power – is made all the more important when those powers attempt to use religious symbols to distract from their cruelties. The Hebrew exiles were not so easily seduced.

1.1.2 The impact of the exile: those who remained in the land

1.1.2.1 Lamentations as crisis literature

Other biblical texts appear to represent reactions to exile from the homeland, as opposed to representing those of the deported in Ezekiel and Second Isaiah. What was the reality of those remaining behind? As Tero Alstola summarizes, '[a]bove all, the exile was a catastrophe' (Alstola 2020: 24–25). Among the earliest documents attributed to people who remained in the land after 587 (perhaps even after the proposed third deportation of 582) is the short book of Lamentations. Considerable attention in the discussion on Lamentations is focused on clarifying its literary form, that of a 'lament'. Despite these apparently technical or superficial concerns, it is important to keep in mind that Lamentations consists of poems which deal with a very real crisis. As Jill Middlemas writes: 'Lamentations vividly capture[s] the exclamation of national grief at the unexpected

and unbelievable fall of Jerusalem' (Middlemas 2021: 3). Although the book's grieving poems comprise a work of artistic and poetic literature, very few scholars would contest the historical reality of shocking events connected to 587 that are referenced in the poetry. Wilkins, for example, describes the horrific history standing behind the words:

> The poems' references to war-related hunger evoke sympathy for the city's population, especially women and children, and call into question the appropriateness of God's aggression that is mediated through an enemy nation. No other texts in the Hebrew Bible depict more graphically the destructive power of siege warfare, especially the impact of hunger used as a weapon of war against Israel's vulnerable civilians. From the opening chapter that speaks of Jerusalem's siege victims begging for food 'just to stay alive' (Lam. 1:11, 19), to the last chapter where survivors are burning with fever from the long-term effects of war-related famine (5:10), the theme of hunger lends literary coherence, but also raises theological ambiguity in the book of Lamentations. (Wilkins 2014: 68)

Is it possible to have some idea of what the emotional poetry of Lamentations is actually talking about in terms of conditions 'on the ground'? Archaeological surveys on the conditions in the conquered Judean homeland increasingly confirm a context that could well give rise to this kind of poetry – especially following the destruction of 587/586. Comparing circa 600 BCE to the middle of the fifth century BCE, Oded Lipschits has argued that the archaeological evidence for settlements in the region suggests a seventy percent decline in the population of the Judean territories, including Jerusalem – a rate of depopulation from over 100,000 people to just 30,000 (Lipschits 2005). In fact, Lipschits believes that Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside would not have fully recovered its former population and economic status until the third century BCE (cf. Guillaume on the geography of devastation, 2015: 125). Avraham Faust's analysis of archaeological sites led him to propose the language of 'post-collapse societies' in speaking about the physical impact of these events in sixth-century Judah (Faust 2012; cf. Nelson 2015: 166, speaking of debris, charred remains, starvation). It seems hardly accidental that Lamentations was traditionally associated with the book of Jeremiah, as both represent voices that spent time in Judah after the tragedies of 587 BCE.

1.1.2.2 Jeremiah: at home and in exile?

Besides the brief poetry of Lamentations, the biblical tradition states Jeremiah remained in the land after 597, and thus experienced the second crisis of 587 BCE. Jeremiah also remained after that crisis, and is therefore often seen as a representative voice of the 'second' group. There is little doubt of the central importance of the book of Jeremiah for trying to assemble a picture of the exilic events – and reactions to those events – but recent work has complicated scholarly readings of the book. Vanderhooft, for example, plainly states that the book of Jeremiah 'dominates biblical discussion of Nebuchadnezzar'

and seems ‘obsessed’ with Babylon and its king (Vanderhooft 2018: 98), yet a plain reading of the book suggests that Jeremiah was never in Babylon. Jeremiah apparently did not, however, escape an exile of his own. After the assassination of the Babylonian-appointed governor Gedaliah and his retinue (about which Jeremiah gives us the most information in chapters 38–41), Jeremiah was kidnapped and taken to Egypt. The question remains whether some of the book of Jeremiah came from Babylon.

Leuchter argues that the first half of the book may represent the actual teachings of the prophet Jeremiah in Jerusalem, who advised cooperation with the Babylonian regime. After chapter 24 or 25, he believes that the remaining chapters represent editorial work in Babylon. Leuchter proposes a ‘supplement’ (chapters 26–45) in exile, to which were added the ‘oracles against the nations’ (chapters 46–52, see Leuchter 2008). Thus, even though Jeremiah himself may never have been to Babylon, the expanded *book* of Jeremiah may well have come from there. This allows the interesting possibility of reading later passages as ‘commentary’ on earlier ones. Leuchter then proposes that chapter 26 – which he sees as clearly related to the ‘temple sermon’ of chapter 7 – is in fact an exilic ‘commentary’ on and further development from that original sermon/narrative in chapter 7 (Leuchter 2008: 33). Leuchter is especially interested in the possibility of Jeremiah representing the perspective of Levitical priests, given Jeremiah’s familial associations with the Priestly families of Anathoth and his identification as the son of a priest (Jer 1:1). If Jeremiah represents a Levitical perspective, this brings the book into relationship with recent work on wider Levitical perspectives over against the Zadokite or Aaronite central priestly hierarchy of Jerusalem – a hierarchy represented by Ezekiel and some of the ‘elite’ who left in 597.

Middlemas had already called attention to the different theologies of restoration in Jeremiah and Ezekiel: Jeremiah suggesting possible forgiveness, Ezekiel suggesting that God will act solely for God’s reputation (‘[s]o that you will know that I am the Lord’, cf. Middlemas 2007: 90).

If Jeremiah represents a perspective of Levitical, ‘rural-oriented’ religious personnel – over against the centralizing tendencies of Zadokite/Aaronite Jerusalem personnel – this would explain the often noted commonalities between Jeremiah and Deuteronomy (a Levitical-oriented version of the laws of Moses). Some have suggested (e.g. Cook 2012; Leuchter 2008) that Deuteronomy is not the document that drove Josiah’s ‘reform’, but rather a Levitical reaction to Josiah’s centralization described in 2 Kings 23. Stephan Cook, for example, argues that texts like Deut 16:18–20 and 17:2–7 are attempts to ‘counter and reform the monarchy’s hierarchically organized legal system. These texts push back against a system that concentrated judicial power in a royal center’ (Cook 2012: 56). In Deuteronomy 16, 17, and 21, Cook sees an attempt to preserve local authority even as Josiah seeks to strengthen the capital. Finally, Leuchter sees the latter chapters of

Jeremiah representing a largely Levitical move during the exile toward scribal authority as a balance (and answer) to centralized Zadokite/Aaronite authority and its monarchical partners

> Torah is distanced from the Zadokite priesthood (cf. Jer 18:18) and declared to be completely a scribal concern, thereby open to exegetical interpretation. In this way, the audience could retain its Israelite identity while rejecting the corporate nature of Israelite nationhood under the king and the priests in Jerusalem. (Leuchter 2008: 59)

Since Jeremiah was part of the community which remained after 587, attention to that group is also an important aspect of this analysis. The community at Mizpah, where Gedeliah (a member of Jeremiah's extended Levitical family) was made governor, involves a tragic tale of political intrigue. The book of Jeremiah gives us far more detail about these events than any other source, and Leuchter argues that this is part of the reason for emphasizing the violence and 'debauchery' of the assassins, including an outrageous massacre of pilgrims heading to the ruined temple in Jerusalem. The assassins were identified with the royal Davidic line, thus putting groups associated with the monarchy at odds with those associated with the prophet. Leuchter comments:

> The account presents a bitter commentary on the old covenantal institutions (the Temple and the royal line as sacred): these fixtures lead to destruction and death over against the potential represented by the prophetic word as mediated programmatically through Gedaliah. (Leuchter 2008: 125)

Leuchter argues that the Babylonian 'supplement' of Jeremiah (chapters 25–49) represents another unique 'voice' among the exiles, quite different from the Ezekiel voice representing the old Jerusalem 'establishment'. The supplement in Jeremiah 25–49, argues Leuchter, presents Jeremiah himself as a 'symbol of the deportees' own experience', emphasizing Jeremiah's imprisonments and forced removal to a foreign land (Leuchter 2008: 145). This is all in striking contrast to Ezekiel, who paid most attention to the Jerusalem cult (e.g. his temple-centred reconstruction in chapters 40–48). Leuchter even speaks of Ezekiel voicing a 'tirade' against Levitical notions about Torah being based on 'word/teaching' as opposed to being 'temple' based, notions which would have disempowered the former elite (Leuchter 2008: 157). Ultimately, Leuchter asks if Jeremiah 26 can be read as an 'assault on the Zadokite circle' (Leuchter 2008: 162).

Jeremiah's unique voice in the early chapters of the book, however, clearly argues for a level of cooperation with Babylonian hegemony. This is not because of a favourable view of Babylon (although Jeremiah's use of 'servant' language with regard to Nebuchadnezzar

could give that impression: Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10). Rather, it comes from Jeremiah's strong sense of God's justice, as Jeremiah carries out God's warnings about the consequences of disobeying his laws of justice (an argument preeminently displayed in the temple sermon of Jer 7). Even a Babylonian official is presented as understanding Jeremiah's theology of 'judgment' (Jer 40:1–2). Many of Jeremiah's words about a more hopeful future were taken up in later tradition as well, such as the seventy years of exile indicated in Jer 29:10, recalculated in Dan 9:24 as seventy weeks (presumably, then, 70 x 7 = 490 years). Jeremiah's arguments in favour of cooperation were seen – even at the time – as a kind of treason to some, but clearly (and ironically) were appreciated by Babylonian officials (Jer 40:1–5).

Theologically, Jeremiah's argument (which may well have been the Prophetic source of Deuteronomic Theology generally) that 'we brought this on ourselves' has controversial implications. It has also been read as a way for the prophet to assure his listeners (and readers) that these catastrophic events are not outside of God's control and will come to an eventual end. This argument is familiar to people suffering some form of subordination, or even conquest. An intriguing example is provided by 'New World' Indigenous traditions which deny the success of European conquerors' superior power, and draw attention to their grave (and often spiritual) mistakes or 'sins' in reference to the Europeans' own traditions and gods. Jeremiah's theology represents yet another way in which conquered peoples can continue to redefine catastrophic events in ways that contribute to their survival as a people.

1.1.2.3 The Elephantine texts – an Egyptian diaspora?

There is one final tradition sometimes associated with a reading of the book of Jeremiah – namely his being taken unwillingly to Egypt. The group heading to Egypt seems to virtually disappear. It is important to note recent work, on the Elephantine Aramaic papyri and ostraca from the fifth century, which has raised questions about what we can know about an 'Egyptian Diaspora'. These are Aramaic texts from an island on the Nile near present day Aswan, where there was considerable economic and military activity in the Persian period. Notably, they are from a much later period than the time of Jeremiah – but the mention in Jeremiah of Judeans heading to Egypt sometime after 580 BCE, and the existence of a Jewish 'garrison' in Elephantine over a century and a half later, both point to a continued existence of Judeans in Egypt.

However, it is unlikely that the Elephantine group are somehow connected to the much earlier discussions of a group fleeing to Egypt in Jeremiah. Bezalel Porten's work established the Elephantine community as 'Jews', albeit with hints of a less-than-strict worship of the God of the Israelites (written as 'Yeho' in these texts; Porten 1996).

However, there is now considerable debate now about whether we can make the connection between those who left Babylonian Yehud in the sixth century and these texts.

Written between 498 and 399, the Elephantine papyri represent vignettes of the community throughout the fifth century and into the fourth. Perhaps most intriguing is that a notable text was discovered among these Aramaic letters. It is the earliest extant version of the story of Ahiqar, believed to be originally a Mesopotamian story, whose central character turns up in the book of Tobit and is identified as Jewish (Tob 1:21–22, etc.). Notably, Ahiqar is very much like a 'court tale' with similarities to Daniel, Esther, and Joseph, raising intriguing questions about the dangers of being answerable to foreign rulers. Like Jeremiah, Ahiqar depicts attempts to maintain a working relationship with foreign (in this case Persian) authorities. The theological importance of negotiating co-existence with (often) threatening imperial leaders not only informs the exilic texts. It also continues right up to Paul's struggles in Romans 13, and Revelation's angrier tones toward the Roman 'Babylon'. Katherine Southwood sees significant 'resistance' themes in Ahiqar, raising questions about different ways that the Jewish garrison would have read – and valued – the story (Southwood 2021).

There is one final and crucial point to be made in relation to Jeremiah and his influence. Scholarly readers of the Bible have tended to agree, for nearly a century, that the 'historical' books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings are to be understood as a comprehensive project called the Deuteronomic (or 'Deuteronomistic') history, abbreviated to DH. The final event discussed at the end of 2 Kings is, significantly, the exile. It is now normally thought that DH does take a 'point of view' in its presentation of Israelite history – a view that matches Jeremiah's. In short, the 'historical books' function as a 'catalogue of sins' which led precisely to the exile. This view largely explains the overriding condemnation of virtually all the kings of both Judah and Israel (only Josiah escapes all judgment), and the positive comments about prophets.

1.1.3 The Persian period (539–333 BCE): was there a 'restoration'?

Having considered the deported and those left behind, what about the events immediately following the Persian conquests of Babylon in 539? This final section of the survey of history and texts examines the Persian period. Two sets of texts are particularly important to mention – the 'rebuilding' texts of Ezra-Nehemiah, and the 'diaspora stories' of Daniel, Esther, Joseph, and Tobit. The question is whether there really was a 'restoration' in the Persian period, and how substantial it was.

Virtually all modern biblical introductions and standard textbooks follow a discussion of the exilic events with a section entitled 'the return', or 'the restoration' (in line with Ackroyd's classic, entitled 'Exile and Restoration', from 1968). However, the suggestion of a major return from exile in the Persian period, and a rapid recovery from the devastations of

587, has come to be seriously questioned. The more optimistic ideas of 'recovery' or 'restoration' were based on an exaggerated and favourable picture of Cyrus (noted above in the Isaiah traditions, e.g. Isa 45:1) and the equally sympathetic discussions in Ezra-Nehemiah (cf. Smith-Christopher 2023). The large numbers of 'returnees' in the 'census lists' repeated in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 11, for example, are now being met with serious scepticism by scholars. Even the purported rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls mentioned in the book of Nehemiah, dated to mid-to-late fifth century, is now doubted, given the lack of evidence of any major reconstruction in Nehemiah's era, or even roughly 150 years later (Finkelstein 2008). It is now usually proposed that Judah was not a fully recovered society until the fourth century at the earliest, perhaps even later, and thus into the Hellenistic period after the conquests of Alexander the Great (beginning c.333 BCE). Furthermore, a significant number of Judeans did not 'return' to the Judean homeland, and archaeological evidence suggests that the rebuilding was very slow indeed. This matches what is currently known about larger Persian interests in this area. As Schniedewind points out, Persian imperial interests were focused on travel routes, such as the 'way of the sea' (*Via Maris*) path for armies, especially when Egypt became even more rebellious in the late fifth and fourth centuries (Schniedewind 2013: 145).

1.1.3.1 Rebuilding in Ezra-Nehemiah?

The short books of 'Ezra-Nehemiah' are two of only a few sources for information about the groups returning to Palestine from diaspora communities. Significantly, these two short works are filled with narratives of social conflict. The first six chapters mention an initial group led by a certain 'Sheshbazzar', about whom we are told very little, then there is a longer discussion about a group led by Zerubbabel and Yeshua (figures who are also mentioned in Zechariah and Haggai). Similar to (and perhaps influenced by) the two 'census lists' in Numbers (Num 1 and 26, 'take a census'), the nearly identical lists in the 'people of the province' (Ezra 2:1; Neh 7:6) have been a topic of considerable debate. Virtually no modern historian accepts these as lists of actual returnees. This is not only because of the large numbers described but also because of growing doubt about a major return in the first place ('no signs of any significant return', Alstola 2020: 29).

The situation began to change in the fifth century, when Egyptian threats came to be taken seriously by Persia. A similar concern is likely behind the Jewish fortress stationed at Elephantine within 40–50 years of the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. This seems a logical backdrop to the traditions of Ezra and Nehemiah and their trips back to Palestine, both apparently with official support. Philippe Guillaume writes that Persian anxiety about Egypt meant Persia was now concerned with travel routes and food supplies for their armies:

> [T]he Achaemenid administration turned its attention to the Levant in the wake of military operations in and against Egypt […] To feed Persian armies, land left unplowed for a century had to be put back under cultivation. (Guillaume 2015: 136)

Some of the economic complaints in Ezra-Nehemiah may well result from the imperial requirements about working the land and paying Persian taxes. Lizbeth Fried argues that this forced work on lands in Yehud was the cause of the economic difficulties faced by Yehud residents mentioned in Nehemiah 5 (Fried 2015: 160). In addition to these difficult economic issues, some scholars perceive conflicts between the Hebrews in the land as they differed over what the future should, or would, bring for them. Ulrich Berges, for example, argues that Ezra-Nehemiah and Third Isaiah, despite both coming from groups of exiles, take quite different stands in relation to key issues. Ezra, in line with Ezekiel, takes a firm stand on priestly leadership in the post-exilic community, and has a narrow definition of who is a genuine member of the community (e.g. the interesting and highly exclusive phrase, 'the holy seed' in Ezra 9:2; Rom-Shiloni 2011: 138). By contrast, the latest layers of the large book of Isaiah, argues Berges, are far more open to a wider participation of non-Hebrews in the post-exilic community (Isa 56:7; see Berges 2017: 188).

Whatever the conflicts may be, however, it is clear that Ezra and Nehemiah both represent a period of struggle to re-establish a significant institutional presence in 'Yehud' (the Persian-period name for 'Judah') that would be answerable to the Persian authorities. This issue of relationship to political/civil authority is an ongoing concern – notable even in New Testament discussions, which could be summarized as asking 'what about the Romans?' The final genre of biblical 'exilic' literature to be considered represents reflections on diaspora existence – but with theological issues of importance to people in many different circumstances.

1.1.3.2 The diaspora tales: Daniel, Esther, and Joseph

The presence of a version of Ahiqar at Elephantine (see section 2.1.2.3) suggests an interest in 'court tales' in the diaspora. These kinds of biblical stories are widely agreed to be largely fictionalized, and therefore the so-called 'diaspora stories' of Daniel, Esther, Joseph, and Tobit are not read by contemporary scholars as history. Rather, they are read as involving plot lines based on painful memories of some of the less sanguine aspects of Mesopotamian conquest and diaspora existence.

For example, there are clear themes in all these diaspora stories about Judeans being singled out and even openly persecuted for their unique identities. Is the presence of these themes to be dismissed as merely dramatic license in telling a good story in the late

Persian or even Hellenistic period? Many texts clearly identify a bias, even a xenophobic racism, against Judeans ('their laws are different from those of every other people', Esther 3:8; cf. Dan 6:5 and Tob 1:19–20).

Even the punishments long thought to be a storyteller's exaggeration need to be reconsidered, suggests Paul-Alain Beaulieu, in the light of Mesopotamian documents 'where the manner of execution by burning is specified' (Beaulieu 2009: 282, 286). Similarly, Daniel James Waller argues that the stories in Daniel 1–4 are stories 'with important constituent parts', and suggests that the image of Nebuchadnezzar – a man who must learn to deal with a power greater than himself, and to finally acknowledge the Hebrew God – is actually 'a model for exiles learning to live with life in exile' (Waller 2020: 345–346). Similarly, Chase points out that the Joseph 'novella' contains more than mere encouragement for those living in exile: '[i]t also contains elements that highlight the drawbacks of living in the Diaspora and collaborating with imperial power. Thus, the text allows for continuous debate and reflection' (Chase 2019: 93). Finally, we should note that it is likely Nehemiah should be included among post-exilic texts that draw on the 'diaspora story' literary motif, since Sean Burt (2014) has indicated that the opening chapters of Nehemiah and his direct interaction with the Persian monarch read very much like a Daniel or Esther story.

Scholars of these 'diaspora tales' are becoming more cautious about dismissing all the elements of these stories as fictional creations of a later era, especially if they are similarly dismissed as having no accompanying 'traumatic memories' of the experience of exile at all. Therefore, these post-exilic texts represent not only 'post' exilic theological reflections on the lessons of exile and its continued impact, but may also echo the views and experiences of previous generations of deported peoples – and perhaps even continued contact with the ongoing communities in the Persian diaspora. In sum, biblical scholars are becoming alive to 'trans-generational' trauma.

As previously stated, these events cast a long shadow across biblical literature. Theologies of resistance and cooperation, of decolonization and its disappointments (cf. Memmi 2006) can draw on the issues raised by communal divisions and tensions evident in biblical literature. This is especially true with the recent emphasis on diversities of theological and social responses, including Ezra-Nehemiah, and the reflections on resistance and/or cooperation in the diaspora tales.

1.1.3.3 Anger and trauma

Finally, although it has not been a major part of this summary, it is also crucial to point out that many exilic biblical texts reflect quite negative thinking. For example, besides the heroic rebuilding work, the texts of Ezra-Nehemiah are also vehemently ethnocentric documents which condemn any 'mixture' with foreigners (most likely giving rise to the

story of Ruth as a response). Passages in later Persian-period texts of the book of Isaiah speak of revenge, re-conquest, and humiliation of enemies (Isa 49:23). The short book of Obadiah is an angry one-chapter screed against the Edomites, who appear to have allied themselves with the Babylonians in their destruction of Jerusalem. The most well-known text is Psalm 137, with its call to kill Babylonian children, along with other psalms of imprecation. Angry calls for vengeance are also discussed in recent work examining scripture through the lens of trauma studies (Boase and Frechette 2016). In short, it is not surprising that traumatic events can bring out the worst in people. Those who suffer violence often dream of vengeance in reply – like the Christian martyrs portrayed as awaiting revenge in Rev 6:9–10. To be sure, a biblical exilic theology requires careful reading and reflection on *all* aspects of the biblical reflections on the terrors of the exile, and for readers to be cognizant of real dangers in these texts. Having noted this caution, we move toward a survey of modern attempts to construct a 'theology of exile'.

2 Contemporary theological responses: introducing modern 'theologies of exile'

Any contemporary 'theology of exile' must take the creative step of asking, 'how do *their* responses and questions as reflected in the variety of biblical reactions to exile impact on *our* relationship to God and each other as people of faith?' This raises compelling questions about contemporary readers' own contexts in addition to the historical context of the biblical writings. For many modern people, thinking about exile and forced migration has important implications. It may be that they are themselves refugees or descendants of recent refugees, disenfranchised minorities or Indigenous peoples, or are undergoing migrations forced by ecological devastation, violence, and warfare. For such people, these biblical texts are directly applicable and often ask precisely the same questions they themselves are asking. Others, however, may find it difficult to see how a context of exile relates to their modern situations.

One recent direction for modern 'theologies of exile' that should be mentioned here involves those who work on constructing a theology of *response* to exiles. One might even ironically propose that this is a 'theology' for modern Babylonians, as it were, rather than their exiled victims. Gemma Cruz, for example, argues forthrightly that a

> theological construction of the self or of ourselves as Christians cannot be separated from the acceptance of the stranger, just as the identity of the Israelites as a people of God is very much linked with the stranger. The God we believe in is a God of the stranger (Deut 10:17–18; Ps 146:9). (Cruz 2014: 27)

Daniel G. Groody speaks of a ‘Theology of Migration’ (2022), which is intended as a challenge to Christians groups in receiving societies and their attitudes to refugees, although he also surveys biblical themes of movement in ways not unlike other ‘theologies of exile’.

In light of theologies focusing on the exiles and their biblical voices – as well as recent theologies of what Cruz calls ‘the church of the stranger’ (2014: 93) – studies of a ‘theology of the exile’ have expanded into an interesting variety of issues and approaches with regard to how we think about biblical literature. This expansion can be seen beyond biblical literature, of course. The same turbulent events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that led biblical scholars to consider issues like forced migration, trauma, and exile have also had a significant impact on literary studies, and on literary, musical, and artistic (even photographic) ‘reactions’ to these events. Such reactions often raise profound questions about our reflections on the meaning of biblical literature, as well about as our modern responses to that literature. (For literary discussions of ‘exile’ as a context and theme of modern literature see collections like Dubow 2021; Naffis-Sahely 2019; Milbauer and Sutton 2020; Levitsky, Osborne and Setka 2016.)

Contemporary contexts of ‘exile’ are therefore profoundly important driving forces for a modern ‘theology of exile’. Kim, for example, proposed comparisons between the experience of the Judean exiles and Korean responses to Japanese occupation in the twentieth century. He asserts: ‘the exile […] happened, *and it still happens today*’ (Kim 2013: 47, emphasis added). Kim’s challenge is that all this discussion of exile most certainly *does* have significance for contemporary peoples, and thus invites serious engagement with the notion of an ‘exilic biblical theology’. All the textual questions we have considered above also persist in the modern world: ‘is God [still] angry with us?’; ‘how could God allow these things to happen?’; ‘what does it mean to be the people of God in a foreign land?’; ‘what kind of a future do we now have?’; ‘has our identity, or purpose, as the people of God changed, if we cannot restore the conditions like those described in the older stories?’ (again, the theodicy questions are analysed by Rom-Shiloni 2021).

Ironically, biblical theologies of exile have arisen in a time when many other scholars are sceptical of any thought of a ‘biblical theology’ at all. Carolyn Sharp, for example, acknowledges this scepticism about ‘doing biblical theology’, but remains interested in whether the growth of attention to exile as both an event and a biblical theme is a sign of early emergence of a constructive biblical theology with exile as its core (Sharp 2004: 156). In response, Sharp calls for a recognition of ‘diaspora existence’ as central to modern Christian existence: ‘it is precisely in such diaspora reading practices that Christians can begin to claim our own fundamentally diasporic identities, grafted as we are into Israel through the grace of Jesus Christ’ (Sharp 2004: 165). She then finishes her call

to an exilic-centred biblical theology with a challenge to the creativity of biblical scholars, because '[t]he exiles are waiting' (Sharp 2004: 169).

In fact, there are promising articulations of a 'biblical theology' that is serious about the exile as a central, guiding theme. Two different approaches can be clearly identified. First, there is a major discussion in New Testament scholarship, especially inaugurated by the debates surrounding N. T. Wright's thesis that the New Testament proclamation can be expressed as none other than a proclamation of the end to the exile. On the other hand – and more in line with Sharp's comments – Brueggemann, Alain Epp Weaver, and Marc Tumeinski represent proposals from three different Christian traditions (mainline Protestant, Anabaptist/Mennonite, and Roman Catholic) for a 'diaspora theology' that takes exile as its central guiding biblical motif. This article will now examine each of these briefly.

2.1 The New Testament 'end of exile' theology of N. T. Wright

While Wright has summarized his argument in straightforward terms, his defence has been both impressive and voluminous. In a recent volume dedicated to debating his ideas, Wright states:

> My argument […] is that the majority of Second Temple Jews saw themselves as living within an ongoing exile. Both Jesus and Paul drew on this theme. Jesus believed that he himself was bringing the state to an end; Paul believed that Jesus had indeed accomplished it. If we today are to understand their work we need to grasp the whole concept, what it meant and what it means. (Wright 2017: 19)

Wright's work consists in first establishing the notion that late biblical and intertestamental Jewish literature shared a central idea that the exile never ended (Piotrowski 2017: 219), and, second, that a large swathe of the New Testament can be read in such a way that an 'end to exile' is the most comprehensive way to make sense of both Jesus and Paul's teaching and work. These points will now be explored further.

First, Wright argues (along with others) that there was a central idea among Jews in the centuries before Jesus that they were living in continued exilic conditions (Wright 1992: 268–269). Wright agrees with those who have identified a 'Deuteronomic theme' that is evident wherever Deuteronomic editors have left evidence of their presence in the biblical text. This presence is considered to be extensive, including most of the prophetic books and the older historical works known as the 'Deuteronomistic History' (namely Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings). The importance of this for Wright is that the theme can be summarized as 'Sin – Exile – Restoration' ('thought to be most clearly stated in Deuteronomy 27–30, but certainly alluded to elsewhere, Deut 4, 31–33 but centrally

in 32, etc', according to Wright 2017: 23). Nicholas Piotrowski points out that arguments for a 'continued exile' have been expressed previously – perhaps most notably in an important 1976 article by Michael Knibb, 'The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period' (Knibb 1976) – but that it attracted little attention for New Testament work until Wright made it a central plank of his New Testament theology. Piotrowski states that Knibb's central texts (Dan 9; 1 En 85–90, 91, 93; CD 1; Jubilees 1; Tob 14) recur often in other arguments about Jewish notions of being 'still in exile' (Piotrowski 2017: 218).

Deuteronomy 30:1–5 is a central text in this discussion because of its promises to bring people back from those among 'whom the Lord your God has scattered you' (v4). Similarly, Solomon's famous 'dedication prayer' for the temple also contains numerous references to the condition of exile as a result of sin – expressing hope that exiles 'come to their senses in the land to which they have been taken captive' (cf. 1 Kgs 8:46–50). Notably, 1 Kings 8 does not promise a return, but rather better conditions in exile. The unique form of prayer now often referred to as 'Penitential Prayers' are also important because they appear to perpetuate the idea that the person praying this set style of prayer still speaks of the 'open shame' from the sins of kings, officials, and ancestors (Dan 9:8–9; cf. Ezra 9:13–15; Neh 9:32). The idea is that, despite having physically returned to the land of Israel, the people of God remain somehow in exile. In other words, for the person praying, they are in exile as a result of previous generation's sins. Daniel 9, from c. 170–160 BCE, thus recalculates the prophesied length of exile from 70 (as in Jer 29:10) to '7 times 70' (490), extending it beyond the supposed return to Jerusalem. Later intertestamental texts also speak of exile as a salient term to express their contemporary realities 'Wright offers Neh 9:36–37, CD 1:3–11, Tob 14:5–7, Bar 3:6–8, 1:27–29 (1992 269–70), Ezra 9 […] and Dan 9:24–27 […] as his main lines of evidence' (Piotrowski 2017: 220). So, why is there no clear statement that the conditions of exile have ended? Why are there prayers of mercy in Persian and Hellenistic prayers as if the exile has continued? Wright answers: 'As long as Persia, Egypt, Greece, Syria, or Rome are in charge, the exile is not really over' (Wright 2017: 29).

Also central to Wright's arguments are related themes in Jewish literature before the time of Jesus – including, for example, the 'centrality of the temple' (Wright 2017: 36–38), because the temple was understood as a 'microcosm of the whole creation' (Wright 2017: 41). It was also connected to the monarchy and associated ideas of a new creation. As Wright argues, '[t]his combination of motifs – temple, presence, glory, kingship, wisdom, creation, exile, rebuilding, and unfulfilled promise – would be part of their mental and emotional furniture. Touch one and you touch them all' (Wright 2017: 44–45). Wright's argument is clear thus far: if Jesus is addressing himself to all these central issues, it is because he believes that his presence, his actions, and his message are introducing a significant change: '[e]xile and restoration was the central drama that Israel believed itself to be acting out. Jesus belongs exactly within that drama' (Wright 2017: 45). Similarly:

‘[t]he real return from exile, including the real resurrection from the dead, is taking place, in an extremely paradoxical fashion, in Jesus’ own ministry’ (Wright 1996: 127).

In the phrase ‘paradoxical fashion’, however, Wright accounts for a considerable amount of redefinition of terms in the New Testament proclamation of an end to exile. For example, the motif of Jesus calling twelve disciples is understood to symbolize a restored Israel in light of Israel’s twelve tribes. Jesus as ‘king’ is redefined not as ruler of a particular piece of real estate, as a literal restoration of the Davidic monarchy, but rather as ‘king of all the earth’ (Wright 2017: 48, 50). This also explains Jesus’ radical inclusivity: ‘a neighbour was every human being, precisely because the eschatological promise was that YHWH was becoming king of the entire world’ (Wright 2017: 51). Finally, Jesus’ references to himself as the ‘new temple’ mean that this major motif – the role of the temple in the end of exile – was part of his conscious ministry:

> Thus, the resurrection would be seen as the launch of the real return from exile, the ultimate liberation of the people of God, from the exile that lay deeper than the exile of Egypt or Babylon. (Wright 2017: 61)

Finally, Wright argues that Paul clearly understood this as well, citing two classic passages in Rom 2:17–3:9 and Gal 3:6–12

> The answer, in both cases, is the death of Jesus, bursting through the blockage and enabling the promises to be fulfilled despite the failure of Israel […] Paul envisages the entire story of Israel as a single narrative that, having threatened to run out of steam entirely in the exile, has now been rescued from that oblivion and given its proper fulfillment. (Wright 2017: 63, 65)

It is not the purpose of this article to offer an extended presentation or critique of the lengthy arguments presented by Wright in his series of volumes of New Testament analysis. Other biblical theologies of exile, however, have taken a significantly different direction. Instead of suggesting that the New Testament aims to elaborate a Christian theology of ending the exile, they instead propose a New Testament development of an argument already anticipated in Old Testament texts – a theology of diaspora.

Notably, in an essay in the monograph dedicated to discussing Wright’s New Testament ‘end of exile’ theology, Robert Hiebert raises the point that a ‘sense of exile or diaspora is evidently regarded to persist even after Jesus’ earthly ministry (Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1, one could add 5:13) which is supposed to have effected a release from captivity’ (Hiebert 2017: 97). Is an ‘exilic theology’, then, more properly a post-exilic ‘diaspora’ theology? Ought

a theology of exile also reflect on the ways in which Christians life a different ethic and lifestyle from the world around them? Is ‘exile’ normative? A number of recent voices in Old Testament Christian theology have proposed versions of precisely this.

2.2 ‘Diaspora’ theologies of exile: Tumeinski (Roman Catholic); Brueggemann (Mainline Protestant), and Weaver (Anabaptist/Mennonite)

Tumeinski’s Catholic ‘exilic theology’ begins with this response to Pope Benedict XVI’s calls for a ‘pilgrim’ church:

> Theologically, the pilgrim Church can indeed be thought of as, like Jesus, without a place to lay her head (Matt 8:20). She is ‘en route to the nations’. She is on a pilgrim journey, like the Holy Family (Luke 2:41–42). The sojourning Church, though comprised of many and dispersed peoples, is nonetheless one People of God (1 Pet 2:11). The church –wandering in exile from her true homeland–is still sowing, falling into the earth and dying, but thereby bearing much fruit (John 12). She is a tiny flock, yet standing for the many. (Tumeinski 2020: 70)

Tumeinski engages Benedict’s imagery of both ‘pilgrim’ and ‘minority’ to realize that exilic themes are perhaps the best way to embody a Catholic perspective on no longer being a ‘state entity’ in the modern world. This modern reality, Tumeinski proposes, is a new challenge to the church to think in creative ways as a ‘convinced minority’ (Tumeinski 2020: 71).

Finally, in a highly creative move (which brings to mind the work of both Cruz and Groody noted above), Tumeinski proposes that the Catholic Church look to its own family of ‘minority’ and ‘migrant’ churches, rather than the formerly powerful institutions it was once part of, in order to realize the creativity – and critical perspective – of being a church in diaspora:

> This societal and political pattern of dispersion and scattering has been repeated from biblical times until today in various places, albeit in many forms depending on the signs of the times; such as has occurred for Maronite, Irish, English, German, Vietnamese and Kashubian Catholics, to name just a few examples. (Tumeinski 2020: 71)

From what is normally considered in the USA a ‘mainline’ Protestant tradition, Walter Brueggemann, surely among the most prolific biblical theologians of the twentieth and twenty-first century, has also taken up the ideas of an ‘exilic theology’ in two works: *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* (1997), and the more recent statement,

Out of Babylon (2010) which we draw from here. Brueggemann is clear about why a perspective of 'living under empire' is especially relevant for the context of the modern American Christian churches, which he compares to Babylon rather than ancient Israel:

> Is this sense of privilege and entitlement, bolstered by an uncritical joining of Bible and flag and underwritten by military and economic dominance, a proper legacy to leave coming generations in the United States? (Brueggemann 2010: 13)

Brueggemann, clearly cognizant of the variety of biblical perspectives which have also been highlighted here, argues that a variety of biblical voices point to an interesting plurality of emphases that can inform a contemporary diaspora theology. He uses three prophetic voices – Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah – as 'waves of Prophetic poetry'. For Brueggemann, Ezekiel is clearly more attuned to the roles of the temple and priesthood (Brueggemann 2010: 71); Jeremiah is informed by a 'rural, covenantal' tradition (without using specific Levitical language, Brueggemann 2010: 71); and Isaiah is informed by a monarchical concern that is nonetheless able to move from an earthly king to YHWH as king in the post-exilic period (Brueggemann 2010: 72). However, Brueggemann proposes that they each provide interesting voices for responding to exile:

> Their sole authority came from (a) their imaginative, playful utterance; (b) their knowledge of the facts on the ground connected to human, bodily reality; and (c) the claim to be connected enough to speak the truth of Yahweh. (Brueggemann 2010: 37)

The final chapter of Brueggemann's 2010 work, *Out of Babylon* is entitled 'Doin' Time in Persia', and leaves the reader with the post-exilic reality of having to live under empire – no 'restoration' in sight. Alluding to the work of anthropologist James Scott, Brueggemann writes:

> As a consequence of this shift from Babylon to Persia, faith had to find other ways of being Jewish. In the Persian Empire, the exile-homecoming paradigm did not work well. In its place, the local tradition vis-à-vis the empire had to be one of accommodation and resistance; accommodation enough to survive and prosper, resistance enough to maintain a distinctive identity and ethic. This latter model required a kind of ability for the practice of the 'Weapons of the Weak'. (Brueggemann 2010: 131)

Thus, in the end, Brueggemann draws on Ezra-Nehemiah and the diaspora stories of Daniel, Esther, and Joseph for a biblical theology of 'accommodation and resistance'.

Notably, he writes that the churches in America especially understand ‘accommodation’ only too well – what they need to learn is a theology of ‘resistance’ to empire.

Finally, we turn to a voice from the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition, Alain Epp Weaver. In two recent monographs (*States of Exile: Visions of Diaspora, Witness, and Return*, 2008; and *Mapping Exile and Return: Palestinian Dispossession and a Political Theology for a Shared Future*, 2014), Weaver argues for an analysis of exile that responds with a diaspora theology. This diaspora theology, however, must not ignore the severe conditions of landlessness in the world as a starting point for an exilic theology. Weaver is alarmed with any ‘exilic’ theology that is too quick to celebrate a comfortable disengagement with the world surrounding exiles. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Weaver has in mind more radical sectarian Anabaptist groups like the Amish, who are classically ‘withdrawn’ from the world and have limited engagement with wider political concerns as a result:

> Anabaptists and Mennonites thus sometimes faced violent persecution and occasionally enjoyed ‘the privileged status of that hard-working minority population which kept to itself, worked hard, paid its rents and taxes, and was appreciated by the rulers who protected them’. (Weaver 2008: 109–110)

Weaver thus brings the Palestinian context into dialogue with a theology of exile – as well as maintaining a dialogue with the work of Edward Said, a Palestinian-American literary scholar who had written profoundly on the context of exile in the modern world. First of all, Weaver is well aware that writing about ‘exile’ has particular significance for the Anabaptist/Radical Reformationist traditions; but by engaging with the legacy of Edward Said, Weaver takes seriously the challenge of discussing any kind of ‘exile’ or ‘diaspora’ theologies in the face of the realities of modern exile. Said, too, was concerned about ‘romanticized’ treatments of exile that saw exile as a creative space from which to critique the surrounding society: ‘Said demanded that the brute reality of life in the refugee camp be given priority over literary treatments of exile in any critical evaluation of forced displacement’ (Weaver 2014: 153–154).

The question remains whether a diaspora theology offers cold comfort to Christians who are themselves actually suffering the results of exile in the modern world. Weaver asks:

> Is this critically laudable aspect of exile, however, compatible with a struggle to end the physical condition of exile? Specifically, in the case of Palestinian refugees and other Palestinians who have lost their lands, can one work for *al-awdah* (return) and not lose the moral perspective granted by exile? (Weaver 2014: 157)

In moves that seem arguably compatible with Brueggemann's call for a balance of 'accommodation' and 'resistance', Weaver cautiously proposes that a diaspora theology can remain committed to economic justice in the modern world:

> [C]an [an] exilic politics of the church as the nonviolent body of Christ in diaspora speak to the call for justice and right living in the land, to the desire, indeed the justice, of people returning to their homes? […] European-American Christians, particularly those in urban and suburban settings whose livelihoods are not dependent on the cultivation of the land, could be tempted to confuse Jeremiah's vision for life in exile with the rootless virtual reality of much postmodernist thought. (Weaver 2014: 159)

3 Concluding observations: modern theologies for exile…from exiles?

Finally, it is also essential to be mindful of the fact that biblical theology is also being lived and expressed and sometimes written, by those whose communities are themselves deeply impacted by forced migrations, and/or by what might be called 'settler occupation' or the enforcement of minority status of many kinds. In the USA, for instance, many scholars, including practitioners recognized within their own communities who may or may not have Western academic training, are engaged in the articulation of exilic theologies. These theologians, whether traditional theologians or academic writers, are certainly constructing biblical theologies from existential realities in addition to an academic commitment. For example, when Chinese-American Old Testament scholar Gale Yee writes about Ruth, she points out: 'As Chinese-Americans were economically exploited for cheap labor, particularly during the 1800s and early 1900s, so is Ruth's foreign labor exploited by both Naomi and Boaz' (Yee 2009: 130).

While many Western scholars have intellectually benefited from a reading about diaspora and/or minority existence, forced migrations, refugee experiences, and other forms of mass movement, the fact that there are increasing numbers of voices among those communities who have experienced the realities of different iterations of exile in current or recent history are making crucially important contributions to this dialogue on developing 'theologies of exile'. The numbers are growing – but a few examples will illustrate.

Jean-Pierre Ruiz (who self-identifies as a 'Puerto-Rican New Yorker') writes *Readings from the Edges* (2011), subtitled *The Bible and People on the Move*. Scholars from minoritized cultures often speak of their work on 'the margins', 'edges', 'periphery'. Ironically, these scholars represent perspectives which speak to the very heart of issues regarding forced migration in both ancient and modern history, and of any work concerning biblical theologies of exile. Thus, Ruiz calls for a biblical theology that is rooted in 'lived

daily experience' of a people, and works toward a theology embracing 'the excluded, minoritized, and marginalized'. He states that '[h]ere […] we find the hermeneutical edge of the preferential option for the poor'. Ruiz offers a number of studies of biblical figures who are 'border-crossers' (Jesus, in Mark 7:24–30; Abraham in Gen 12; Ezekiel in Ezek 20), and considers his contributions part of the ongoing engagement of theologians with the contemporary realities of mass movement.

Fernando Segovia, as a Cuban-American, also speaks of the 'problematics of race and ethnicity in racial-ethnic theory' in an essay on biblical criticism (Segovia 2009). Notably, the volume in which he was writing (*They Were All Together in One Place?: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism,* 2009) featured analyses by writers from different cultural traditions, but the clear majority of texts chosen for analysis were arguably 'exilic' texts. Thus, when Segovia begins to list specific issues of concern in this volume, second on his list is 'the central phenomenon of migration – underlying causes, processes of emigration and immigration, resultant effects' (Segovia 2009: 365). Along these same lines, Francisco Garcia-Treto, another Cuban-American biblical scholar in the same volume, proposes insights from his own experience of bi-lingualism for a fresh reading of Daniel as a bi-lingual text (Garcia-Treto 2009). Thus, Segovia states that 'only the correspondence afforded by a literature of survival, emerging out of exile, can help in grasping the Hebrew Bible as an exilic literature of survival – as presented beyond interpretation, forged in minoritization' (Segovia 2009: 372). Once again, scholars reflecting on their own identities and experiences are making important contributions to modern theologies of exile.

These readings based on racial/cultural identity are currently considered to be of primary importance. It is also significant to note, however, that if mass migrations are important existential realities from which to rethink biblical theologies, surely a class-based analysis would also point to very significant parallels: for example, in the American experience of the Dust-Bowl migrants from Oklahoma and Arkansas (heavily, but not exclusively, impoverished European-Americans) to an unwelcoming California in the 1930s. This was an experience complete with competing 'prophetic poets of exile' in musicians Woody Guthrie and Merle Haggard, and novelists John Steinbeck and Sonora Babb (see Gregory 1991). Alternatively, one could consider the migrations of people from the region of Appalachia northwards into industrial Ohio in the same period. Both populations (from Oklahoma/Arkansas and from Appalachia) faced serious class-based discrimination, yet neither example has served as a basis for a serious reconsideration of reading biblical texts of exile as yet.

For British biblical studies, there are some attempts to draw on the Irish or highland Scottish 'clearances' as experiences of forced migration to rethink biblical texts and their contemporary theological ramifications. A notable example is John Murdoch's 'Highlander' newspaper, published 1873–1881, which regularly featured extended biblical discussions

relevant to the suffering of highlanders in the midst of the period of the ‘clearances’ - the forced vacating of rented land by wealthy landowners. Murdoch, however, has yet to find a modern champion.

As we have noted, there are many different kinds of exile and migration, as John Ahn helpfully articulates in his studies (Ahn 2011). Among those making reference to contemporary migrations, some have expressed serious reservations about making judgmental distinctions between so-called ‘economic’ refugees and ‘political’ refugees (Cruz 2014). It can be argued, however, that reading widely among many experiences (even prisoners-of-war, cf. Reiss and Feltman 2022) serves to raise questions for creative ways to think about biblical texts, and how to call on these texts for thinking about contemporary faith and practice.

Clearly, constructing theologies of exile for the twenty-first century is going to involve serious dialogue across a number of ‘borders’ – intellectual as well as geographical – if we are going to further make sense of the biblical experiences of exile, diasporic existence, reconstructing identities under occupation, and many other human realities that are clearly reflected in the biblical texts. There is also a clear need for dialogue between biblical scholars and those communities whose stories of forced migration need to be heard and considered. Therefore, the argument can be made that scholars of the Bible need to widen their areas of study to include the historical, sociological, and anthropological literature of exile, in addition to listening to modern experiences, so that they can learn to recognize similar human realities in the biblical texts. This, then, can inform the process of constructing a theology for people of faith, so that they more clearly hear the wisdom from the experiences of faith ‘in movement’ – especially for those whose physical as well as spiritual journeys come centuries later.

Attributions

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