

## The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism

In this book, Jason A. Staples proposes a new paradigm for how the biblical concept of Israel developed in Early Judaism and how that concept impacted Jewish apocalyptic hopes for restoration after the Babylonian Exile. Challenging conventional assumptions about Israelite identity in antiquity, his argument is based on a close analysis of a vast corpus of biblical and other early Jewish literature and material evidence. Staples demonstrates that continued hopes for Israel's restoration in the context of diaspora and imperial domination remained central to Jewish conceptions of Israelite identity throughout the final centuries before Christianity and even into the early part of the Common Era. He also shows that Israelite identity was more diverse in antiquity than is typically appreciated in modern scholarship. His book lays the groundwork for a better understanding of the so-called "parting of the ways" between Judaism and Christianity and how earliest Christianity itself grew out of hopes for Israel's restoration.

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# The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism

A New Theory of People, Exile, and Israelite Identity

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> To my parents, Mark and Brenda מתהלך בתמו צדיק אשרי בניו אחריו The righteous walk in integrity How blessed is the son who follows them!

> > (Prov 20:7)



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#### Preface

The present work is the product of nearly two decades of thought and research and has changed in scope and detail over that time period. I first started thinking seriously about the concept of Israel and its connection to restoration eschatology in William L. Lyons' "Hebrew Bible Prophets" course at Florida State University in the spring of 2003. That was a unique class, with three students proceeding to PhD programs in the field shortly thereafter, and we drank deeply of the prophets all semester. My term paper focused on the new covenant passage in Jeremiah 31:31–34 (LXX 38:31–34), which quickly raised the problem of how to understand "Israel," since that prophecy (along with several others in Jeremiah) promises the restoration and reunification of "the house of Israel and the house of Judah," language that specifically distinguishes the southern kingdom from the northern kingdom, the latter of which had not existed for over a century by the time Jeremiah began to prophesy.

That this prophecy would specifically include the restoration of an Israel that no longer existed in Jeremiah's own day was striking, if for no other reason than that the language of the passage presumes that Judah still lacked an exclusive claim to the Israelite covenant. But what struck me most of all was how familiar I already was with the new covenant prophecy and many other prophetic passages about the restoration of "Israel" from the New Testament, where their application seemed quite different from what I was seeing in their original literary contexts. This led to a much more extensive investigation of the concept of Israel and its variegated development after the Babylonian Exile. The present work is the result of that investigation.



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The more I studied, the more the consequences of the fragmentation and siloing of many of the subfields covered in this study became evident. I repeatedly found studies of individual texts or corpora that arrived at similar conclusions to those on other texts or corpora, each study presenting its case as an outlier or exception, seemingly unaware of similar work being done in a related subfield. The number of exceptions soon grew to the point that it became apparent that several foundational assumptions about the concept of Israel in the wider field of Second Temple studies needed to be reexamined. This study aims to do just that, taking a synthetic approach reaching across multiple subfields to reassess those foundations and thus to see important aspects of each subfield more clearly.

In the process, the reader may be confronted at times with a bit of a forest and trees problem, as the larger arguments of this book (the forest) require detailed examinations of specific trees, though obviously with less depth than would be afforded by a specific study of any individual tree. In some respects, this book really involves two forests - the concept of Israel and the relationship of that concept to restoration eschatology. Since any attempt to provide a coherent account of the concept of Israel must also address the overlapping terms "Jew" (Ioudaios/Yehudi), and "Hebrew" (Hebraios), the first part of the book investigates the relationship of these terms to one another, putting forward a new paradigm for these terms and their respective domains in the Second Temple period. Part II focuses primarily on the narrative construction of the concept of Israel among Iews and others in the Second Temple period and how biblical eschatological perspectives are related to that concept, further reinforcing the model offered in Part I. The third part of the book builds on and tests the theses of the first two parts across a broad corpus of early Jewish literature, paying particular attention to the correlation between eschatological perspectives within specific texts and how Israel is portrayed (or not) in these texts. The Introduction and Chapters 1, 2, and 6 take a broader view in order to critique important assumptions typically embedded in studies of the specific bodies of evidence covered in the book. Otherwise, each chapter deals with a specific literary corpus - biblical narratives of Israel and Judah, the Latter Prophets, Ezra-Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Josephus, Philo of Alexandria, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other Second Temple literature - arguing that each participates in the larger discourse about Israel by constructing the concept of Israel (and, by extension, the other related terms) in a specific way.



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Each of these individual pieces is important for the larger argument of this book, though no single chapter or specific argument is itself determinative. As such, I have tried to make each individual unit worthy of close study in itself, though each chapter ultimately serves as evidence for the big-picture theses about the concept of Israel and restoration eschatology in Second Temple Judaism. The reader who is most interested in the larger theses of the book will therefore have to work through hundreds of pages of detailed discussions of specific cases, since the larger paradigm I am proposing rests on the cumulative persuasiveness of the various pieces of the puzzle and how they fit together. On the other hand, those more interested in my treatment of a specific text or corpus will need to consider the relationship of those specific parts to the comprehensive aims of the book as a whole. <sup>I</sup>

Put simply, this book has two specific aims. The first is to demonstrate the insufficiency of the current paradigms for understanding the concept of "Israel" and its relationship to the related categories and concepts of "Jews" (that is, *Ioudaioi* or *Yehudim*) and "Hebrews" presumed in most studies of early Judaism and early Christianity, offering a new paradigm for understanding these concepts and their relationships throughout the Second Temple period. Secondly, this book argues for a particular relationship between "Israel" language – and the concept of Israel more broadly – and eschatological expectations that appear across a broad range of early Jewish literature. Along the way, there will be a number of subtheses with respect to individual texts or corpora, but ultimately all of these serve to support the ultimate aim of the project: the establishment of a new perspective on Israel as a concept in the Second Temple period.

It should also be noted that since this book covers such a broad corpus of material and challenges several foundational assumptions across several generations of scholarship in multiple subfields, each of which involves its own (often extensive) specialized bibliography, I found it necessary to compress or omit summaries or discussions of prior secondary scholarship for the sake of brevity and readability. I have therefore limited the engagement with prior scholarly work to what seemed necessary to the argument as a whole. At an editorial level, I have translated all substantive foreign-language quotes into English. For longer block quotes, I have provided the original language quotations in corresponding footnotes when that seemed warranted. I have translated the ancient

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Cf. the similar caveats in E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), xii.



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source material into English, though in some instances I have also included specific phrases from the original languages to draw the reader's attention to particular verbal elements. All translations of ancient materials are my own except where noted. I have also chosen to transliterate frequently used terms (e.g., *Ioudaios*, *Yehudi*, *apoikia*) in the body text to make the book more easily accessible to those readers lacking facility in ancient languages. (Note: italics will mark when *diaspora* is a transliteration of the Greek noun rather than the English term.) Transliterations are based on the standards set forth in the second edition of the *SBL Handbook of Style*. All textual searches were conducted using the relevant modules of *Accordance Bible Software* 13 (2019) and verified by hand except where otherwise noted.

This book grew out of the first portion of my PhD dissertation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where I was supported by a Jacob K. Javits Fellowship and a Thomas S. and Helen Borda Royster Dissertation Fellowship, the latter in conjunction with the Royster Society of Fellows. Most of this project was written while in visiting faculty positions in the Department of Religious Studies at Wake Forest, the Department of Sociology and Divinity School at Duke, and the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at NC State, and I am grateful to my colleagues in those departments for their support.

As grateful as I am to have had institutional support, I am far more grateful to those scholars who have tolerated my obsession with this subject and have generously read and critiqued early versions of this research and/or discussed my theories for so many years. I am especially indebted to my Doktorvater, Bart Ehrman, without whose support this project would never have been completed. His incisive mind, passion for clear writing and communication, and especially his generosity and good humor have exemplified what it means to be an advisor, educator, and scholar. Anathea Portier-Young provided exceptionally detailed comments and corrections of an earlier version of this work, many of which rescued me from embarrassing gaffes and for which I am extremely grateful. David Lambert, Zlatko Pleše, Ross Wagner, and Jodi Magness read and critiqued earlier stages of this work and were valuable conversation partners throughout the process. Paula Fredriksen also provided helpful comments on early material, and her generosity and encouragement have meant a great deal. Bill Lyons not only was important in the nascent stages of the project but also has continued to provide encouragement and helpful feedback for nearly two decades. I am also deeply grateful to David Levenson for his tireless training and mentorship while



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I was at Florida State, without which I would have been unlikely to pursue this path, and for his continued friendship and assistance on numerous occasions, particularly his suggestions in the Josephus material. I am also indebted to Eibert Tigchelaar and Matthew Goff, each of whom provided early guidance on the Dead Sea Scrolls and apocalyptic works. In addition, James Crenshaw, Joel Marcus, Richard Hays, Shannon Burkes, Randall Styers, Nicole Kelly, John Marincola, and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin were all generous teachers who influenced this project either directly or indirectly.

Others have been valuable conversation partners at various stages of what must have seemed like an unending project. Among these, I am especially indebted to Sonya Cronin, Stephen Carlson, Benjamin L. White, Jason Combs, T. J. Lang, Nathan Eubank, Mark Goodacre, Matthew Gray, Scott Hahn, Michael Barber, Mark Nanos, Douglas Campbell, Tim Cupery, Lauren Leve, Andrew Aghapour, Leif Tornquist, Fr. Gregory (Joshua) Edwards, and Jim Hayes. Early versions of what became portions of the book were delivered as conference papers at various sections of the AAR/SBL Annual Meeting and SECSOR over the past fifteen years; I am grateful for the incisive questions and comments of too many to list from those meetings. Two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press truly understood the project and provided helpful critiques that improved the final product. I am also grateful for the patience and steady guidance of Beatrice Rehl, Eilidh Burrett, and the full Cambridge University Press team. The many deficiencies that remain in this work are of course my own.

This book would never have been completed without the support and many sacrifices of my family. The constant encouragement and support of my sister and brother-in-law, Stephanie and Erik Rostad, have truly strengthened weak hands and helped to steady feeble knees. Thanks also to Alan, Debbie, Natalie, Holly, Dillon, and Carly Brown for welcoming me into their family and for all their encouragement through this project. Words cannot express my debt of gratitude to Kari, my γνήσιος σύζυγος, whose love and devotion have been a constant source of strength as we have together endured flood, fire, multiple surgeries, graduate school, medical school, and parenthood. Kari has been patient beyond measure when my work has been all-consuming, has shown unusual interest in my scholarly obsessions, and has selflessly lifted me up when my spirits have been low.

Finally, this book is dedicated to my parents, Mark and Brenda Staples, who were my first Bible teachers and trained me to question



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everything, no matter how firmly established or widely believed, turning over every stone in the quest for truth. My mother taught me to read at an early age and instilled in me a love of learning that has never diminished, while the seeds for the paradigm proposed in this book were sown by my father as we puzzled through difficult texts together in my youth, so it is truly the case that this project was only possible because I am standing on their shoulders.



# **Abbreviations**

Abbreviations of ancient texts follow *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

AB Anchor Bible

ABRL Anchor Bible Reference Library

ACEBT Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese en Bijbelse

Theologie

Aeg Aegyptus

AGJU Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und

des Urchristentums

AJSR Association for Jewish Studies Review

AnBib Analecta Biblica

ANRW Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt:

Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung. Part 2, Principat. Edited by Hildegard

Temporini and Wolfgang Haase. Berlin: de

Gruyter, 1972-

ATANT Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen

Testaments

ATD Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BA The Biblical Archaeologist
BAR Biblical Archaeology Review

BASOR Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research

BBET Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie

BBR Bulletin for Biblical Research

BCH Bulletin de correspondance hellénique

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BDAG Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich = Danker,

Frederick W., Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich. A Greek-English Lexicon on the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. 3rd rev. ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000

BEATAJ Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des

Antiken Judentums

BETL Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum

Lovaniensium

Bib Biblica

BibIntBiblical InterpretationBJSBrown Judaic StudiesBLSBible and Literature SeriesBTBBiblical Theology Bulletin

BWANT Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen

Testament

BZAW Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche

Wissenschaft

CBQMS Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CEJL Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature

CH Church History

CHANE
Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CJAS
Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity Series
ConBNT
Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series
ConBOT
Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
CRINT
Compendia Rerum Iudicarum ad Novum

Testamentum

CSSCA Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural

Anthropology

CurBR Currents in Biblical Research

DCLS Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Series

DJD Discoveries in the Judaean Desert

DJG Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels. Edited by Joel

B. Green, Jeannine, K. Brown, and Nicholas

Perrin. 2nd ed. IVP Bible Dictionary Series. Downers

Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013

DSD Dead Sea Discoveries

EDEJ The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism. Edited by

John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow. Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans, 2010



List of Abbreviations

xix

EDNT Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament. Edited by

Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. Translated by James W. Thompson and John W. Mendendorp. 3

vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981

EDSS Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Edited by

Lawrence H. Schiffmann and James C. VanderKam. 2

vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000

EJL Early Judaism and Its Literature

EKKNT Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen

Testament

EncJud Encyclopedia Judaica. Edited by Cecil Roth and

Geoffrey Wigoder. 16 vols. New York: MacMillan,

1971-1972

ErIsr Eretz-Israel

EvQ Evangelical Quarterly
EvT Evangelische Theologie
ExpTim Expository Times

FAT Forschungen zum Alten Testament

FBE Forum for Bibelsk Eksegese

FRLANT Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und

Neuen Testaments

FZPhTh Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie

GAP Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

GTA Göttinger theologischer Arbeiten
HAT Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HCS Hellenistic Culture and Society
HdO Handbuch der Orientalistik
HDR Harvard Dissertations in Religion

Hen Henoch

Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on

the Bible

HeyJ Heythrop Journal

HOS Handbook of Oriental Studies

HR History of Religions HS Hebrew Studies

HSM Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR Harvard Theological Review
HUCA Hebrew Union College Annual
ICC International Critical Commentary

IEI Israel Exploration Journal



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ImmImmanuelIntInterpretation

IVPBDS IVP Bible Dictionary Series

JAAR Journal of the American Academy of Religion

JAJ Journal of Ancient Judaism

JAJSup Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplement

JBL Journal of Biblical Literature

JEOL Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch

Gezelschap (Genootschap) Ex oriente lux

JETS Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society

JHebS Journal of Hebrew Scriptures

JJS Journal of Jewish Studies

JNES Journal of Near Eastern Studies

JQR Jewish Quarterly Review

JR Journal of Religion

JSHJ Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus

JSJ Journal for the Study of Judaism

JSJSup Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism

JSNT Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTSup Journal for the Study of the New Testament

Supplement Series

JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSP Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha
JSPSup Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha

Supplement Series

JSS Journal of Semitic Studies

ISSR Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion

JTS Journal of Theological Studies

Jud Judaica

LHBOTS Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies

LNTS Library of New Testament Studies

LSJ Liddell, Scott, Jones = Liddell, Henry George, Robert

Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie. *A Greek–English Lexicon*. 9th ed. With revised and expanded Supplement. Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 1996

LSTS Library of Second Temple Studies

MnemosyneSup Mnemosyne, Supplements

MQSHR McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion

NEchtB Neue Echter Bibel



#### List of Abbreviations

xxi

NedTT Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift

Neot Neotestamentica

NICNT New International Commentary on the New

Testament

NovT Novum Testamentum

NovTSup Supplements to Novum Testamentum NTOA Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus

NTS New Testament Studies
OTL Old Testament Library

OTP Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Edited by James

H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York: Doubleday,

1983, 1985

OtSt Oudtestamentische Studiën

PFES Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society

POuT De Prediking van het Oude Testament

PRSt Perspectives in Religious Studies

PS Patristica Sorbonensia

PSJCO Princeton Symposium on Judaism and Christian

Origins

PT Playing the Texts

PTSDSSP Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scrolls

**Project** 

RB Revue biblique

RBL Review of Biblical Literature
RelSRev Religious Studies Review

RevQ Revue de Qumran RivB Rivista biblica italiana

RTR Reformed Theological Review
SAAB State Archives of Assyria Bulletin
SAAS State Archives of Assyria Studies

SBET Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology
SBLMS Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series

SBLMS Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLTT Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations

SBTS Sources for Biblical and Theological Studies
SchwLect Schweich Lectures of the British Academy
SCI Studies in Christianity and Judaism

ScotCS Scottish Classical Studies

Sem Semitica
SemeiaSt Semeia Studies

SFSHJ South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism



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SIM Studies in Intermediality SIC Studies in Jewish Civilization

Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament SIOT

**SNTSMS** Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series

Symbolae Osloensis SO SP Sacra Pagina **SPhilo** Studia Philonica

SPhiloAStudia Philonica Annual

Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah STDI

Studia Post-biblica StPB

Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments **SUNT SVTP** Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha

Symposium Series SymS

Tel Aviv TA

**TANZ** Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter

TBTThe Bible Today

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Edited **TDNT** 

> by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans, 1964-1976

TITrinity Journal Transeu Transeuphratène TS Texts and Studies

**TSAI** Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum

**TThSt** Trierer theologische Studien

**TUGAL** Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der

altchristlichen Literatur

TWNTTheologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament.

> Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. 10 vols. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933–1979

Tyndale Bulletin TynBul

**USFISFIC** University of South Florida International Studies in

Formative Judaism and Christianity

VCVigiliae Christianae

**VCSup** Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae

VTVetus Testamentum

VTSup Supplements to Vetus Testamentum

**WBC** Word Biblical Commentary



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WD Wort und Dienst

WUNT Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen

Testament

ZAW Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft ZNW Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft