

A THEOLOGY OF EXILE

by

Daniel J. Lewis

© copyright 2007 by Diakonos, Inc.
Troy, Michigan
United States of America

Table of Contents

The Promise of the Land.....	4
The Gift of the Land	7
The Centrality of Land to the Covenant People	12
The Deuteronomic Prophets to Judah.....	18
Hope Beyond Disaster	23
The Shape of God’s Future.....	26
The Return from Babylon.....	29
The Exile is Not Complete.....	34
The Reign of God is at Hand	38
Expanding the Ancient Definitions	41

A THEOLOGY OF EXILE

Like poles of a magnet, the history of Israel clusters around two primary events, the exodus/gift of the land and the exile/loss of the land. The Torah works toward the first event, the intermediate history looks both backward to the exodus and forward to the possibility of exile, and the prophets increasingly focus upon the possibility, and finally, the certainty of the latter event. From God's promise to Abram that his descendants would "be strangers in a country not their own—enslaved and mistreated four hundred years—and afterward they will come back here" (Ge. 15:13-16) to the wrenching prayer of Daniel, "We are covered with shame—the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness" (Da. 9:7), the events in the Hebrew Bible are inextricably linked to these two poles.¹

The idea of exile, of course, began even before the promise of the land. The first alienation from one's true home began when Adam and Eve were driven from the garden of God to the east of Eden (Ge. 3:24). Cain, also, lived to the east of Eden after murdering his brother (Ge. 4:16). "East of Eden" serves as a metaphor for exile, a prelude to what would happen to the entire Israelite nation. Disobedience and rebellion merited estrangement, alienation and exile, not only from the land, but from God himself. Nimrod's experiment in the Plain of Shinar as men "moved eastward" (Ge. 11:2; cf. 10:10) resulted in a divine judgment so that humans were scattered over all the earth (Ge. 11:8). It was from the east, Ur, that God called Abram to leave that eastern land of alienation and go to a land he would show him (Ge. 12:1). Thus begins the great story of the gift of the land and its loss, a loss that was not yet at an end when one reaches the last of the prophets. Though a remnant had returned to rebuild Jerusalem, full restoration had not yet occurred, and the promise that Yahweh would "fill this house with glory" (Hg. 2:7) had not yet happened by the time of Malachi's ministry in the mid-fifth century BC (Mal. 3:1).

¹ Walter Brueggemann is surely correct when he says that "Israel's faith is essentially a journeying in and out of land, and its faith can be organized around these focuses," cf. *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), p. 13.

The Promise of the Land

Integral to the covenant God made with Abraham was the gift of the land. In a series of covenant formularies, God promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land to which he had brought the patriarch. His initial instruction was “to leave your land” (in the east) and go “to the land which I will show you” (Ge. 12:1). From Ur and then Haran, he set out for “the land of Canaan”, traveling through it and hearing the divine promise, “To your posterity I will give this land” (Ge. 12:5-7). Though the whole land was before him (Ge. 13:9), Abram chose the “land of Canaan” (Ge. 13:12). From the mountains of central Canaan, God invited him to scan the four directions, assuring him again and again that this land would be given to his offspring forever (Ge. 13:14-17; 15:7, 18-19; 17:8; 22:17b).

Initially, this promise of the land seemed unconditional, and it is hardly to be doubted that most Israelites for most of their national history understood it in unconditional terms. The phrase עַד־עוֹלָם (= until forever), which was specifically linked to the promise of land (Ge. 13:15) and more broadly to the covenant itself (Ge. 17:7-8, 13, 19), seemed inviolable. However, even in these formularies, there is a hint of conditionality. In God’s self-musings prior to the judgment upon Sodom, he said to himself about Abraham, “I have chosen him, *in order that* he will direct his sons and his household after him, and [in turn] they will continue to guard the way of Yahweh, performing righteousness and justice, *so that Yahweh will bring upon Abraham what he promised concerning him*” (Ge. 18:19). This double usage of the preposition לְמַעַן (= in order that, so that) suggests that there are ethical norms and covenant responsibilities to be considered. Of course, no direct answer is offered to the question of what might happen if Abraham or his posterity failed in their covenant responsibility, but later the Sinai covenant would develop more specifically what is not addressed here.

The same promise of the land was repeated to Abraham’s son, Isaac (Ge. 24:7; 26:2-3). When in his old age Abraham had other sons, he sent them “to the land of the east”, since they would not be heirs of the covenant promise established for Isaac (Ge. 25:6). To Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, the promise was repeated as well (Ge. 28:4, 13, 15; 31:3, 13, 18; 35:12; 48:3-4). Though the entire family relocated to Egypt to escape famine, the vibrant hope that they would return to Canaan never died out (Ge. 48:21-22; 50:5, 13). The Genesis record ends on this note: *God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* (Ge. 50:24-25).

When God called Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, this deliverance was directly linked to God's covenant promise to the patriarchs (Ex. 3:6-8, 17; 6:4). *I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am Yahweh!* (Ex. 6:8; cf. 13:5, 11). Still, this promise was expounded with hints of conditionality. In the Decalogue, obedience was urged in order for the people to "live long in the land" (Ex. 20:12). God certainly promised to drive out the present inhabitants (Ex. 23:23, 27-28; 33:1-2; 34:11), though he indicated that their dislocation would be gradual, not sudden (Ex. 23:29-30). Still, the promised land was to belong to the Israelites forever (Ex. 32:13). Their dispossession of the current inhabitants was a form of judgment on them because of their moral defilement (Lv. 18:24-25; cf. Ge. 15:16). Along with this promise came a stern warning: if the Israelites morally defiled themselves in the manner of the Canaanites, the land would "vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you" (Lv. 18:26-28; cf. 20:22-24). Further, even though the land was to be theirs forever, their possession of it was on the order of tenants, not owners, for the land ultimately belonged to Yahweh himself (Lv. 25:23). Obedience to God's Torah would result in "safety in your land" (Lv. 26:5), but disobedience and covenant violation meant defeat (Lv. 26:14-17), disaster (Lv. 26:18-30) and exile (Lv. 26:31-35, 38-39). Even so, exile was not Yahweh's final word: if after exile the people confessed their sins, restoration was possible, also (Lv. 26:40-45).

The trek through the Sinai desert brought the community to the very southern edge of the land promised to them by divine oath (Nu. 13:1). Here, a bad report from representatives of ten tribes convinced the majority that the effort to invade would be futile (Nu. 13:31—14:4; cf. Dt. 9:23-24). The rebellion at Kadesh resulted in a divine announcement that not one of those who treated Yahweh with contempt would see the land promised to the people on oath (Nu. 14:21-23). Herein lies the germ of the remnant concept—the concept that the covenant promises guaranteed by divine oath would be fulfilled only to a remnant of faith. Caleb and Joshua were the vanguard of this remnant (Nu. 14:24-25, 30; cf. 32:12); all the others were sentenced to death in the desert (Nu. 14:29, 31-35; cf. 32:11, 13), a sentence that eventually extended even to Moses and Aaron (Nu. 20:12, 24; cf. 27:12-14). A remnant remained, however, to whom the promise of land was to be fulfilled, but along with this assurance was a repetition of the solemn warning that if the people of Israel fell into the immoral patterns of life typical of the Canaanites, then "I will do to you what I plan to do to them"

(Nu. 33:56). Clearly, the gift of the land “forever” was not without qualification!

Deuteronomy is the example par excellence of this retributive justice and the conditionality of the gift of the land. Though it is structured around the three speeches of Moses in the Plains of Moab, underlying this dialogue are key elements of the ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaty. A number of Old Testament scholars have recognized that the Book of Deuteronomy contains salient features of what is known of such treaties, a covenant form that had been in use for centuries.² These features are:³

Preamble announcing the treaty and those who are party to it (Dt. 1:1-5)

Historical prologue rehearsing the previous relations between the parties
(Dt. 1:6—4:49)

General stipulations (Dt. 5-11)

Specific stipulations (Dt. 12-26)

Deposition of the document for the purpose of public reading
(Dt. 27:1-10; 31:9-29)

Witnesses (Dt. 32)

Blessings and curses (Dt. 27:12-26; 28:1-68)

From the beginning, Deuteronomy concurs with the rest of the Torah that God swore on oath that Israel would be given the land of Canaan (Dt. 1:7-8, 21; 3:18; 4:1; 6:20-23; 26:15; 28:11; 31:7; 34:4). God’s purpose in “bringing them out” of Egypt was in order to “bring them in” to the land of Canaan (Dt. 6:23). Deuteronomy agrees with the other references in the Torah that this displacement of the Canaanites was a divine judgment (Dt. 9:5-6; 18:9-13). Hence, it should come as no surprise that their gift of the land was contingent upon covenant faithfulness, while covenant violation would surely lead to invasion and exile (Dt. 4:25-27). Still, as before, exile was not Yahweh’s final word (Dt. 4:29-31), though it remained an uncomfortable possibility. Obedience was paramount if the people were to successfully gain the land (Dt. 6:18-19; 8:1; 19:8-9), and it was equally necessary if they were to “live long in the land” (Dt. 4:40; 5:16, 32-33; 11:8-9, 21; 16:20; 25:15; 30:16-20). If they broke covenant, Moses promised that God would “destroy them from the face of the land” (Dt. 6:15; cf. 11:17).

² M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11 [AB]* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 6. The impetus for much of this study goes back to a monograph written by G. E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (1955), and it has been employed by various scholars, cf. D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (1963), Meredith Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (1963), G. Von Rad, *Deuteronomy [OTL]* (1966), J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: Introduction and Commentary* (1974), P. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (1976), etc.

³ J. McConville, “Deuteronomy, Book of,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Alexander and D. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), pp. 184-185.

This threat of the loss of the land reached its climax in the covenant curses near the end of the book. Here, the idea of exile is described in frank and unvarnished terms. Repeated covenant violation would lead to plagues “until he [God] has destroyed you from the land” (Dt. 28:21). The people would be invaded (Dt. 28:33, 49-57), destroyed (Dt. 28:45-48), uprooted (Dt. 28:63) and scattered among the nations (Dt. 28:36-37, 64-67). God would send them back to foreign slavery comparable to their slavery in Egypt (Dt. 28:68). Their exile would be a potent testimony to their covenant unfaithfulness (Dt. 29:22-28).

The disaster of judgment, however, did not stand as a final sentence. As hinted at earlier, exile was never God’s final word. If exile was a historical symbol of alienation from God, restoration was a historical symbol of forgiveness and reconciliation. Hence, even if exile occurred and the people of Israel were banished to the most distant lands in the world, the possibility of redemption remained (Dt. 30:4-5).

In the end, Yahweh held forth no optimism that Israel would successfully avoid covenant failure. He plainly asserted that they would break covenant, resulting in their own destruction (Dt. 31:16-21, 26-29). Moses’ closing song reiterates this anticipation of unfaithfulness and rebellion (Dt. 32:15-18) and the divine rejection that would follow (Dt. 32:19-29).

The Gift of the Land

The gift of the land is largely the provenance of the books of Joshua, Judges and Samuel in the Hebrew Bible. The Book of Joshua describes the initial invasion, which took the form of three campaigns, one in central Canaan (Jos. 2-10:28), one in the south (10:29-43) and one in the north (10:1-23). The invasion was prefaced by a reaffirmation of the original covenant promise that the land was to be theirs (1:1-4, 13-15). Still, the initial triumph, the fall of Jericho (Jos. 6), was tarnished by covenant disobedience, leading to failure in the attempt to take Ai (Jos. 7). Clearly, the gift of the land was linked to covenant obedience, and violation of the covenant code resulted in setbacks. In central Canaan on Mt. Ebal, Joshua erected an altar to Yahweh in a covenant renewal ceremony (Jos. 8:30-33), just as Moses had instructed (Dt. 27-28), and at this ceremony all the blessings and curses of the covenant code were rehearsed, which included the possibility of exile for repeated covenant violation (Jos. 8:34-35).

The notation at the end of the campaigns is brief but exultant:

So Joshua took this entire land: the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the western foothills, the Arabah and the mountains of Israel with their foothills, from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, to Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings and struck them down, putting them to death.

So Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.

Joshua 11:16-17, 23

Had the Book of Joshua concluded here, one might never suspect that this record of victory was mitigated by the equally clear admission of covenant failure. The Book of Joshua itself contains important qualifications to this record of victory. Yahweh acknowledged to Joshua near the end of his life that “very large areas of land” still remained to be taken (Jos. 13:1-7; cf. 18:3). Especially, some critical areas were not yet under Israelite control, including the Philistine coast (Jos. 13:2-4), Jebus (Jerusalem, cf. Jos. 15:63), Gezer (Jos. 16:10), the coast south of Carmel (Jos. 17:11), the coast north of Carmel (Jos. 13:5-6), the Esdraelon (Jos. 17:11), the northern transjordan (Jos. 13:13) and other important areas (Jos. 17:12-13). To be sure, Joshua allotted all the land to the various tribes (Jos. 13:8—21:42), so that the record states, “So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers” (Jos. 21:43), and “Not one of all the LORD’s good promises to the house of Israel failed” (Jos. 21:45). Still, this summation must be balanced with Joshua’s farewell to the tribes before his death, a farewell in which he clearly expressed in the imperfect tense that there was much work left:

The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

Joshua 23:5

As these “future tense” instructions make clear, and as Joshua himself acknowledged, many Canaanites still remained within the territorial allotments (Jos. 23:7, 12).⁴ Covenant faithfulness was incumbent upon the Israelites if Yahweh was to continue giving them victory (Jos. 23:12-13). Yahweh’s good promises of success were conditioned upon covenant

⁴ It is to the point that the word גוֹיִם (= nations) appear seven times in the Book of Joshua, all of them in this chapter! They are divided into the nations Yahweh had subdued and those nations whose power was still unbroken.

faithfulness, and they were matched by his promises of exile for covenant violation (Jos. 23:15-16; cf. 24:19-20).

When one opens the Book of Judges, the full scope of what tracts of land remained to be brought under Israelite control is detailed copiously. Judges opens with the question, “Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?” (Jg. 1:1). Though effort was made, success was limited largely to the mountainous regions (Jg. 1:19), and many Canaanite enclaves remained (Jg. 1:21, 27-36).

The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

Judges 3:5

Intermarriages served to elevate Canaanite culture and religion to a place of theological acceptance, and the effort of the Israelites to dislodge the indigenous Canaanites was judged a failure, leading to Yahweh’s sentence of coexistence (Jg. 2:1-3, 10-15, 20-23; 3:1-4). The resulting history of the judges is a period of political ebb and flow, some victories on the part of the judges, along with some colossal failures. By the end of the period, the tribes were in considerable disarray, both religiously and politically. A vicious civil war brought the Tribe of Benjamin to the edge of extinction (Jg. 20-21).

The early chapters of 1 Samuel offer little relief. The debacle at Shiloh ended with the sacred shrine destroyed, the Philistines in possession of the Ark of the Covenant, and the death of the nation’s primary religious leaders (1 Sa. 4). Samuel revived the flagging efforts at the Battle of Ebenezer (1 Sa. 7:12-14), but clearly, by the time of Saul’s upstart kingship, the perennial threat of the Philistines loomed large. In the transition between the Late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age, Israel was decidedly at a disadvantage, since the Philistines controlled the entire blacksmithing trade (1 Sa. 13:19-21). They deployed garrisons at key locations, effectively shutting off the Israelites into the hinterlands and preventing any encroachment into the south coastal lowlands (1 Sa. 10:5; 13:3). To the east, yet another threat prompted the Israelites to ask for a king to lead them in their battles, an Ammonite mobilization against them from the transjordan (1 Sa. 12:12).

Israel acquired a king (1 Sa. 8:21), of course, though as Yahweh indicated, it was a sign they had rejected him as their king (1 Sa. 8:7). Saul, the first Israelite monarch, rather early transgressed the laws of Yahweh War, preempting the priestly sacrifice required before battle (1 Sa. 13:8-14;

cf. Dt. 20:2-4) and violating the Deuteronomic command for total destruction of the Canaanite enemy (1 Sa. 15; cf. Dt. 7:1-2, 16; 13:12-16; 20:16-18). With the rise of David, Saul devoted the remaining energies of his kingship to bumbling about over the mountains with his whole army in search of David, who had been declared an outlaw (1 Sa. 18-30). By the close of 1 Samuel, the Philistines had mobilized for a final crushing blow against Saul's tattered army. At the Battle of Mt. Gilboa near the southern end of the Esdraelon, Saul and his sons were killed, leaving a critical vacuum of leadership (1 Sa. 31:1-6). Instead of Israel dispossessing their enemies, the Philistines now dispossessed Israel (1 Sa. 31:7).

It was in this vacuum of leadership and the lowest ebb of the nation since the sojourn in the desert that a young shepherd was anointed king of one tribe, Judah (2 Sa. 1-7). David had garnered considerable fame while just a boy by killing a Philistine champion (1 Sa. 17), and though he was outlawed by Saul, he managed, while avoiding Saul's army, to rescue more than one Israelite town from its enemies (1 Sa. 23:1-5; 30:1-30). These victories were all in the south, so it is unclear how well David's reputation was known farther north. Indeed, with Saul's death, the northern clans predictably selected one of Saul's remaining sons as king (2 Sa. 2:8-9), while David was king of Judah in the south (2 Sa. 2:10). Naturally, the situation was ripe for civil war, and civil war ensued (2 Sa. 3:1, 6)! In the end, after a prolonged internecine conflict, David emerged as the king of an exhausted but united, Israel (2 Sa. 5:1-5).

David had no rival in military leadership! Rapidly, he marshaled the Israelite forces and attacked the most important Canaanite stronghold in the interior, Jebus (Jerusalem), which he turned into his new capital (2 Sa. 5:6-10). Turning to the southwest, David next advanced successfully against the Philistines (2 Sa. 5:17-25; 8:1).⁵ Moving to the southeast across the Jordan, he defeated the Moabites, executing two-thirds of their standing army (2 Sa. 8:2). Striking to the north, he neutralized the chariot corps of his enemies on his northern border (2 Sa. 8:3-6) as well as the Edomites to the south of Judah (2 Sa. 8:13-14). Finally, in the central transjordan he put the Ammonites to tribute (2 Sa. 10:1-19; 12:26-31). In the end, the conquest that began under Joshua was now completed under David. The land promised on oath to the patriarchs belonged to Israel at last! In his Hymn of Victory, David clearly credited his success to Yahweh (2 Sa. 22:1-20, 29-51). At the

⁵ While the name *Metheg Ammah* might refer to simply a geographical location, its meaning, "the bridle of one cubit" more likely figuratively refers to Philistine surrender, cf. Y. Kobayashi, *ABD* (1992) IV.800. In the LXX, this phrase in 2 Sa. 8:1 was rendered, "David took the tribute out of the hand of the Philistines."

same time, he also extolled the crucial factor of covenant faithfulness (2 Sa. 22:21-28).

It was to this same David that a third great covenant was established by Yahweh. Like both the covenant God made with Abraham and the covenant he made with Israel through Moses, this third covenant concerned “a place for my people Israel...a home of their own” (2 Sa. 7:8-11a), that is, the land. However, this time the gift of the land was linked directly to a dynasty, the “house of David” (2 Sa. 7:11b-16). The same language of עַד־עוֹלָם (= until forever) that attended the covenant with Abraham now attended the covenant with David and his posterity (2 Sa. 7:13b, 16b). Indeed, David’s final words recall this profound promise:

*Is not my house right with God?
Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant,
Arranged and secured in every part?
Will he not bring to fruition my salvation
and grant me my every desire?*

2 Sa. 23:5

The eternal covenant God made with David became the stuff of songs (Ps. 89:3-4, 19-29).

*I will maintain my love to him forever,
and my covenant with him will never fail.
I will establish his line forever,
his throne as long as the heavens endure.*

Psalm 89:28-29

Similar to God’s covenant with Abraham, the covenant with David seemed inviolable and without condition. As time passed, the Davidic covenant came to be firmly associated with the temple on Mt. Zion that David and Solomon worked to construct (Ps. 2:6-9; 78:65-72; 132:10-18). Nonetheless, there were hints of conditionality even here. From his deathbed, David gave his son Solomon a charge, and as with the Abrahamic covenant, the preposition לְמַעַן (= in order that, so that) and the attendant אִם (= if) clauses suggested that covenant responsibilities were a crucial component.

...observe what Yahweh your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements...so that you may prosper...and so that Yahweh may keep his promise to me: ‘If your

descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'

1 Kings 2:2-4

The fact that David recalls the essence of the covenant in conditional terms is highly significant. It meant that with respect to the politics of ancient Israel, there was not some sort of unconditional guarantee to the throne and the land. Indeed, in the later Song of Ascents this same conditionality is cleared expressed:

Yahweh swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke:

*“One of your own descendants I will place on your throne—
if your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them,
then their sons will sit on your throne forever and ever.”*

Psalm 132:11-12

In retrospect, while the gift of the land was completed under the warrior kingship of David, and while the promise of security in the land was now linked to David's dynasty, a clear Deuteronomic tone underlay this gift. The land was theirs, but they also were expected to keep the covenant if the land was to remain theirs.

The Centrality of Land to the Covenant People

The centrality of the land to the covenant and the covenant people remained a constant for Israel's national history. The history of the monarchy is punctuated with the political vicissitudes affecting the landedness of Israel.

Solomon widely extended the influence of the kingdom, but he did so at the cost of covenant violation. If the king's responsibility was not to control the land, but rather, to enhance it for the sake of the people—those covenant partners to whom the king was bound by covenant loyalty—any covenant violation on his part endangered the gift of the land for everyone.⁶ Early in his reign, Yahweh sternly warned Solomon about the consequences of covenant unfaithfulness:

...if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised

⁶ Brueggemann, pp. 71-72.

David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'

But if you or your sons turn away from me...then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them...(1 Kg. 9:4-7)

The Deuteronomic code had anticipated an Israelite king “when you enter the land...and have taken possession of it” (Dt. 17:14). However, this king was required to depend upon Yahweh for the security of the land. In particular, he was not to depend upon building his own chariot corps, which was the more conventional military strategy of the Canaanite nations (Dt. 17:16). He was not to depend upon a network of political alliances, alliances that often were established by intermarriage with the princesses of neighboring countries (Dt. 17:17a). (It is to the point, of course, that one usually does not go to war against one’s in-laws.) Finally, he was not to depend upon building his royal treasury, a means for hiring mercenaries, when necessary, to defend his borders (Dt. 17:17b). Instead, his security was to be established by his faithfulness to the covenant, a covenant with which he must remain intimately familiar (Dt. 17:18-20). Only in this way could he be assured that “he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel” (Dt. 17:20b)!

Solomon, as the Kings record demonstrates, failed terribly in each of these points. His attempts to secure the land included precisely those things the Deuteronomic code prohibited. He amassed a huge chariot corps, building special “chariot cities” to house them (1 Kg. 10:26; cf. 9:19).⁷ He married many foreign princesses from neighboring countries, thus securing a ring of political allies on his borders (1 Kg. 3:1; 11:1-8; cf. 7:8; 9:24). He amassed a huge treasury (1 Kg. 10:14-21).⁸ Yahweh’s word to Solomon was stern:

Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees...I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates (1 Kg. 11:11).

⁷ Megiddo in the Esdraelon was in Solomon’s fifth administrative district (1 Kg. 4:12). Two rather large compounds were excavated there and identified as stables for horses (though this identification has been challenged). If they are indeed stables, altogether about 450-480 horses could have been garrisoned there, cf. D. Ussishkin, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (Oxford: Oxford University, 1997), 3.467.

⁸ One might be tempted to think that the description of such large quantities of gold are a gross exaggeration, but copious extra-biblical references to similar quantities in Assyria, Babylon and Egypt in the ancient world, not to mention references to huge quantities found in Susa by Alexander the Great, demonstrate that these descriptions are entirely in context, cf. A. Millard, “Does the Bible Exaggerate King Solomon’s Wealth?”, *BAR* (May/June 1989), pp. 20-34.

Various enemies arose to encroach upon Solomon's security, including Hadad of Edom in the south and Rezon of Damascus in the north (1 Kg. 11:14-25). The leader of his forced labor units, Jeroboam, was confronted by a prophet, who signaled that the threat made against Solomon would, in fact, be carried out (1 Kg. 11:26-33). This oracle even promised to Jeroboam an enduring dynasty along the same lines as the one promised to David, but only "if you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands, as David my servant did" (1 Kg. 11:34-39).

At Solomon's death and Rehoboam's ascension, the kingdom split, the northern tribes taking Jeroboam as their new king (1 Kg. 12:1-24). Now it was Jeroboam's turn to flaunt his violation of the Deuteronomic code. One of Jeroboam's first acts of state was to neutralize the probability that any religious unity centered on Mt. Zion in the south eventually would subvert the political secession of the north. Hence, he rejected the temple on Mt. Zion along with the Davidic covenant and the dynasty of David. This action was a specific violation of the ancient stipulation that there should be a single worship center at "the place Yahweh your God will choose" (Dt. 12). In place of the temple on Mt. Zion, Jeroboam established alternative worship centers at his northern and southern borders, Dan and Bethel, as well as revived the old cult sites on the high places (1 Kg. 12:26-30; cf. 3:2-3).⁹ He even rejected the exclusiveness of the levitical tribe for priesthood (1 Kg. 12:31) and established an alternative festival cycle (1 Kg. 12:32-33).

This rejection of Jerusalem, Zion and David's family was a theological watershed with respect to the covenant. In the south, the ancient covenants with Abraham and Moses were subsumed into the covenant God made with David. Hence, the south remained loyal for its entire national tenure to the temple and the dynasty of David's sons. In the north, by contrast, the divine promises of the land remained strictly within the confines of the promise to Abraham and the gift of the land through Moses and Joshua. David simply was not part of the equation, and it is likely that the idea of God's covenant with David was castigated as a heresy. The later Samaritan emphasis on Mt. Gerezim in the north was probably linked to this covenant debate.

David or no David, the northern nation had plenty of fodder for the Deuteronomic oracles of its prophets. Early on, when Jeroboam set up the

⁹ Te sacred site of Dan has been extensively excavated under the direction of Avram Biren, cf. H. Shanks, "Abraham Biran: Twenty Years of Digging at Tel Dan," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1989), pp. 12-25; A. Biran, "Sacred Spaces," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1998), pp. 38-45, 70; J. Laughlin, "The Remarkable Discoveries at Tel Dan," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1981), pp. 20-37; A. Biran, "Tel Dan Scepter Head," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1989), p. 29-31.

alternative worship shrine at Bethel, an unnamed prophet from Judah denounced it. It must have been particularly galling for Jeroboam to hear the sentence of doom announcing that in some future time a descendent of David would desecrate this same altar (1 Kg. 13:1-3). The fact that this prophet was restricted by God from eating or drinking while in the north (1 Kg. 13:8-9, 16-17)—ancient Near Eastern signs of covenant acceptance—hints at the broader truth that the north’s rejection of theological unity with the south was displeasing to Yahweh. When Jeroboam’s heir became deathly ill and he sent his wife to inquire of Ahijah, the elderly blind prophet decreed a blistering disaster because of Jeroboam’s covenant violations, a disaster that would climax in the end of his dynasty (1 Kg. 14:1-13), and ultimately, the loss of the land:

This is the day! What? Yes, even now. And Yahweh will strike Israel, so that it will be like a reed swaying in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land that he gave to their forefathers and scatter them beyond the River (i.e., the Euphrates)...(1 Kg. 14:14-15).

The cycle of northern kings and their covenant violations punctuate the Kings record like the tolling of a doomsday bell. There were no exceptions; all were covenant violators, and all were to be judged by the Deuteronomic standard of covenant obedience/disobedience. A stereotypical form documents their sordid history.¹⁰

1. *In the-----year of so and so, king of Judah, so-and-so, king of Israel, began to reign.*
2. *Facts about the length of his reign and the place of his capital.*
3. *Censure for the fact that “he did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and walked in the way of Jeroboam and his sin which he made Israel to sin.”*
4. *“Now the rest of the acts of so-and-so. . .are they not written in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?”*
5. *Concluding statement that he slept with his fathers, and so-and-so reigned in his stead.*

When Baasha ascended to the throne of Israel, Jehu ben Hanani denounced him and predicted the end of his dynasty (1 Kg. 16:1-4, 7). The most infamous of all, of course, was Ahab ben Omri and his Phoenician wife

¹⁰ B. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), p. 195.

Jezebel. Together, they flaunted their royal power against the land, both building in places that had been consigned to the covenant ban forever (1 Kg. 16:34; cf. Josh. 6:26) and annexing the landed property of free Israelites (1 Kg. 21:1-24). Worst of all, Ahab imported wholesale the Ba'al fertility cult of his Sidonian wife (1 Kg. 16:30-33; 21:25). Ominously, the historian in the Kings record compares Ahab to "the Amorites Yahweh drove out before Israel" (1 Kg. 21:26b). The Amorites were dispossessed of Canaan because of their wickedness (Ge. 15:16; Lv. 18:24-25), and now Israel, under Ahab, was following the same path.

In spite of the ups and downs of their political fortunes, the northern Israelites maintained a resilient optimism about their landedness (Am. 6:1). They seemed determined to reject the possibility that disaster could overtake them (Am. 9:10). It is probable that the theologically-minded among them placed their greatest confidence in the covenant God made with the patriarchs, the divine land grant that seemed to them irrevocable. They made pilgrimages to the ancient sacred sites of their ancestors to whom the land promises were made, *Bethel* (Am. 4:4a; 5:5a; Ho. 4:15b; 10:5), where Jacob was promised by God, "I will give you and your descendents the land on which you are lying" and "I will bring you back to this land" (Ge. 28:13-15), *Gilgal* (Am. 4:4b; 5:5b; Ho. 4:15b; 12:11), the site of the tribes' initial entry into the promised land (Jos. 4:20-24; 5:9-12) and *Beersheba* (Am. 5:5b), where Yahweh confirmed his promise to Israel, "I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again" (Ge. 46:4). The prophets in the north, on the other hand, continually called the people back to the Sinai covenant with its attendant blessings and curses. By the eighth century BC, two prophets, Amos and Hosea, began recording their oracles against the northern nation, and their sermons were potent expressions of the Deuteronomic code. If God had ousted the Amorites for their wickedness, giving the land to Israel instead (Am. 2:9-10), his divine judgment would not overlook Israel's sins, either (Am. 2:6, 13; 3:1-2). Israel's enemies would overrun the land (Am. 3:11; 6:14), and the ominous shadow of exile loomed on the horizon if a radical course correction could not be effected (Am. 4:2-3; 5:2-3, 27; 6:7-8; 7:11, 17; 9:4; Ho. 9:3, 17). It is to the point that the vocabulary of exile increases considerably in this context:¹¹

The people who live in Samaria...will mourn over [the calf-idol of Bethel]...because it is taken into exile. It will be carried to Assyria as tribute for the great king (Ho. 10:5-6a).

¹¹ The most common Hebrew terms for exile are גולה and גלות along with the hipil form of the verb גלה.

Gilgal will surely go into exile (Am. 5:5).

Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus (Am. 5:27a).

Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile... (Am. 6:7a).

Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land (Am. 7:11b).

Israel will certainly go into exile, away from their native land (Am. 7:27b).

Given the north's rejection of David and everything associated with him, it must have been particularly stinging to hear Amos and Hosea predict that following exile the citizens in the north would return to the Davidic covenant they once rejected (Ho. 3:4-5; Am. 9:11). Their entitlement to the land, even if they refused to think about it in such terms, was linked to Yahweh's promises to David.

If the northern Israelites had to be reminded that God's promises concerning the land could not be disconnected from his covenant with David, the Israelites in Judah, who clung tenaciously to the covenant with David, had to be reminded that they must come to terms with the Sinai covenant's retributive justice. Loyalty to David's family in itself was not enough; they must be faithful to the covenant of Moses, too! Hence, prophets in the south, like Isaiah and Micah, stridently preached that the people of Judah must return to the covenant. As in the north, the southerners harbored a stubborn optimism about their security in the land. When these prophets arose to warn them about the impending judgment of exile, their sermons were dismissed as inappropriate, perhaps even heretical.

"Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us." Should it be said, O house of Jacob: "Is the Spirit of Yahweh angry? Does he do such things?" (Mic. 2:6b-7)

...they lean upon Yahweh and say, "Is not Yahweh among us? No disaster will come upon us." (Mic. 3:11b)

Optimism notwithstanding, the message in the south was the same as in the north. If there were not a significant correction to their covenant unfaithfulness, exile would be their lot.

Therefore, my people will go into exile for lack of understanding (Is. 5:13a).

Shave your heads in mourning for the children in whom you delight; make yourselves as bald as a vulture, for they will go from you into exile (Mic. 1:16).

In the end, whether in Israel or Judah, the centrality of the land to covenant expectations was central. Though the north relied upon two covenants, those of Abraham and Moses, landedness was the epitome of covenant blessing. In the south, which also championed the covenant of David as well as the covenants of Abraham and Moses, it was the same. To be in covenant with Yahweh was to live in his land. They neither expected nor assumed anything less.

The Deuteronomic Prophets to Judah

The exile predicted by the prophets to the northern nation became a crushing reality engineered by the Assyrian war machine. The last kings of Israel were weak, and Tiglath-pileser III forced Menahem into an exorbitant tribute (2 Kg. 15:19-20). After Pekahiah, his son, was assassinated, Pekah, his successor, experienced the first massive deportations to the Assyrian aggressor (2 Kg. 15:29). When Ahaz of Judah voluntarily invited Tiglath-pileser into an alliance because of threats from Pekah, it was the beginning of the end for the northern nation (2 Kg. 16:7-9). Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea (2 Kg. 15:30), who subsequently was installed as an Assyrian puppet king, but when he stopped his Assyrian tribute and courted Egypt to protect him (2 Kg. 17:3-4), the Assyrians savagely attacked Samaria, bringing to a close the political entity of Israel (2 Kg. 17:5-6). In 721 BC the Israelite citizens in the north were deported to outlying provinces of the empire. The prophets had been right! Because of repeated covenant violations, the Israelites in the north were dispossessed of their land (2 Kg. 17:15, 18-23). In the end, “Only the tribe of Judah was left” (2 Kg. 17:18).

The demise of Israel in the north, strangely enough, did not erode political optimism in the south. Probably, the citizens of Judah felt that Israel to the north had received no more than their just deserts for deserting David’s family and the temple on Mt. Zion. Still, the eighth century prophets to Judah were hardly timid about the ominous possibilities for the south. In naming his sons by their strange appellations, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (= Speed-Plunder-Haste-Booty) and Shear-Jashuv (= A-Remnant-Will-Return),

Isaiah clearly intended his fellow citizens in the south to face squarely the possibility of invasion and exile. Using powerful metaphors, Isaiah depicted Judah's cities stripped and burned with Jerusalem barely surviving (Is. 1:7-9). His warning of clear and present danger should have been unmistakable:

"If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." The mouth of Yahweh has spoken.

(Is. 1:19-20)

Perhaps the citizens in the south did not think Isaiah's warnings about purging would include something as radical as exile (cf. Is. 1:25-18; 3:1-9), but the imagery of Yahweh's upraised hand repeatedly striking out against them should have clued them in that the future was dark, if anything (Is. 5:25; 9:12b, 17b, 21b; 10:4b)! The city of Jerusalem, once put to siege by David, would now be put to siege by God (Is. 29:1-4). Isaiah's final word to Hezekiah was blunt:

Hear the word of Yahweh Tsabaoth: The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says Yahweh.

(Is. 39:5-6)

Micah's preaching, too, was scathing. His habit of walking around the village barefoot and naked—adopting the appearance of a refugee—should have been immediately recognizable. The disease that destroyed Samaria was contagious, and it had infected Jerusalem, too (Mic. 1:9). Cities like Lachish and others in Judah's Shephelah were candidates for disaster (Mic. 1:11-16). Micah became the first of the prophets to clearly predict the destruction of the temple on Mt. Zion (Mic. 3:12).

The oracles of doom that began with the eighth century prophets only increased as the decades slipped by. While the time of Joel's oracles are debated, his vision of the locust plague from the north clearly suggested a terrible invasion that would strip the land. Heartfelt repentance from leaders to citizens (Jl. 1:13-14; 2:12-13, 16-17) was the only hope, for as the prophet put it, "Who knows but that Yahweh may turn and have pity..." (Jl. 2:14). By the seventh century, two prophets, in particular, laid out Judah's future in clear and unmistakable terms. One was Zephaniah, who declared that Yahweh had prepared a sacrifice—and the princes of Judah would be the victims (Zep. 1:7-8)! Any complacent citizens who thought such a thing

could never happen were due for a rude shock, for Yahweh would search them out in every dark corner:

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'Yahweh will do nothing, either good or bad.'"

(Zep. 1:12)

During the reign of Josiah, an incident occurred that spurred thorough-going reforms. Josiah already had begun a deeply sensitive search for God early in his reign (2 Chr. 34:3-7), but when a Torah scroll was discovered in the temple during some renovations and the scroll was read to the king, Josiah was struck with the immensity of the words. This scroll, as virtually all scholars agree, must have been some form of the Book of Deuteronomy.¹² The curses it pronounced (2 Chr. 34:24) and the actions of reform it spurred, such as, the destruction of the Canaanite high places (2 Chr. 34:4-7), the renewal of the covenant (2 Chr. 34:29-33), and the pilgrimage celebration of Passover, are all concerns of Deuteronomy (cf. Dt. 7, 12, 28, 29). Josiah immediately requested the input of the senior prophet in Jerusalem, Huldah (2 Kg. 22:8-14; 2 Chr. 34:14-22). She was blunt, if anything! Her word from Yahweh was:

Tell the man who sent you to me, 'This is what Yahweh says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people—all the curses written in the book that has been read in the presence of the king of Judah. ...my anger will be poured out on this place and will not be quenched.'

2 Chronicles 34:23b-25

To be sure, Huldah also indicated that the disaster would not happen during Josiah's lifetime, because of his reform efforts (2 Kg. 22:18-20; 2 Chr. 34:26-28), but the reprieve would be temporary.

At the time of the Torah scroll discovery, Jeremiah was still a young man in his early years as a prophet (Je. 1:2; 2 Chr. 34:8). Thereafter, he sustained a long and difficult ministry. If anything, the threat of exile became a virtual certainty in his oracles. With a clarion blast like a trumpet of war (Je. 4:5-6), Jeremiah's scorching words announced the coming of a

¹² It is axiomatic among historical-critical scholars that the Torah Scroll not only was Deuteronomy, but that it was a fresh composition. It was, to use the words of one contemporary scholar, "not an old law that was now rediscovered, but was an innovation in the late seventh century B.C.E.," cf. J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), pp. 163-164. Conservative scholars are not so quick to accept this late-dating of Deuteronomy, but nonetheless, the relationship between the Torah scroll found in Josiah's day and the Book of Deuteronomy seems established beyond serious question.

foreign army (Je. 4:16), and they would plunder the land until it was entirely in ruins (Je. 4:20, 27). As had happened in the north, the apathy of false optimism lulled the people into a sense of false security. False prophets continued to spill out messages of peace and safety (Je. 6:14; 8:11), but their sermons were falsehoods:

They have lied about Yahweh; they said, 'He will do nothing! No harm will come to us; we will never see sword or famine.'

(Je. 5:12)

Yahweh declared that if even a single honest merchant could be found in Jerusalem, he would forgive the city (Je. 5:1), but alas, the moral deterioration was so bad that if intercessors like Moses and Samuel were to pray for reprieve, it would be too little, too late (Je. 15:1-2).

At the center of Jeremiah's oracles was the Deuteronomic code, the covenant God made with Israel through Moses. The citizens might cling to their supposed unconditional rights to the land on the basis of the promises to Abraham and David, but they could not ignore the Deuteronomic character of the covenant at Sinai.

Listen to the terms of this covenant and tell them to the people of Judah... Tell them that this is what Yahweh, the God of Israel says, 'Cursed is the man who does not obey the terms of this covenant... Obey me and do everything I command you, and...I will fulfill the oath I swore to your forefathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey—the land you possess today.'

'From the time I brought your forefathers up from Egypt until today, I warned them again and again, saying, "Obey me." But they did not listen or pay attention... So I brought on them all the curses of the covenant I had commanded them to follow but that they did not keep.'

(Je. 11:1-8)

Especially, the continuing loyalty to David's dynasty and the temple on Mt. Zion were looked upon as guaranteeing national security. Had not God promised to dwell on Mt. Zion forever? Would not the sons of David's line rule from Jerusalem forever? Not according to Jeremiah! He preached in the king's court that if there was not an immediate course correction, Yahweh would bring the royal palace to ruin (Je. 22:1-7). Should anyone ask why Yahweh allowed such a disaster to happen, the answer was blunt: "They have forsaken the covenant" (Je. 22:8-9). Shallum (Jehoahaz), who already had been deported to Egypt (cf. 2 Kg. 23:30b-33), would not be coming home (Je. 22:10-12). Yahweh, likewise, had rejected Jehoiakim's

family (Je. 22:18-19; 36:30-31). Jehoiachin, who by now had been deported to Babylon too (2 Kg. 24:12-16), would not be back either (Je. 22:24-27). Even though one of the court prophets urged that the exile of Jehoiachin would be short-lived (Je. 28:1-4), Jeremiah declared Hananiah to be a false prophet, and further, that he would die for his falsehood (Je. 28:15-17). Exile would surely happen, and it would last for seventy years (Je. 25:8-11). Of Jehoiachin, the last legitimate king of David's line, Jeremiah moaned:

O land, land, land, hear the word of Yahweh! This is what Yahweh says: 'Record this man as if childless...for none of his offspring...will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.'

(Je. 22:29-30)

If loyalty to the dynasty of David was not guarantee of national security, neither was lip service to the temple of Solomon. Jeremiah stood at the gate and delivered a blistering sermon to the worshippers, telling them that what once had happened to the tabernacle at Shiloh in the days of Eli would surely happen to the temple on Mt. Zion (Je. 7:1-15).

'Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your fathers. I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your brothers, the people of Ephraim.'

(Je. 7:14-15)

Along with Jehoiachin, a young priest named Ezekiel had been exiled to Babylon in the first deportation (Eze. 1:1-3). What Jeremiah's sermons were to the citizens still in Jerusalem, Ezekiel's oracles would be to the exiles that already had been exiled. Jerusalem, of course, would continue to eke out an existence for a few years under the puppet king Zedekiah, but Ezekiel showed that Yahweh had abandoned the temple as a prelude to its destruction (Eze. 10:18-19; 11:22-24). In a series of hard hitting parables and oracles, Ezekiel predicted the siege of Jerusalem (Eze. 4:1-3, 16-17; 5:8, 14-17). The fate of the city was inescapable. Even if righteous men like Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they barely would be able to save themselves (Eze. 14:12-14, 19-20). As a final sign concerning the fall of the city, Ezekiel was ordered by God to record a date, the date when Jerusalem would be put to siege by the Babylonians (Eze. 24:1-2). Of course, for those already exiled in Babylon, it would be some time before the news arrived that the city had fallen (Eze. 33:21), but Ezekiel recorded the siege date in advance so it would be clearly remembered. As a clinching sign of the

severity of its fall, Ezekiel's wife died on the day the city fell (Eze. 24:15-18), a potent symbol of the desecration of the sanctuary on Mt. Zion (Eze. 24:21). The sordid details of Jerusalem's siege and fall were dutifully recorded by Jeremiah, who was there to witness the fulfillment of his own terrible predictions (Je. 39:8-10; 52:12-34).

Hope Beyond Disaster

If the exile to Babylon was an unimaginable disaster, it was not a disaster without hope of recovery. From the earliest form of the Deuteronomic theology, the covenant formulary contained a way forward even if exile occurred. While there was no relenting from the terrible curses to be visited upon Israel for covenant violation (Dt. 29:18-28), nonetheless, if they were "dispersed among the nations" (Dt. 30:1) and then turned to Yahweh with their whole hearts (Dt. 30:2)...

...then Yahweh your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there Yahweh your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your fathers...

Dt. 30:3-5

This promise of restoration was repeated in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the first temple (2 Chr. 6:36-39).

In the writing prophets, the promise of hope beyond exile accelerates in proportion to the warnings that exile would surely come. Amos in the north bluntly announced that only a small remnant would survive the Assyrian crisis (Am. 3:12; 5:3; 6:9).¹³ Still, even for this small remnant a restoration would come. To be sure, he links the restoration to the family of David (Am. 9:11-12), but still, Yahweh's word was clear: "I will bring back my exiled people Israel" (Am. 9:14), and "I will plant Israel in their own land never again to be uprooted" (Am. 9:15). Hosea, also, links the restoration to David's family (Ho. 3:5). He frankly concedes that Israel will be deprived of both the royal line and the cult for a long, undetermined period (Ho. 3:4). Nonetheless, those who because of covenant violation had been labeled "not loved" and "not my people" would be planted in the land and accepted (Ho. 2:23).

¹³ Several terms are used to describe the remnant, including שְׁאֵרִית (= remainder), שְׁאֵר (= remnant), שְׁרִיד (= survivor), פֶּלִיטָה (= what has been spared) and יָתֵר (= to be left over).

The eighth century prophets in Judah offered the same hope. Micah, also, viewed the surviving remnant as eking out a precarious existence (Mic. 5:7). Still, he promised forgiveness (Mic. 7:18), regathering and deliverance for the remnant (Mic. 2:12; 4:6). Though he was the first to announce the destruction of the temple (Mic. 3:12), he also predicted the restoration of worship on “the mountain of Yahweh’s temple” (Mic. 4:1, 7) as well as the restoration of kingship (Mic. 4:8; 5:2). In the end, Yahweh would be true to his sworn oath to Abraham (Mic. 7:20). Yet it is Isaiah of the eighth century whose predictions of restoration were the most glowing. Like Amos, Isaiah expected only a small surviving remnant (Is. 1:8-9; 6:11-13; 10:22). This remnant would be like a remaining stump after the forest was cut down (Is. 6:13; cf. 10:20-21; 30:17). Still, it would survive (Is. 28:5-6; 37:31-32). After the disaster Yahweh once more would gather the exiles of Israel (Is. 11:11-12; cf. 43:5-6; 45:13; 49:5, 17-18; 56:8). Isaiah agreed with Micah that the mountain of Yahweh’s temple would be reestablished, this time not merely for the people of Israel, but for the nations (Is. 2:2-4).¹⁴ In the restoration, the surviving remnant would be cleansed, and the cloud and pillar of fire that once sheltered Israel in the desert of Sinai would overshadow Mt. Zion (Is. 4:3-6). These ransomed and redeemed survivors would enter Zion with joy and celebration (Is. 35:9b-10). As with the other prophets, this restoration was linked to David’s family (Is. 9:7; 11:1, 10; 16:5; cf. 55:3), and while the remnant would be no more than a stump after deforestation (Is. 6:13b), a live sprig from Jesse’s stump would begin to grow (Is. 11:1).

The vision of hope beyond disaster did not dim in the prophets that followed. By the seventh century, Zephaniah, whose blistering oracles left little doubt that Judah was in serious trouble, nevertheless envisioned the gathering of God’s scattered people as a purified remnant (Zep. 3:9-13, 19-20). The remnant theology of Isaiah was replicated by Jeremiah, through whom Yahweh announced:

*I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries
where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture...*
Je. 23:3

*Israel is a scattered flock... The first to devour him was the king of
Assyria; the last to crush his bones was Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.
Therefore this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel says: “I will*

¹⁴ Since Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 2:2-4 are nearly verbatim replicas of each other, the question of literary dependency naturally arises. It would take us too far afield to address it here, but one thorough treatment can be found in F. Andersen and D. Freedman, *Micah [AB]* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 413-427.

punish the king of Babylon...as I punished the king of Assyria. But I will bring Israel back to his own pasture... In those days...search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare."

Je. 50:17-20

This reassembling of the exiled people would be a virtual second exodus, this time not from Egypt but from "the land of the north" (Je. 23:7-8; 30:1-3; 31:7-14; 50:17-20). As before, the restoration was linked directly to the family of David (Je. 23:5-6). Jeremiah specified that the time of exile would be seventy years, but after this dislocation, Yahweh promised:

'When the seventy years are completed...I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. I will be found by you,' declares Yahweh, 'and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,' declares Yahweh, 'and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.'

Je. 29:10-14; cf. 32:37

This regathering, as with the earlier prophets, was a blessing for the "remnant of Israel" (Je. 31:7).

Ezekiel, who already had been deported to Babylon, prayed for the survival of a remnant (Eze. 9:8; 11:13), and in fact, predicted that a small nucleus would escape (Eze. 6:8; 7:16; 14:22). To be sure, they would be scattered among the nations (Eze. 5:10, 12b; 12:15-16; 17:21). This scattering, however, was not Yahweh's final word. From among the nations he intended to regather the remnant (Eze. 11:17; 28:25-26; 34:11-16; 36:24; 37:20-22), reestablishing his covenant with them and purging all rebels from among them (Eze. 20:34-38).

The prophets made very clear that in the restoration the remnant who survived would not be allowed simply to return to "business as usual". There is a marked feature of repentance, cleansing, holiness and single-hearted devotion to God that would characterize the remnant community. The ancient promises of restoration to the land would be fulfilled, to be sure, but those who were blessed in this fulfillment would be a remnant of faith! In fact, it is to the point to say that the prophets understood the exile and the restoration in rather broadly spiritual terms, not merely nationalistic terms. Hosea's prediction, "They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings" (Ho. 3:5b), envisions a chastened, repentant remnant. The old habit of lapsing into syncretism with Canaanite religion would be a thing of

the past (Ho. 2:16-17; 14:1-3), and the hallmarks of the remnant's new relationship with Yahweh would be righteousness, justice, love, compassion, faithfulness and acknowledgement of God (Ho. 2:19-20). Their spiritual waywardness finally would be healed (Ho. 14:4).

Isaiah's message to the south was similar. The remnant—those left—would be called holy (Is. 4:3-4; 30:19-22; 35:8-10). They would rely only on Yahweh, trusting completely in his provision of salvation (Is. 10:20; 12:1-3; 29:22-24). Zephaniah announced that in the restoration the surviving remnant would be the meek and humble, those trusting in Yahweh (Zep. 3:9-13). Jeremiah, likewise, anticipated a day when Israel would repent in deep sincerity (Je. 31:18-20), and in turn, God would give them a heart to know him (Je. 24:7; 31:33-34; 32:39-40). In the near future, of course, Israel would be punished for covenant violation, but this discipline would not result in total destruction. A remnant would survive (Je. 30:11; 46:27-28), and they would be cleansed of their sins and forgiven (Je. 33:8). For Ezekiel, the message of hope was the same. Israel would be cleansed and restored:

'I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Eze. 36:25-26

In the end, the message of hope stands side by side with the warnings that the exile would certainly take place. Still, the Deuteronomic curse of exile was not Yahweh's final word; his final word was for a remnant to be forgiven, purified and restored.

The Shape of God's Future

If the prophets envisioned hope beyond the disaster of exile, it must also be said that they anticipated this restoration to bear several remarkable features. Already we have had occasion to remark upon the remnant theology and the prophet's expectation that the remnant would be a repentant, purified and forgiven people. The prophetic vision for the future went much farther, however. In the first place, the timing of this restoration is admittedly ambiguous. Recurring expressions among the prophets put it into the future, but without much specificity. The defining expression is "the Day of Yahweh" (יְהוָה יוֹם), a phrase that at once encompasses the elements of judgment and restoration. It seems likely that a popular version

of the Day of Yahweh expected it to be the moment of Yahweh's eschatological victory over his enemies culminating in the supremacy of Israel (cf. Am. 5:18-20). To the contrary, Amos announced that it would be doomsday for Israel (Am. 4:12; cf. 2:16; 3:4, 8, 12-15; 8:3, 9-14; 9:1-4). However, judgment did not exhaust Amos' vision for the future, for "that day" also would include the restoration of David's "fallen tent" (Am. 9:11).

Other prophets, also, used this same language of judgment and restoration. Isaiah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Obadiah viewed the Day of Yahweh as a time of darkness and divine wrath (Is. 2:12-21; 13:9-13; Zep. 1:14-18; Je. 46:10; Eze. 7:19; 13:5; 30:3-4; Ob. 15). Joel viewed the Day of Yahweh as a crucible of judgment (Jl. 1:15-20), a period of judgment and calamity (Jl. 2:1-10). However, he also anticipated an outpouring of God's Spirit and the salvation of many (Jl. 2:28-32). Paradoxically, the Day of Yahweh would be both a judgment on God's enemies as well as a refuge for his people (Jl. 3:14-16). Mt. Zion would become the dwelling place of Yahweh once again, and it never again would be violated by invaders (Jl. 3:17). Judah and Jerusalem would be inhabited forever, and the sins of God's people would be pardoned (Jl. 3:20-21). Both Jeremiah and Obadiah also include this vision of blessing within the scope of the Day of Yahweh. Israel would be saved from exile (Je. 46:27-28), and on Mt. Zion deliverance would come (Ob. 17, 20). Hence, the expression Day of Yahweh has a broad semantic range. There seems little doubt that the prophets used it to refer to what was imminent as well as what was in the indeterminate future.¹⁵

Two prophets, in particular, described in covenant terms this future on the far side of exile. They were Jeremiah, who was in Jerusalem when it fell (Je. 39:11-14), and Ezekiel, who resided with those exiled in the first deportation and heard about the city's fall from a refugee (Eze. 33:21; cf. 24:25-26). In his oracles about restoration, Jeremiah predicted a "new covenant" to be established between Yahweh and Israel (Je. 31:31). Of special significance would be the difference between this covenant and the Sinai covenant, for the new one "will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant..." (Je. 31:32). The remarkable difference was this: the new covenant would be thoroughly internalized—"in their minds" and "on their hearts"—and especially, it would be grounded on divine forgiveness, not the retributive justice of the old covenant (Je. 31:33-34; cf. 50:4-5). The shape of God's future would be covenantal, but it would be on other than the Deuteronomic code. Ezekiel, for his part, does not use

¹⁵ D. Lewis, *3 Crucial Questions About the Last Days* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), pp. 30-34.

the expression “new covenant”; instead, he speaks of a “covenant of peace” to ensure that God’s people would live in safety in the land (Eze. 34:25-31; cf. 37:26). To be sure, this covenant had echoes of the old one even while it surpassed it (Eze. 16:59-63). Most important, the covenant of peace would include atonement for sin (Eze. 16:63). God’s surviving remnant would have an undivided heart (Eze. 11:19) and a new spirit (Eze. 11:19; 36:26-27).

The gift of the Spirit to God’s people is a feature that several prophets mention in addition to Ezekiel (Eze. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29). Joel, as cited earlier (Jl. 2:28-29), and Isaiah, too, projected this same vision (Is. 32:15). The oracles of comfort feature several explicit mentions of the gift of the Spirit. Like the Branch from David’s family (Is. 11:2), the Servant of Yahweh would be Spirit-endowed (Is. 42:1; cf. 61:1), and upon the people of Israel would be poured out the divine Spirit (Is. 44:3; 59:21). What once had been the experience of the elders of Israel would become the experience for all God’s people (cf. Nu. 11:17, 25-26). Moses’ ancient wish would come true; all God’s people would be filled with the Spirit (Nu. 11:27-29)!

The ancient ideal of temple and holy city would loom large in the restoration. Mt. Zion, which is virtually a synonym for Jerusalem and the temple, would be gloriously restored, or to use Isaiah’s language, “redeemed with justice” (Is. 1:27; 2:2-3; 4:3-6; 12:6; 14:32b; 24:23; 30:19; 33:5, 20, 24; 35:10; 37:31-32; Mic. 4:2-3). Good news would come to Zion, the good news of salvation (Is. 40:9; 41:27; 46:13; 52:7-8; 59:20; Jl. 2:23, 32; Zep. 3:16-17). Yahweh would look on Zion with compassion (Is. 51:3; 62:11-12), and the ones Yahweh ransomed from exile would return to Zion, singing with joy and gladness (Is. 51:11, 16; cf. 52:1-2; Je. 31:11-12). The glory of Yahweh that abandoned the temple would return (Eze. 44:4).

Worthy of special note is the frequent reference to the nations, who now would come to Jerusalem to worship on Mt. Zion (Is. 2:2-4; 18:7; Mic. 4:1-3). The remarkable thing is that in the old covenant the nations had been excluded from such worship (Ex. 12:43-45; Dt. 23:3). In the restoration, however, aliens would join the people of Israel to worship the Lord, and he will accept them (Is. 14:1b; 56:3, 6-8). Death, the certain destiny of all humans, would be replaced with a rich feast for all peoples on Mt. Zion (Is. 25:6-8). The very ends of the earth would resound with songs proclaiming glory to Yahweh (Is. 24:14-16). Egyptians and Assyrians would offer sacrifices, and together Egypt, Assyria and Israel would become a three-fold blessing (Is. 19:19-25). Africans, also, would bring gifts to Mt. Zion (Is. 18:7; Zep. 3:10). Some from among the nations would be joined to the priests and Levites in order to serve in the house of the Lord (Is. 66:21). Even Philistines would be cleansed so that they could become leaders in

Judah (Ze. 9:7). Those among the Israelites who because of physical defects or illegitimacy were restricted from the altar (Lv. 21:16-23; Dt. 23:1-2) would now be welcome (Is. 56:3b-5). People from the ends of the earth would be saved, and every knee in all the world would bow before Yahweh, acclaiming him as God alone (Is. 45:22-24; 66:19-20; Zep. 2:11b; 3:9-10).

The dazzling vision of this future is inextricably connected with the family of David. Already it has been noted that the northern prophets did not hesitate to link this future with the Davidic family (Am. 9:11; Ho. 3:5). Isaiah is even more specific. Using the metaphor of deforestation to depict the coming disaster, in which “the holy seed” would be like so many stumps in the land (cf. Is. 6:13; cf. 2:12-13), Isaiah envisioned a stump from which would grow a small shoot, a “Branch” from Jesse’s family (Is. 11:1, 10; cf. 4:2). This royal branch, one from the “tent of David”, would reign in faithfulness on David’s throne (Is. 16:5; 9:7). Jeremiah picks up the Branch metaphor and uses it to the same end (Je. 23:5-6; 33:14-16). In the restoration, the people once more would serve “David” their king (Je. 30:9). The covenant with David was not dead, and the promises to David concerning his posterity would certainly be fulfilled, albeit to a future generation (Je. 33:17-26). “David” would tend them as a good and faithful shepherd (Eze. 34:23-24; 37:24-25).

So, the future on the far side of exile was described in glowing terms—in fact, in quite spiritual terms. The prophets prepared the people of Israel and Judah for an understanding of exile that was not merely a political disenfranchisement, but a spiritual discipline, and in turn, they described a future restoration in terms that were not merely political, but a spiritual revival. The repeating phrase defining this restoration is:

They will be my people, and I will be their God.

(Je. 32:38; cf. Is. 51:16a; Je. 24:7; 31:1, 33; Eze. 11:20; 14:11; 37:23, 27; Zec. 8:8)

It is hardly any wonder that, as one of the post-exilic Psalms puts it, “When Yahweh brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, and our tongues with songs of joy” (Ps. 126:1-2a).

The Return from Babylon

Jeremiah predicted that the exile in Babylon would last seventy years (Je. 25:11-12; 29:10; cf. Zec. 7:5). While he did not offer precise markers for

calculating the beginning or ending of this period, the best assumption is that it should be reckoned beginning with the fall of Jerusalem and the temple's destruction until the construction of the second temple.¹⁶ In Isaiah there appeared the very name of the liberator of the exiled Jews, Cyrus (Is. 45:1, 13).¹⁷ In the transition from Babylon to Persia, the new emperor, Cyrus the Great, decreed in 539 BC that various displaced peoples in the empire could return to rebuild the temples of their native deities, and this included the Jews (2 Chr. 36:22-23; Ezr. 1:1-4; 6:3-5). Actual references to this decree have been discovered on the famous Nabonidus Chronicle, which confirms that Cyrus returned "the gods...to their sacred cities", as well as on a clay cylinder, where Cyrus codified his permission for the rebuilding of sacred cities "on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries which (used) to dwell therein".¹⁸

With this permission, the first wave of Jewish exiles began the long trek homeward under the leadership of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel (Ezr. 1:8, 11; 2:2). Sheshbazzar's name drops from the record abruptly, but Zerubbabel's name continues as the leader of the returning expedition. Some twelve leaders (more than likely intended to represent a reconstitution of the twelve tribes) along with a large company, in all about 50,000, returned to Jerusalem (Ne. 7:7-69; 1 Esdras 5:8-43; Ezr. 2:2-67). They vowed to rebuild the temple on Mt. Zion that had been destroyed by the Babylonians (1 Esdras 5:44-45). The rebuilding project started with construction of the great altar so that the morning and evening sacrifices could be offered (Ezr. 3:1-3; cf. 1 Esdras 5:47-53) and the annual festivals could be celebrated (Ezr. 3:4-6). Subsequently, the foundation for a second temple was laid and heralded with celebration (Ezr. 3:8-11; cf. 1 Esdras 5:56-57).

Before the structure could be raised on the new foundation, however, overpowering opposition brought the project to a halt. Locals offered to help (Ezr. 4:1-2), but when their offer was rejected, they began to oppose the rebuilding efforts (Ezr. 4:3-4). This antagonism continued for sixteen years and effectively stymied the work throughout the reigns of Cyrus (who died in 529 BC), Cambyses (529-523 BC) and into the reign of Darius the Great

¹⁶ In the 4th regnal year of Darius I Hystaspes (522-486 BC), Zechariah described the fasting of the Jews in exile for "the past seventy years" (Zec. 7:5). Hence, working backward from 518 BC to 587 BC (inclusive), the calculation is very close. Other possibilities exist, however. It was about seventy years between Jehoiakim's vassalship to Pharaoh Neco II and Cyrus' decree to allow displaced peoples in the empire to return to their ancestral lands (609-539 BC). Also, it should be pointed out that Daniel, who also was aware of Jeremiah's prediction of seventy years, seems to have used some point earlier than the temple's destruction as the beginning point of the calculation (Da. 9:1-2).

¹⁷ Josephus cites a tradition that Cyrus was aware of the Isaiah text that named him, cf. *Antiquities* XI.1.4.

¹⁸ *ANET* (1978) pp. 306, 316.

(522-486 BC, Ezr. 4:5).¹⁹ It was near the end of this sixteen year hiatus that two prophets rose to support Zerubbabel and Joshua in the rebuilding project: they were Haggai and Zechariah (Ezr. 5:1-2; 6:14).

It is highly instructive to read the theological ground upon which these prophets urged the recommencement of the work. In the first place, they seem to have understood well the concept of a remnant who would survive as God's people. Their repeated labeling of the returned community as "the remnant of the people" suggests as much (Hg. 1:12, 14; 2:2; Zec. 8:6, 11-12), and it can hardly be doubted that this nomenclature (שְׁאֲרִית = remnant) was drawn from the oracles of the earlier prophets (cf. Is. 37:32; 46:3; Mic. 2:12; 4:7; 5:7-8; 7:18; Zep. 2:7; 3:13; Je. 23:3; 31:7). If Isaiah had said "a remnant will return" (Is. 10:20-22), the repatriation of exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem was the first phalanx of fulfillment.

At the same time, it is equally clear that the remnant who returned did not see any immediate fulfillment of the dazzling promises they expected. Haggai was blunt: "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little" (Hg. 1:9a). Those among the repatriates who could remember the splendor of the first temple were not a little put off by what seemed to be a rather modest beginning for the second one (Hg. 2:3; cf. Ezr. 3:12-13). Attitudes became cynical, and the cynicism spread like contagion (Hg. 1:2; 2:13-14). Those who started the work had by now resigned themselves to building their own homes (Hg. 1:3-4, 9b). It was certainly clear enough that the retributive justice of the old covenant was still in effect. Crop failure and deprivation, according to Haggai, were direct results of covenant negligence (Hg. 1:5-6, 10-11; 2:16-17). The same warnings about covenant failure that earlier prophets gave the people before the exile were taken up by Zechariah for the remnant who returned (Zec. 1:2-6; 7:8-14; 8:16-17). If anyone expected the new covenant predictions of Jeremiah and Ezekiel to be effective immediately, they could dispossess themselves of that notion. The Mosaic covenant was in no way suspended!

At the same time, in a series of pointed oracles, the two prophets worked to inspire the remnant to renew the work. If the return from Babylon was only a down payment on the full slate of restoration promises, the work of rebuilding the temple was integrally linked to this larger vision. In its larger parameters, God's purpose for the future included all nations (Hg. 2:7a, 21-22; Zec. 2:11; 6:15; 8:20-23). What Ezekiel had envisioned would

¹⁹ Cyrus' edict of repatriation came in 539 BC, but in all likelihood, the time required for the trip back to Jerusalem meant that the rebuilding of the great altar did not commence until 538-7 BC. The work on the temple itself did not begin until 536 BC (Ezr. 3:8), and when it was stopped, it did not recommence until 520 BC, the second regnal year of Darius the Great (Ezr. 4:24; Hg. 1:1).

yet happen (cf. Eze. 44:4), for God intended to fill this second temple with glory to a degree even greater than had been true of the first temple (Hg. 2:7b-9; Zec. 2:5). The work of rebuilding was seed for this larger future (Hg. 2:19; Zec. 8:12). God was deeply passionate about the rebuilding of his house (Zec. 1:14-17; 2:13; 8:2), so those who were commissioned with the work could hardly afford to be apathetic! By renewing the work, the remnant of repatriates in Jerusalem had a stake in this larger future. Yahweh would indeed come to dwell in his temple again (Zec. 1:16-17; 2:10-12; 8:3).

Furthermore, God had not forgotten his promises about covenant, kingship and priesthood. Though the retributive justice of the old covenant was still in effect, a new day was dawning in which Yahweh would “not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past” (Zec. 8:11-15; cf. Hg. 2:18-19). Zerubbabel, though he may never have been a king, still was a descendent of David through Jehoiachin, the last rightful king of Judah (1 Chr. 3:17-19; cf. Mt. 1:12). He embodied the future fulfillment of Yahweh’s promise to the Davidic family (Hg. 2:23). Through both him and the high priest Joshua flowed the golden oil of the Holy Spirit (Zec. 4:11-14). In his own person Zerubbabel carried the predictions of earlier prophets that a Branch from Jesse’s stump would grow (Is. 11:1; 4:2; Je. 23:5; 33:15). To emphasize his unique role as a carrier of the promise, the prophet Zechariah created a crown symbolizing the union of both royal and priestly leadership in a single person (Zec. 6:11-13). Though he set the crown on Joshua’s head, his proclamation at the coronation was that a man called “Branch” would build Yahweh’s temple (Zec. 6:12-13). This “Branch”, without question, was Zerubbabel (Zec. 4:6-10; cf. Hg. 1:12-15; 2:4-4; Ezr. 5:2). Still, the ultimate fulfillment of the prediction was for the indeterminate future, and the crown was to be preserved in the second temple as a memorial for that future time when the royal and priestly lines would be brought together (Zec. 6:14).

In the end, Zerubbabel and Joshua, supported by Haggai and Zechariah, led the community to resume the work. The future was bright with promise (Zec. 8:3-8, 11-23), so the people were encouraged to renew the temple’s construction with their whole hearts (Zec. 8:9; Ezr. 5:2; 6:14). Though further challenges awaited them (cf. Ezr. 5:3—6:13), they completed the work by 516 BC (Ezr. 6:15). The new temple was dedicated, and the priests were installed in office (Ezr. 6:16-18).

The biblical narrative does not resume until half a century later during the reign of Persian emperor Artaxerxes I Longimanus (464-424 BC). Precisely what happened in the intervening period, the reader is not told, but clearly the remnant community made little spiritual progress, and in fact,

lapsed in some significant ways. Three biblical figures share the spotlight at this later time, Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi, each of them aiming at reforms among the remnant.

Ezra exemplified the ideal priest who was both a ceremonial leader and a teaching scholar (Ezr. 7:6, 10; cf. Lv. 10:11; Dt. 33:10; 2 Chr. 15:3; 31:4; Je. 18:18; Ho. 4:6; Mal. 2:7). He led an expedition from the Jewish community in Babylon back to Jerusalem, and what he found was a persistent lapse in that the Jews in Jerusalem were intermarrying with pagans, a clear violation of the Torah (Ezr. 9:1-2; cf. Ex. 34:11-16; Dt. 7:1-6). His passion for the Torah resulted in the people's complete repentance (Ezr. 10:1ff.; Ne. 9:1-3). Not only did they confess their own sins, they clearly confessed the sins of their ancestors that had led to exile, proclaiming the justice of Yahweh in his sentence of judgment on them:

In all that has happened to us, you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong. Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the warnings you gave them. Even while they were enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn away from their evil ways.

Nehemiah 9:33-35

Together, they bound themselves under oath to conscientiously follow the Torah, promising not to succumb to paganism while carefully observing the Sabbath, the laws of tithing, the command to dedicate of their firstborn sons—and most important—promising not to neglect the new temple (Ne. 10:28-39).

Nehemiah, in addition to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem which still were in disrepair from the Babylonian destruction, also supported the Ezra reforms. He led the way in fixing his personal seal, along with the seals of other leaders, to the covenant renewal document (Ne. 10:1). When there were further lapses, Nehemiah took it upon himself to set right what was wrong (Ne. 13).

The relationship of Malachi to the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah are not entirely clear, for there are no clear datable markers in the last of the writing prophets. However, the situation as it is described in Malachi resembles closely the situation facing Ezra and Nehemiah. The temple rituals had lapsed into perfunctory acts (Mal. 1:13; 3:8-9, 13-14), the sins of paganism and Torah violation were rampant (Mal. 2:11; 3:5), and the priests were failing to properly instruct the people (Mal. 2:7-8). Most scholars put the oracles of Malachi at about the time of Nehemiah or perhaps slightly

earlier. It is hard to imagine that Malachi would have been anything but supportive of the Ezra and Nehemiah reforms.

In the end, the remnant who returned from Babylon did not see all the glorious promises of restoration that the earlier prophets had anticipated. To be sure, a remnant did indeed return to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem, but there was no new Davidic king, no new covenant, no regathering and reunion of the northern clans, no establishment of Mt. Zion as a center of worship for the nations, no outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and no return of glory to the new sanctuary. The cloud of glory had descended upon the tabernacle that Moses built (Ex. 40:34-35), and it filled the temple that Solomon built (1 Kg. 8:10-11; 2 Chr. 5:13-14), but nothing comparable happened in the temple that Zerubbabel built. The spiritual revolution of the people fell far short of what was expected.

The Exile is Not Complete

With the return of many Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem, the identifiable Jewish community now existed in three widely separated geographical areas, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Palestine. In the first place, it should be realized that the remnant of the northern kingdom deported by the Assyrians never had the opportunity to survive as an identifiable ethnic community nor were they ever afforded the privilege of returning home to Israel. These so-called “Lost Ten Tribes” were absorbed into the cultures of the areas to which they were deported.²⁰ Assyrian records show that they served as military personnel, officials, priests, skilled laborers, merchants and servants. Elements of their names survive in Assyrian records, especially in suffixes like “-Yau”,²¹ but these Israelites disappeared into Assyrian culture and ethnicity, and they were unable to retain their unique ethnic identity.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, some refugees fled to Egypt (Je. 43:4-7; 2 Kg. 25:26), and in fact, some Jews may already have been living in Egypt previously (Je. 44:1). Of course, many Jews had become acclimated to life in Babylon and remained there instead of joining those who returned

²⁰ Three Assyrian monarchs were responsible for the deportation of northern Israelites: Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC), who deported both trans-Jordan and Galilean Israelites to various places in the empire (cf. 1 Chr. 5:26; 2 Kg. 15:29; cf. 5:6); Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC), who captured Samaria and deported many of its citizens (2 Kg. 18:9-11); and Sargon II (722-705 BC), who claimed in an inscription excavated in Khorsabad to have taken as booty 27,290 Israelites, cf. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger, Jr., *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 2.296.

²¹ K. Lawson Younger, Jr., “Israelites in Exile,” *BAR* (Nov/Dec 2003), pp. 36-45, 65-66.

to Jerusalem. Books like Esther and Tobit presuppose a Jewish community that did not return to Palestine, and extensive historical evidence throughout the Persian and Hellenistic Periods demonstrate a strong Jewish presence in Mesopotamia. Hence, the “return” from exile, even at best, was never more than a partial return.

The fact that the Jewish community now was dispersed over a wide area of the ancient world gave rise to a special vocabulary. The term גלות (= exile, deportation) came to have the nuance of dispersion, and it was used of those Jews scattered among the nations even though some had returned home.²² The parallel Greek term διασπορά (= the dispersed) continues into the intertestamental period (2 Maccabees 1:27; Psalms of Solomon 8:28; Testament of Asher 7:3), and one finds it in the New Testament as well (Jn. 7:35; Ja. 1:1; 1 Pe. 1:1).

Even for those Jews who returned, however, the fact that still they were subjects of the Persian Empire meant that they were not free to rebuild a politically independent state, as once had been the case prior to the exile. The prayer of confession by the returned community perhaps expresses the situation most succinctly, when they said,

But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.

Ne. 9:36-37

So long as the Jewish community remained dispersed, and so long as those who returned to Jerusalem remained under the hegemony of pagan rulers, the exile could not be said to be completed.

This point was forcibly underscored by Daniel, who recast the 70 years of Jeremiah’s prediction and expanded it to 70 weeks of years, that is, 490 years. Daniel was quite aware of Jeremiah’s prediction (Da. 9:2), and in anticipation that he was nearing the end of the exile, Daniel began a period of fasting and prayer (Da. 9:3). The climax of his recorded intercession, “O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name,” without doubt was aimed at the restoration that had been promised by the earlier prophets (Da. 9:19). It was during this period of prayer that God communicated via Gabriel that the 70 years of Jeremiah’s prediction must be

²² J. Sanders, *IDB* (1962) 1.854.

understood in much larger dimensions. Instead of 70 straight calendar years, Daniel was told that “seventy ‘sevens’” had been decreed upon the remnant community and the city of Jerusalem (Da. 9:24). While interpreters have struggled to fully understand the scope of these “seventy ‘sevens’”, what is not in doubt is that the exile could no longer be calculated purely in terms of a simple 70 years. To be sure, there was indeed 70 years between the temple’s destruction and its rebuilding, but this fact alone did not reverse all the setbacks of the exile.

To this must be added the visions of the post-exilic prophets, who even though they clearly envisioned the glory of Yahweh returning to the second temple (Hg. 2:7b-9; Zec. 1:16-17; 2:5, 10-12; 8:3), nonetheless did not see this blessing in their lifetimes. By the time of Malachi, several decades later, the return of God’s glory still was envisioned as something in the future (Mal. 3:1). The apocalyptic visions of Zechariah sustained the expectation of a coming king and a restoration at some undetermined future point (Zec. 9:9-17). Indeed, these visions even anticipate a return of the Diaspora and the northern Israelites from exile.

Though I scatter them (i.e., the Ephraimites) among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return. I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them.

Zechariah 10:9-10

The house of David would figure significantly in this restoration (Zec. 12:7—13:1). In the end, the nations would come to worship in Jerusalem (Zec. 14:16). All these oracles suggest that even though a remnant had returned to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem, the exile was not yet over!

Intertestamental history bears out this basic thesis. Many Jews remained scattered through the ancient world, and the Jews in Palestine subsisted under the Persians and later under the Greeks. Indeed, it was under the Greeks that their most trying period emerged, especially due to concerted efforts to Hellenize them. Under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the pressure became so unbearable that a priestly family under the military leadership of Judas Maccabeus finally liberated the Palestinian Jews from their Syrian-Greek overlords. The second temple, which had been desecrated, was cleansed, and a new period of independence, confirmed by the Roman Senate, lasted from 134-63 BC.²³

²³ D. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), pp. 25-31.

The union of civil and religious leadership among the Hasmoneans from the time of Simon implied a religious ideal probably stemming from the Zechariah oracle that the two entities should be joined (Zec. 6:13). John Hyrcanus, Simon's son, continued this ideal, even extending his religious zeal both north and south. He seized Idumea (Edom) and forced its citizens to accept circumcision. He raided the Samaritan territory, razing the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim. Such efforts notwithstanding, the Hasmonean family hardly were the ones to usher in a golden age such as was envisioned by the prophets, and in fact, their administration was plagued by controversy, rivalry and dissent. In 63 BC, the Jews of Palestine again lost their independence, when Pompey conquered them, bringing them once more under the power of a pagan administration, this time Rome. It is not too surprising, then, to hear Luke's description of the old man Simeon in the temple, who in about 4 BC "was waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Lk. 2:25). It was precisely because the exile was not over that he so waited!

The yoke of heathenism that extended from the Persian to the Greek to the Roman periods gave rise to a vibrant Jewish nationalism that continued through the first and second Jewish revolts in the 60s and 130s AD. True, Babylon had fallen, but Israel did not become free. Much of the literature produced by the Apocalyptists²⁴ was rife with the imagery of liberation as was considerable literature produced by the Qumran community.²⁵ By the time of Jesus, the Greco-Roman setting had become a perpetual threat to the culture and faith of the Jews. There was, of course, incredible pressure to assimilate, and some, notably the Herodians in the gospels, seemed content to do so. Against this pressure, however, a number of patriotic uprisings—usually billed by the Romans as the foment of brigands—demonstrate that revolution remained in the air. It erupted in AD 66 as a full-scale revolt. Roman reprisals were severe, and they included the destruction of Jerusalem and the second temple. Yet another revolt under Simon ben Kosiba in AD 132-135 would be put down by the Roman Emperor Hadrian. The fact that Rabbi Akiba dubbed ben Kosiba as "Bar-Kochba" (= Son of the Star, cf. Nu. 24:17) clearly showed that the revolt was perceived to be the advance of the new age, the one heralded by the ancient prophets. Within rabbinic literature, the concept of the return from

²⁴ See especially, D. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), pp. 263-284.

²⁵ The War Scroll (1QM) describing an eschatological battle between the sons of light against the sons of darkness ends with divine intervention to save the true Israel.

exile “pertains primarily to the future event by which God will gather the dispersed of the nation Israel and return them to the promised land.”²⁶

It would remain for Jesus and the writers of the New Testament to offer an alternative pathway toward ending the exile, a pathway that was markedly spiritual, not political and certainly not militaristic. Still, it should be clearly understood that the gospel of the earliest Christians, all of whom were Jews, was profoundly informed by the common consent that the exile was not over. The ideals of covenant, land, kingship and temple—all of which figured so prominently in the prophets’ visions of restoration—were taken up by those who composed the New Testament, albeit in ways that were counter-cultural to the Jewish mainstream.

The Reign of God is at Hand

The defining symbols for Judah’s self-identity—kingship, temple, covenant and land—remained remarkably stable in spite of the exile and its aftermath. It is due almost entirely to the prophetic hope that these defining symbols had such longevity between the return from Babylon and the two Jewish revolts early in the Common Era. All of these symbols were threatened by pagan occupation, but all of them were sustained, in spite of foreign occupation, because God’s promises for the future, especially his messianic promises, were inextricably linked to these symbols.

The link between these promises and the messianic hope for the future is nowhere more clearly displayed than in the birth narratives of Jesus. In Matthew’s gospel, the notion of kingship is prominent in the genealogy, where Jesus’ pedigree is traced not only through Abraham (Mt. 1:1-2) but through David (Mt. 1:1, 6), Jehoiachin²⁷ and Zerubbabel (Mt. 1:11-13, 17; cf. Lk. 3:31, 27). Luke’s gospel, similarly, begins with the vision of Zechariah about the birth of John, and the explicit words of Gabriel link John’s birth with the post-exilic oracles of Malachi.

Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Luke 1:16-17

²⁶ J. Neusner and W. Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1996), p. 216.

²⁷

The Jeconiah of Mt. 1:11-12 is King Jehoiachin, the last rightful king of David’s line.

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers...

Malachi 4:5-6a

Gabriel's later words to Mary directly tied Jesus to David's royal family and the Davidic throne (Lk. 1:32-33). It can hardly be doubted that such a pronouncement was meaningful in light of the repeated prediction by the prophets that the royal family of David had a future in the restoration. Mary's child was the Promised One who would rule forever!

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.

Luke 1:32b-33

I will establish the throne of his [David's Son's] kingdom forever...your throne [David's] will be established forever.

2 Samuel 7:13b, 16b

This is what Yahweh says: "David will never fail to have a man sit on the throne of the house of Israel..."

Jeremiah 33:17

My servant David will be king over them... David my servant will be their prince forever.

Ezekiel 37:24-25

The Song of Zechariah at the birth of John is even more emphatic. God had "raised up a horn of salvation...in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago)" (Lk. 1:16-70). In the sequence of nativity events, God was fulfilling his covenant oath to Abraham (Lk. 1:72-73). Salvation from exile seems the most appropriate way to understand the exultation of Zechariah!

Praise be the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and redeemed his people...[to give us] salvation from our enemies and the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies...

Luke 1:68, 72-74

Virtually everywhere in the teachings of Jesus the affirmation looms large that his advent was the end of the exile. The reign of God was at hand (Mt. 3:1-2; Mk. 1:14-15)! The core of Jesus' teaching was about the kingdom of God (= the reign of God), the time when Yahweh would be king over all the earth. N. T. Wright is exactly on target when he says that "Jesus applied to himself the three central aspects of his own prophetic kingdom-announcement: the return from exile, the defeat of evil, and the return of YHWH to Zion."²⁸ All the things that the prophets indicated would be central to the restoration are explicitly connected with Jesus' messiahship. These include not only his own kingship as the "son of David" (Mt. 21:9; 22:42-45), but also the return of the glory that had abandoned the temple prior to its destruction (Jn. 1:14; 4:21-24), the outpouring of the Spirit upon God's people (Lk. 3:16; Ac. 1:4-5), the regathering of God's scattered children (Jn. 11:51-52), the elevation of Mt. Zion as a place of worship for the nations (Mk. 11:17; Jn. 4:21-24), and the establishment of the new covenant (Mt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20). To be sure, these categories in the gospels are reinterpreted along lines that were not entirely conventional in the currents of first century Judaism. Nonetheless, they clearly are intended to say that the restoration from exile was to be realized in Jesus, the Messiah. If the Servant of Yahweh, the one destined to "bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth", was coming to be the bearer of the Spirit (Is. 42:1; 62:1-2), Jesus was that Servant (Lk. 4:16-21)!

Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

Luke 4:21b

In a special sense, the writers of the gospels saw the story of Israel was recapitulated in the life of Jesus, for Jesus was the embodiment of all that Israel was intended to be as the Servant of the Lord. Again and again, the gospels assert that the story of Israel is "fulfilled" in the story of Jesus. Like ancient Israel, Jesus was called out of Egypt (Mt. 2:14-15; cf. Ho. 11:1). He passed through the waters and was tempted in the desert (Mt. 3:16—4:2). The forty days of temptation correspond to the forty years of Israel's sojourn, and it is far from accidental that the passages Jesus quoted to the tempter were drawn from the desert sojourn narratives (cf. Dt. 8:3; 6:13). Jesus did not hesitate to apply the scriptures about the anointing of God's Servant directly to himself (Lk. 4:16-21; cf. Is. 61:1-2; 42:1). Jesus was the eschatological prophet like Moses, mighty in word and deed (Jn. 6:14; cf. Dt. 18:18; Ac. 3:22; 7:37). His parables were the recapitulation of

²⁸ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), p. 477.

the oracles of Isaiah to a hardened and unreceptive people (Mt. 13:13-15; cf. Is. 6:9-10). He was the shepherd of Israel, struck down so that the flock was scattered (Mt. 26:31; cf. Zec. 13:7). He was betrayed by Israel's leaders (Mt. 26:55-56; Mk. 14:49), just as the ancient people of Israel were led astray by false kings, prophets and priests. The purchase of a field with Judas' blood money was testimony to Jeremiah's prediction that "houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land" (Mt. 27:8-10; cf. Je. 32:15; Zec. 11:12-13). Despised and rejected, he was the Servant of the Lord given over to vicarious death for the sins of others (Lk. 22:37; Is. 52:13—53:12). In his abandonment on the cross, he suffered the agony of exile (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34; cf. Ps. 22:1). The true exodus from exile was Jesus' triumph over death as prefigured in the transfiguration (Lk. 9:29-31).²⁹ His resurrection on Easter was the epitome of vindication and restoration (Is. 26:19; Eze. 37:1-14). It was because the story of Israel was recapitulated and fulfilled in the story of Jesus that Christ could explain to his disciples, beginning with Moses and the prophets, how all that was said in all the Scriptures was really about him (Lk. 24:27)! Exile and restoration have their highest spiritual meaning in Jesus himself, for he was the embodiment of the true Israel (Lk. 24:45-46). On this basis the apostolic consensus stands that in Jesus the "last days" had begun (He. 1:2; 1 Pe. 1:20; 1 Co. 7:31b; Ac. 2:17; 1 Co. 10:11; He. 9:26)!

Expanding the Ancient Definitions

If Jesus was the coming Davidic king, and if his messiahship was to be understood in spiritual, not political, terms, then it follows that the concepts of temple, land and any number of other related categories also must be elevated to a higher and broader level than what was popularly expected by the Jews in the late second temple period. In the New Testament, this expansion of the ancient definitions is exactly what is done. The writers of the New Testament, following the lead of Jesus himself, offered an alternative to what became normative Judaism after the two Jewish revolts. After the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the collapse of the Bar-Kokhba revolt in the 130s, the Judaism that emerged was a Judaism without a temple, without a land, and without Jewish sovereignty. In rabbinic religion, the institutions of temple and land were redefined and

²⁹ The NIV's translation "departure" does not capture the full sense of Lk. 9:31. The Greek word is ἔξοδος (= exodus), which while metaphorically referring to Jesus' death and resurrection, prophetically suggests the second exodus from exile.

redirected. Daily prayer came to be seen as a replacement for sacrifice.³⁰ The synagogue succeeded the temple. The rabbis inherited the authority of the priests. The family table replaced the altar so that the home acquired the centrality once accorded the temple. The day-to-day and annual rhythm of festival celebration in the home became the focus of religion without a temple. The land no longer was available, but the Jewish community, wherever it existed, acquired a cosmic significance that succeeded the land.³¹

Christianity, as based on the teachings of Jesus, took a decidedly different turn. Rather than formulating a redefinition of the temple after it no longer existed, Christians began redefining the temple *while it still stood*, for they understood from the prediction of Jesus that the temple soon would be destroyed (Mt. 24:1-2; Mk. 13:1-2; Lk. 21:5-6). Very early, Jesus had hinted at the demise of the temple (Jn. 4:21-24), and Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin was built upon this alternative (Ac. 6:13-14; 7:44-50). Jesus was himself the cornerstone of the true temple, the apostles and prophets were the foundation, and the whole community of disciples was a union of living stones joined together to create a living, breathing temple (Ep. 2:20; 1 Pe. 2:4-7). It was not in the ancient Holiest of Holies on Mt. Zion that God now dwelled, but in the Christian community of faith, baptized by the messianic gift of the Spirit (Ep. 2:22b; 1 Co. 3:16-17; 2 Co. 6:16; cf. 1 Co. 6:19-20; Rom. 8:9-11; 2 Ti. 1:14; 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:15). Jesus had said that the time had now come when true worship would not be in the rituals conducted on Mt. Zion, but rather, "in Spirit and truth" (Jn. 4:21-24). In this spiritual worship, the priesthood consisted not of an elite group chosen by pedigree from Levi's clan or Aaron's family, but rather, the whole community who in spiritual worship offered up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ both in acts of worship and good deeds (1 Pe. 2:5; He. 13:15-16; Ro. 12:1-2; 15:16; Phil. 2:17; 4:18; 2 Ti. 4:6; Rv. 5:10). Atonement for sin, which once had been associated with the daily sacrifice and the annual observance of Yom Kippur, now had been accomplished once and for all in the sacrificial death of Jesus (He. 2:17; 9:24-28; 10:1-2, 10; 1 Pe. 3:18; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10; Ro. 3:25).

The reorientation of such basic structures in the messiahship of Jesus meant that any number of other categories from the ancient prophets were open to interpretation along the same kind of lines. Already, Jesus had made

³⁰ Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Eleazar both said, "So long as the Temple stood, the altar made atonement for Israel. Now a man's table makes atonement for him," *Barakot* [Babylonian Talmud], 55a.

³¹ Phrases in the Hebrew Bible like "courts of the Lord", "the beauty of the Lord", "the tent of the Lord" and the "gate of the Lord" were understood as parabolic of the life to come after the travails of the present life, cf. J. Levenson, *Sinai & Zion* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), p. 182.

clear that true kingship in the family of David must be understood in terms much broader than the politics of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. In fact, Paul could summarize the gospel in the most succinct possible way, when he said, “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel...” (2 Ti. 2:8; cf. Ro. 1:3-4; Rv. 5:5; 22:16). However, the exile itself also was broadened beyond mere estrangement from the land to the general human condition as estranged from God (Col. 1:21; Ep. 2:19). Caiaphas, in a moment of authentic prophetic word, had offered one of the first glimpses into the truth that the exile must be understood in this wider way. Just before the passion of Jesus, he predicted that Jesus would die in behalf of the Jewish nation “and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one” (Jn. 11:52). Here, John understands the “scattered children of God” to mean not merely the remnant Diaspora of Israel and Judah, but the believing remnant of all who would come to faith in Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:12-13). Jesus had said that as the Good Shepherd he had “other sheep that are not of this fold,” and he would bring them together so that there would be one flock under one shepherd (Jn. 10:16; cf. 12:32; cf. Eze. 34:11-16, 23-24). Hence, the definition of the people of God could not be restricted to those of Jewish pedigree; rather, God’s people consisted of all who had faith in Jesus Christ, whatever their ethnic descent (Ga. 3:26-29; Col. 3:11). Altogether, they constitute “God’s chosen people” (Col. 3:12; Ep. 1:11; 1 Th. 1:4-5; Tit. 1:1; 1 Pe. 1:1-2; 2:9; 5:13; 2 Jn. 1, 13; Rv. 17:14). This company of chosen people *are* the remnant, or more precisely, the “remnant chosen by grace” (Ro. 11:5). This remnant of faith is not to be reckoned by the old definitions, for the “Israel [that] sought [it] so earnestly did not obtain [it], but the elect did” (Ro. 11:7a)! Rather, “only a remnant will be saved”, and that remnant includes even Gentiles who originally did not pursue righteousness by the ancient Torah (Ro. 9:27-33).

It may strike the modern reader as unusual, but the clans of the northern nation who were exiled to Assyria and who for all practical purposes disappeared also were promised a surviving remnant. Those dispersed to the point of losing their ethnic identity were promised regathering (cf. Ho. 3:4-5; Am. 9:14-15; Eze. 37:15-23). Out of this promise, St. Paul takes the very language that once had been directed to the northern clans and interprets it to refer to the Gentile nations (Ro. 9:24-26; cf. Ho. 2:23; 1:10). He seems to do so precisely because those northern Israelite clans were absorbed into the Assyrian culture and ceased to retain their ethnic distinctiveness. Their integration into the nations becomes the ground out of which the nations themselves can be included in the remnant! James

does almost exactly the same thing in the Jerusalem church when summing up the circumcision debate. Amos' promise that God would restore David's family so that "the remnant of men may seek the Lord" (Am. 9:11-12, LXX)³² he interprets as clear justification for the gentile mission (Ac. 15:13-19). In the end, then, the Diaspora comes to refer to Christians, not merely Jews, scattered over the Roman world, regardless of ethnic identity. Peter can refer to the community of [largely Gentile] Christians as "chosen sojourners of the Diaspora" (1 Pe. 1:1).

Hence, the definition of the people of God, the chosen people, the seed of Abraham and Israel itself is broadened to include all those who come to faith in Jesus Christ. Pedigree, as John the Baptist so poignantly put it, is no longer an adequate definition (Mt. 3:9; Lk. 3:8). Rather, the children of the promise are those who are counted for Abraham's seed (Ro. 9:8). On the one hand, "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Ro. 9:6b-7a). On the other, only the people of faith can be counted as true Jews (Ro. 2:28-29). Hence, God's promise to Abraham is guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring who come to faith, for in this sense, Abraham is the father of many nations (Ro. 4:16-17, 22-24). All Israel will be saved (Ro. 11:26), not just those who have bloodlines traced back to Abraham. Whether Jewish or non-Jewish, if one belongs to Christ, *then he is Abraham's seed and an heir of God's promise to Abraham* (Ga. 3:29). The point, of course, is not that ancient Israel is dispossessed of God's promise, but rather, the definition of Israel and Abraham's seed has been expanded to include all those who believe, not merely those who are Jewish. This fundamental perspective governs the way writers of the New Testament transfer Jewish vocabulary to Christians in general and in some cases reverse Jewish vocabulary from its original reference.

The Twelve Tribes and the Diaspora (Jn. 11:52; Ja. 1:1; 1 Pe. 1:2)

The Elect (1 Pe. 1:1; 2:9)

Alien Sojourners (1 Pe. 1:1; 2:11)

Israel (Ga. 6:16; Ro. 11:26)

The Jews (Rv. 2:9; 3:9)

The Holy Nation (1 Pe. 2:9)

Zion's Temple (Ep. 2:20-22; 1 Co. 3:16-17; 2 Co. 6:16; 1 Pe. 2:4-7; Rv. 3:12; 7:15; He. 12:22-23; Rv. 3:12)

³² James obviously is relying on the LXX here. The MT of Amos 9:12 reads, "So that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all nations that bear my name," but the LXX reads, "...that the remnant of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek me". The linguistic issue concerns the pointing of the Hebrew trilateral consonantal root אָדָם. In the MT, it is pointed so that it reads "Edom" (אֱדוֹם), while the LXX has taken it to read "Adam" (אָדָם), i.e., "humanity".

Daily sacrifice (1 Pe. 2:5; He. 13:15-16; Ro. 12:1-2; 15:16; Phil. 2:17; 4:18;
2 Ti. 4:6)

Incense and altar (Rv. 6:9; 8:3-4)

Atonement (He. 2:17; 9:24-28; 10:1-2, 10; 1 Pe. 3:18; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10; Ro. 3:25)

Levitical priesthood (1 Pe. 2:5, 9; Rv. 1:6; 5:10)

Menorah (Rv. 1:20)

Synagogue (Ja. 2:2)

Passover Lamb (Rv. 5:6)

Festival of Unleavened Bread (1 Co. 5:7-8)

Sabbath rest (He. 4:1-11)

Old Jerusalem (Rv. 11:8)

New Jerusalem (3:12; 11:12-13; 21:2, 10)

If the new covenant is in the blood of Jesus, then it follows that Christians are not veiled from this new vision (2 Co. 3:12-18). What is “old”, by contrast, is obsolete and fading (He. 8:13).

It remains, then, to address the ancient promises about the land. If the story of Israel is fundamentally a story of moving in and out of land, then how are the promises about land oriented to the new covenant and the messiahship of Jesus? Once more, Jesus’ discourse about the temple hints at a future that does not depend upon the land in the old way. Just as he predicted the destruction of the temple, he also predicted that the desolation of the temple would result in flight from the land (Mk. 13:14-19; Mt. 24:15-16; Lk. 21:20-24). He directed his disciples, not toward a return to Jerusalem, but toward his coming at the end of the age (Mk. 13:26-27; Mt. 24:30-31 Lk. 21:27-28). This “gathering” of God’s elect is no more than what was predicted in Isaiah (cf. 43:5-7). Jesus final words to the disciples before his ascension, who still were concerned about the restoration of the ancient kingdom in its ancient land, reshaped the future as centrifugal, not centripetal (Ac. 1:6-8). The Book of Acts is the story of that reshaping as it played itself out in history, moving from Jerusalem and the land of Palestine to the nations of the Mediterranean world.

It follows, then, that if God does not live in temples made with human hands, he is tethered neither to the temple in Jerusalem nor to Palestine itself (Ac. 7:48-50). To this, the writer in Hebrews testifies when he writes that even in the land of promise Abraham, the father of the faithful, sojourned as “a stranger in a foreign country” (He. 11:9). Abraham’s goal, even though he was given a promise about the land, looked for something greater and more fundamental—a “city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (He. 11:10). Similarly, the Israel of faith who lived in the land confessed themselves to be “aliens and strangers on earth”, for they were “looking for

a country of their own”, a “heavenly country” where “God has prepared a city for them” (He. 11:13-16). The entire thrust of this sort of language reaches beyond the land of Palestine toward a heavenly promise. To come to Christ was to come to “Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem” (He. 12:22). Indeed, to look back merely to the old understanding of things was tantamount to “shrinking back” from “better and lasting possessions” (He. 10:34b-39). It should hardly be surprising, then, to hear Peter describing the true inheritance of God’s people as something that can “never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you” (1 Pe. 1:4). This inheritance that does not deteriorate could hardly be the ancient land of Israel, which was spoiled time and again by pagan oppressors! Rather, it is a new heaven and a new earth (Rv. 21:1-2). The ancient covenant formulary for restoration, “They will be their people and I will be their God” (Je. 32:38; cf. Is. 51:16a; Je. 24:7; 31:1, 33; Eze. 11:20; 14:11; 37:23, 27; Zec. 8:8), finds its ultimate meaning in heaven (Rv. 21:3-4). The final book in the New Testament puts the exclamation point beside this concept when it concludes that the “old Jerusalem” is now “Sodom and Egypt” (Rv. 11:8); the object of hope for God’s people is the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven itself (Rv. 3:12; 21:2, 10). When it does, the exile—the estrangement from our true home, an estrangement that began east of Eden—will be over!