

INTRODUCTION

The struggle between those taken to Babylonia and those left behind is a well-known and widely discussed feature of the exilic and early post-exilic periods. These communities' battles for political legitimacy, theological authority, and the apportionment of blame form the drumbeat of the literature from this period. Surprisingly, scholars have failed to notice that this struggle is frequently articulated in terms of competing Israelite and Judahite identities. Drawing on a deep reservoir of tradition, those deported in 597 BCE laid an absolute claim on Israel's name and status with YHWH . Those left behind coalesced around Judah, relying on the land to draw the kingdom's diverse remaining inhabitants together.

Having failed to recognise the identity politics at stake in this nomenclature, scholars have overlooked a major aspect of these communities' conflicts and, in the process, obscured the interpretation of a number of key texts in the literature responding to the events of this era. This book is designed to rectify these oversights.

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The presentation proceeds in three parts.

Part I demonstrates the importance of the Israel and Judah nomenclature for this period, analysing passages whose meaning has posed a significant problem for interpreters and demonstrating the interpretive effectiveness of an approach that associates 'Israel' with those taken to Babylonia in 597 BCE and 'Judah' with those left behind in the homeland. These passages include the allegory of YHWH 's sister-wives in Jeremiah 3, the sign-act of the two sticks in Ezekiel 37, and the curious complaints about circumcision in Jeremiah 9, among others. Read in terms of debates between Israelite deportees and Judahites in the homeland, each of these passages comes quickly into focus.

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Thus, the allegory of the two sister-wives in Jeremiah 3, for example, transforms from a perplexing declaration of divine preference for the old northern kingdom into a delightfully creative instalment in the well-known dispute between those deported to Babylonia and those left in the land. Recognising that the Israelite community in Babylonia was composed primarily of Jerusalemite elites, and thus excluded most of the Judahite kingdom's population, resolves an otherwise puzzling differentiation between Judah and Israel in Jeremiah 9. Heated contention between the supporters of Jehoiachin in Babylonia and the supporters of Zedekiah in the homeland clarifies the rhetoric of the sign-act in Ezekiel 37, as well as the heavy interventions to which the passage was later subjected. Several other passages give way under similar scrutiny.

Details in a number of these passages are illuminated by recent social-scientific analyses of involuntary migration. Recognising that encroachment on abandoned property is typical in instances of partial displacements, for example, clarifies the dispute over Israel's heritage in Jeremiah 12. The sociological implications of successive waves of deportations explain a number of oddities in Ezekiel's vision of restoration (Ezekiel 47–48), including the way that these chapters temper the book's preference for the 597 BCE exiles enough to include certain other groups under the Israelite umbrella.

The use of social-scientific research on involuntary migration, as a lens through which the concerns of the biblical literature of this period may be clarified, is a major feature of the volume. Mass displacements were a major and recurring element of sixth-century experience, and the biblical literature responding to the events of this period is richly informed by this research. This branch of the social sciences has, in the last several years, reached a critical mass that enables its effective comparative use. Sociological and psychological investigations into the causes and consequences of trauma also form an important part of the analysis, especially where they intersect with work done on the social, cultural, and psychological effects of migration. These efforts further resonate with postcolonial literature and scholarship, especially regarding the impact of colonial and imperial power on subject populations. The exertions of the Babylonian empire were a pervasive feature of sixth century life, with profound consequences for those deported to Babylonia as well as those who remained in Judah. Postcolonial studies therefore also feature prominently, especially in Part III.

Parts II and III delve more deeply into the developments in Israelite and Judahite identity foreshadowed by Part I. 'Israel in Jerusalem' (Part II, Chapter 2) briefly confirms the existence of Israelite identity in Jerusalem prior to the deportation of its elites in 597 BCE. Although the earlier history of Israelite identity would be fruitfully reconsidered in light of the arguments put forth here, the interests of the present work prompt a focus on the turn of the sixth century. The poetry of Jeremiah addresses an Israelite community in Jerusalem in the late seventh and early sixth centuries; it depicts a community centred on the capital city, comprised largely of elites, and conceived in ethnic terms. This latter aspect is signalled by references to shared cultural and religious traditions, to a shared genetic heritage among Israelites, and to a shared narrative of Israel's origins in an exodus from Egypt. Although cultural, genetic, and historical realities were undoubtedly more complex in practice, community homogeneity in these key respects is assumed and idealised.

Two chapters examine the changes that arise from the deportation of these Israelites to Babylonia. 'Israel in Rural Babylonia' (Part II, Chapter 3) focuses on Israelites relocated to Tel Abib, bringing Ezekiel into conversation with trauma studies and with social-scientific research on involuntary migration, especially migration to similarly rural, isolated locations. Through this experience of displacement Israel retains its ethnic character, as well as its links to Jerusalem and its claims on the city's power structures. The trauma of forced migration, however, also prompts some changes in emphasis. Prominent among these are a recurring interest in the explanatory power of Israel's past together with an unremitting obsession with the significance of the homeland. In the former case, Ezekiel's pervasive historicising seeks to explain the deportees' circumstances in Babylonia as YHWH's punishment for past actions. Identifying the cause of the disaster in the Israelites' behaviour seeks to change that behaviour and thereby to circumvent further catastrophe. This kind of meaning-making is typical of involuntary migrants.

The experience of displacement is also behind Ezekiel's acute attention to the homeland and its possession. Throughout the book, references to the 'homeland of Israel' work to counteract the physical instability resulting from displacement anchoring the community and its cultural heritage in the dirt from which the people came and to which they continue to lay claim. Such concerns are highly

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typical of migrant communities, especially those that have been forcibly displaced to mono-ethnic, isolated camps like the one at Chebar. Indeed, many of Ezekiel's apparent oddities, including its anxious attention to Israel's history, its vociferous claim on the homeland, and its fierce defensiveness concerning Israelite culture, are reactions to displacement characteristic of rural migrant resettlements.

Migrants displaced to urban, cosmopolitan contexts, by contrast, tend to be more pragmatic, approaching ethnic identity with a more flexible attitude to inherited cultural traditions and less of an interest in return to the homeland. 'Israel in Urban Babylon' (Part II, Chapter 4) explores possible biblical reflections of this type of migrant experience, linking the ancestral imagery invoked by Jeremiah 30–31 [37–38], Ezekiel 47–48, and Isaiah 40–55 to the greater openness typical of displaced persons resettled in cosmopolitan environments.¹ By linking this imagery to material concerned with Jehoiachin specifically, this chapter is able to suggest that these passages provide a glimpse of the experience of deportees resettled with the deposed king in the Babylonian capital.

Part III (Chapter 5, 'Judah under Babylonian Rule') returns to the Levantine homeland. This chapter argues that – beginning in 597 BCE and accelerating thereafter – the kingdom's remaining population came together around a shared Judahite identity, emphasising their common origins in the land of Judah and opposition to the Babylonian empire. Jeremiah's account of the fall of Jerusalem and the imposition of direct imperial rule identifies 586 BCE as an especially critical moment in the development of this collective Judahite identity. There are a few hints that suggest a basis in older

¹ Square brackets indicate LXX enumeration, where it differs from MT. LXX enumeration follows that of the Göttingen edition, also used by A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright, eds, *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) (NETS). References occurring only in brackets indicate that the word, phrase, or idea under discussion is present only in LXX. Items present only in MT are marked '[MT only]', excepting parts of Jeremiah where the absence of a corresponding LXX reference serves this purpose (e.g., MT Jer 25:14–51:64). The correlation of MT and LXX Jeremiah may be found in C. L. Crouch, *An Introduction to the Study of Jeremiah*, T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 143–146. The prioritisation of MT numeration does not assume that MT is historically prior to LXX, but rather that many readers will have MT (or a translation based on MT) more readily to hand. The following likewise refers to the 'Hebrew Bible', recognising that this terminology is particularly inconvenient vis-à-vis the Jeremiah traditions. Passages in which the usual English enumeration differs from MT are marked by '[ET]'.

traditions, but Judah comes into the literary limelight only in connection with the events of this period.

This sudden appearance of Judahite identity may be traced to several factors, including a preference among the literate pre-exilic elite to identify as Israelites. The deportation of most of this elite, first in 597 BCE and again in 586 BCE, altered the demographic make-up of the kingdom and changed the balance of power among those who remained. The disruptiveness of these changes was further compounded by repeated displacements, as refugees fled from their towns and villages into and out of Jerusalem, sought safety in the Transjordan, or tried to return home after fighting had stopped. The Babylonians also relocated the capital and its personnel to Mizpah; from there, a significant group eventually fled to Egypt. This constant upheaval wreaked havoc on existing social networks, leaving in their stead an ad hoc community with little in common beyond birth in the land of Judah and a common enemy in the Babylonian empire. The growing significance of Judahite identity among the remaining population is accordingly interpreted with one eye on the effects of repeated displacement on social networks and identities, and one eye on the consequences of imperial power on identity concerns in colonised communities.

The prophetic literature that arises from and responds to the events of the early sixth century is a poignant witness to the effects of migration, trauma, and empire on the people who called Jerusalem and Judah home. Taken together, the texts of this period offer important evidence for a more nuanced, more accurate understanding of a critical period in the history and relationship of Israel and Judah.