

## 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.

Jason A. Staples is Assistant Teaching Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at North Carolina State University. He is a 2008 recipient of the Jacob K. Javits Fellowship and the author of numerous articles on ancient Judaism and early Christianity.

# 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.

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

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. Anthea 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

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	<i>Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese en Bijbelse Theologie</i>
Aeg	<i>Aegyptus</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AJSR	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> . Part 2, <i>Principat</i> . 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	<i>The Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BCH	<i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i>

BDAG	Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich = Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich. <i>A Greek–English Lexicon on the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 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
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
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
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
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
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
DCLS	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Series
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DJG	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> . Edited by Joel B. Green, Jeannine, K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin. 2nd ed. IVP Bible Dictionary Series. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EDEJ	<i>The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism</i> . Edited by John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010



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<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. Translated by James W. Thompson and John W. Mendendorp. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981
<i>EDSS</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls</i> . Edited by Lawrence H. Schiffmann and James C. VanderKam. 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000
<i>EJL</i>	Early Judaism and Its Literature
<i>EKKNT</i>	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>EncJud</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i> . Edited by Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder. 16 vols. New York: MacMillan, 1971–1972
<i>ErIsr</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>FAT</i>	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
<i>FBE</i>	Forum for Bibelsk Eksegese
<i>FRLANT</i>	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>FZPhTh</i>	<i>Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie</i>
<i>GAP</i>	Guides to the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha
<i>GTA</i>	Göttinger theologischer Arbeiten
<i>HAT</i>	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
<i>HCS</i>	Hellenistic Culture and Society
<i>HdO</i>	Handbuch der Orientalistik
<i>HDR</i>	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
<i>Hen</i>	<i>Henoch</i>
<i>Hermeneia</i>	Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>Heythrop Journal</i>
<i>HOS</i>	Handbook of Oriental Studies
<i>HR</i>	<i>History of Religions</i>
<i>HS</i>	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
<i>HSM</i>	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>ICC</i>	International Critical Commentary
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>

<i>Imm</i>	<i>Immanuel</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
IVPBDs	IVP Bible Dictionary Series
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JAJ	<i>Journal of Ancient Judaism</i>
JASup	Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplement
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JEOL	<i>Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Gezelschap (Genootschap) Ex oriente lux</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JSHJ	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JSSR	<i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>Jud</i>	<i>Judaica</i>
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. <i>A Greek–English Lexicon</i> . 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

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<i>NedTT</i>	<i>Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>OTP</i>	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
PFES	Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society
POuT	De Prediking van het Oude Testament
<i>PRSt</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
PS	Patristica Sorbonensia
PSJCO	Princeton Symposium on Judaism and Christian Origins
PT	Playing the Texts
PTSDSSP	Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scrolls Project
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RBL</i>	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>RelSRev</i>	<i>Religious Studies Review</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
<i>RivB</i>	<i>Rivista biblica italiana</i>
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
<i>SAAB</i>	<i>State Archives of Assyria Bulletin</i>
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
<i>SBET</i>	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
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
SCJ	Studies in Christianity and Judaism
ScotCS	Scottish Classical Studies
<i>Sem</i>	<i>Semitica</i>
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism

SIM	Studies in Intermediality
SJC	Studies in Jewish Civilization
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SO	Symbolae Osloensis
SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>SPhilo</i>	<i>Studia Philonica</i>
<i>SPhiloA</i>	<i>Studia Philonica Annual</i>
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
StPB	Studia Post-biblica
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha
SymS	Symposium Series
TA	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter
TBT	<i>The Bible Today</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976
TJ	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>Transeu</i>	<i>Transeuphratène</i>
TS	Texts and Studies
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
TThSt	Trierer theologische Studien
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
TWNT	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. 10 vols. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933–1979
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
USFISFJC	University of South Florida International Studies in Formative Judaism and Christianity
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VCSup	Supplements to <i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

*List of Abbreviations*

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WD	<i>Wort und Dienst</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>