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Judah under the Neo-Babylonian Empire

I.

Historical Introduction

When Assurbanipal died in 627 BCE, Assyria was still an imperial power that stretched throughout Mesopotamia into the Levant. But struggles over succession led to a weakening of centralized power. In the course of a decade, Babylon revolted and went on the offensive against Assyria. While the Medes from the north of Iran and the Babylonians conquered the old capital cities in the North, the total collapse of empire came with the conquest of Nineveh in 612 BCE and the final defeat of the Assyrians at Harran in 609 BCE.

The Emergence of the Babylonian Empire and the Colonization of Judah

The new imperial power, Babylonia, emerged from an alliance between the Chaldean kings and those of Media and the sealand. Nabopolassar (625–605 BCE) founded this Neo-Babylonian Empire (626–539 BCE), which came to rule most of Mesopotamia and the Levant for a century.¹ The Babylonian and Median victory in 609 BCE at Harran resulted not only in the scattering of the remaining Assyrian forces and the fall of Harran but also in the defeat of the armies of the Egyptians who were driven south to their own borders. The final deathblow to the Assyrians took place four years later in the battle at Carchemish (605 BCE) and Egypt fled beyond its borders. Judah passed from being a vassal kingdom of Egypt following Josiah's defeat by Necho II and became subject to the Babylonians following the battle of Carchemish. All of the nations of Syria-Israel had become colonies of the Neo-Babylonian Empire by 601 BCE.

1. See Müller, *Babylonien und Israel*, and Albertz, *Israel in Exile*.

The Babylonian Empire's most important ruler was Nebuchadnezzar II, who followed his father, Nabopolassar, to the throne in 605 BCE. Nebuchadnezzar led his army in the conquest of areas including Syria and part of Asia Minor. In 605 he launched a surprise attack against the Egyptians at Carchemish and defeated them (Jer. 46:2). According to the Babylonian Chronicle, a second victory over Egypt occurred at Hamath, leading to Babylonian control of Syria.² Jehoiakim of Judah then transferred his allegiance to this new empire and became its vassal for three years (2 Kgs 24:1). However, when Nebuchadnezzar's forces were stalemated and possibly even defeated at the Egyptian border in 601 BCE, Jehoiakim followed the pro-Egyptian party's counsel in his court to rebel against Babylon (2 Kgs 24:1), leading to the attack of Judah by Babylonian allies (Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites).

Then, in 598 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar led his army to destroy Judah and threatened the sacking of Jerusalem. Only the assassination of Jehoiakim (Jer. 22:18-19; 36:30) and the city's surrender saved it from annihilation. A large contingent of leaders, including the royal successor Jehoichin, was taken into exile and Nebuchadnezzar placed Zedekiah on the throne. The unrest that occurred during his reign threatened his kingship, for many still considered the exiled king in Babylonia the legitimate ruler and anticipated his return. The trip undertaken to Babylon by Zedekiah in 594 BCE may well have been to declare his loyalty to the Babylonian king. Finally, rebellion against Babylonia, with the expectation of Egyptian support, occurred in 589 BCE. However, in 587 BCE Nebuchadnezzar's forces took and destroyed Jerusalem. Gedaliah, the grandson of Shaphan, was chosen by Nebuchadnezzar to be governor of Judah at the city of Mizpah, but was soon assassinated by Judahite zealots, led by a descendant of David, Ishmael. Other Jews and a number of Babylonian soldiers stationed in the city were also murdered. While the rebels fled to Egypt for refuge, Nebuchadnezzar likely sent his forces back to Judah and took a number of Judahites into a third exile. The last king, Nabonidus, spent the final ten years of his reign in the desert oasis of Teman in Arabia, while his son ruled on his behalf in Babylon. He returned to fight the Persians, but lost in his resistance to the army of Cyrus, leading to the fall of Babylon in 539 BCE.

Zedekiah in the Empire

Zedekiah, the successor appointed by the Babylonians, encouraged by a pro-Egyptian faction at his court, foolishly refused Babylonian tribute in 589 BCE, and prepared for war by having formed an alliance with

2. Malamat, 'The Twilight of Judah', 130.

Psammetichus II in 593 BCE. With promised Egyptian support, he thought he had sufficient means to withdraw from the Babylonian Empire. However, just at the decisive time of rebellion, this Egyptian king died and military aid from Egypt did not materialize to save Jerusalem. The city was sacked in 586 BCE and the countryside was devastated. The royal princes along with numerous other high-ranking officials, priests, and administrators were executed, and a blinded Zedekiah and other ranking leaders of the nation were taken into exile. The Babylonians continued the earlier Assyrian policy of mass deportations. As a political policy, the exile of leaders to distant locations was designed to weaken resistance in the colonies.

Having devastated Judah, the Babylonians chose not to rebuild its destroyed towns and cities, and did little to occupy or station garrisons in Judah. The provincial capital at Mispah (Tell en-Nasbeh), which had a small Babylonian garrison, was attacked, and the Judahite rebels loyal to the House of David assassinated the governor and fled to Egypt, forcing the prophet Jeremiah to accompany them. This may have led to a third invasion and deportation, while Judah eventually was annexed to the old Assyrian province of Samaria (Jer. 52:30).

Colonization of the mind became the tool of control. Foreigners began to infiltrate Judah to set up their own fiefdoms. The Neo-Babylonian Empire began to weaken after the death of Nebuchadnezzar II with a quick succession of three rulers, followed by the last ruler, Nabonidus (555–539 BCE), a usurper and former court official who led a religious revival in Babylonia by restoring ancient cults and their temples and chose to worship as his primary deity the moon god Sîn, although he claimed the legitimacy of his rule through the former high god Marduk. By placing a new deity of the head of the Babylonian pantheon, he sought to gain religious power and to break the power of the priesthood of Marduk. He also withdrew to the desert to live in Teman for a decade to insure control of the significant trade route that passed through this area. His efforts to defeat the Persians, under Cyrus the Great, were not successful, and soon the army of Cyrus invaded Babylonia and took, unopposed, the city of Babylon in 539 BCE. The exiles from Judah, those who remained in the homeland, and various colonies of Babylonia now found themselves part of an expanding Persian Empire.³

3. See especially Lipschits and Blenkinsopp, *Judah and the Judeans*; Smith-Christopher, *The Religion of the Landless*; Oded, 'Observations on the Israelite/Judaean Exiles in Mesopotamia'; and Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land*.

Neo-Babylonian Culture

Nebuchadnezzar II developed a sophisticated civilization aided by the activity of an advanced scribal culture. The literature, composed in both the complex Akkadian cuneiform as well as alphabetic Aramaic that had become the *lingua franca* of the ancient Near East, included codified laws, religious texts, chronicles for the history of kings and important events, and scholarly and religious texts that included a rich wisdom tradition and ancient mythological writings that continued to be redacted and passed down. Even Jewish exiled scribes began to shape a hybridity with the new culture and learned to communicate primarily in Aramaic.

The lower echelons of Babylonian scribal officials recorded temple gifts, tributes from the colonies, taxes from citizens and the sale of their products, and the distribution of materials and rations to laborers and skilled workers for building extensive monuments, palaces, temples, city fortifications and neighborhoods, and canals. They also kept records of the military munitions, supplies, and numbers of different armies and garrisons. Schools for the training of scribes, of all levels, were attached to palaces and temples to archive documents for libraries and educate in the arts. These schools also trained literary officials to record the data of sacrifices, priestly orders, produce from the fields, the goods sold by merchants, and objects produced for daily life.

Important artistic works included not only architectural buildings, but also decorative works such as Babylon's processional way and hanging garden, beautiful metal works made of cast bronze, iron, gold, and silver, and elegant pottery. The gods, who were dressed in expensive clothing, dwelt in luxurious temples and received the daily care of priests who had overseen their crafting and engaged in the rites of 'opening the mouth' to bring them life. The Babylonian cities, which were known by the Jewish exiles, must have been astonishing to behold and seductive for a people exiled there.⁴

II.

The Babylonian Metanarrative of Empire

Like empires in general, the Babylonian metanarrative includes language of the supremacy of culture, religion, and the military, and justification for conquest in a variety of its historical, mythical, and literary texts.

4. See Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, and Sasson, *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Sasson's work includes lengthy essays that provide a detailed overview of Neo-Babylonian society, economy, and culture.

Especially important are the royal titulars that speak of the divine formation, call, and commissioning of the king. The king possessed two roles claiming divine authority: the rule over specific peoples and the restoration of major temples and cities. Thus one reads texts like the following ‘uttered by Nebuchadnezzar II’: ‘Marduk sublimely commanded me to lead the land aright, to shepherd the people, to provide for cult centers, (and) to renew temples’.⁵ Similarly, this king proclaimed: ‘Marduk... entrusted me with the rule of the totality of peoples, Nabu...placed in my hands a just scepter to lead all populated regions aright and to make humanity thrive’.⁶ It is interesting to note that Babylonian power and knowledge in these texts and similar ones, while obviously propaganda, is for rule of less civilized peoples and not for exploitation. The empire through its king is commissioned to protect the conquered nations and to treat them with justice. This is why the gods appointed him to rule the empire of the metropole and its colonies.

Early imperial metanarratives of Babylonia from the eighteenth century BCE were expressed, for example, in both the prologue to Hammurabi’s law code for ordering society⁷ and in the Creation Epic in which Marduk becomes the god of creation following his defeat of the chaos monster, Tiamat.⁸ In the first, the high gods Anum and Enlil choose Babylon to be supreme among nations in the world while Marduk selects Hammurabi to rule over Babylonia and its empire. In the second, the origins of the cosmos, which finds its center in Babylon, are related in the narrative of Marduk’s defeat of chaos leading to his rule of the divine pantheon and the heavens and the earth.

The metanarrative, then, includes the religious contention that Babylonia is the center of the world and protected by the high pantheon of gods, especially Marduk, whose temple, the Esagila, was located in the capital city of Babylon. Marduk, as the head of the Babylonian pantheon, chooses the ruling monarchs and oversees their rule. Tribute from the conquered nations flows into the capital, while defeated royalty come to the city to honor the Babylonian emperor. Numerous royal inscriptions end with a hymn or prayer to grant the king well-being, a long rule, and powerful weapons to defeat his enemies. These displays argue that resistance to the chosen monarch is rebellion against the high

5. VAB 4 72 (Nbk 1=Zyl III,3) I 11-14; identical is VAB 4 104 (Nbk 13=III,7) I 22-25.

6. VAB 4 112 (Nbk 12=Zyl III,5) I 13-17; the same language occurs in VAB 4 122 (Nbk 15=Stein-Tafel X) I 40-46.

7. *ANET*, 163-65.

8. *ANET*, 60-72, 501-503.

god's sovereignty over creation. Rebels can only expect destruction. Nebuchadnezzar II in particular is depicted as the new Hammurabi.⁹ These ancient texts provide the basis for Neo-Babylonian royal ideology. The Old Babylonian lapidary script was used in royal inscriptions as were archaizing orthographies to emphasize this ideological connection with the past. This Neo-Babylonian narrative was celebrated in colonial spheres in order to colonize the mind of those who were in subjection to the empire. This meant that the subjugated were to recognize Babylonian superiority and their own inferiority.¹⁰

The Divine Legitimation of Empire

Still linking his reign to the religious traditions of the past for reasons of justifying his rule over the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the Cylinder of Nabonidus (556–539 BCE) contains Marduk's command to rebuild the Ehulhu, the temple of Sîn in Harran:

I, Nabonidus, the great king, the strong king, the king of the universe, the king of Babylon, the king of the four corners, the caretaker of Esagil and Ezida, for whom Sîn and Ningal in his mother's womb decreed a royal fate as his destiny, the son of Nabû-balâssu-iqbi, the wise prince, the worshipper of the great gods.

Ehulhu, the temple of Sîn in Harran, where since days of yore Sîn, the great lord, had established his favorite residence—(then) his heart became angry against that city and temple and he aroused the Mede, destroyed that temple and turned it into ruins—in my legitimate reign Bêl (i.e. Marduk, and) the great lord, for the love of my kingship, became reconciled with that city and temple and showed compassion. In the beginning of my everlasting reign they sent me a dream, Marduk, the great lord, and Sîn, the luminary of heaven and the nether-world, stood together. Marduk spoke with me: 'Nabonidus, king of Babylon, carry bricks on your riding horse, rebuild Ehulhu and cause Sîn, the great lord, to establish his residence in its midst'. Reverently I spoke to the Enlil of the gods, Marduk: 'That temple which you ordered (me) to build, the Mede surrounds it and his might is excessive'. But Marduk spoke with me: 'The Mede whom you mentioned, he, his country and the kings who march at his side will be no more' (COS 2:310-11).

In the imperial metanarrative of Nabonidus, new topics are taken up that were previously unmentioned in earlier ones: dialogues between king and architects, dream reports, and stories of the installation of his daughter as an *entu* priestess of Sîn at Ur.

9. Berger, *Die neubabylonischen Königinschriften*, 371-75.

10. Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*.

The Babylonian Political Order

The Neo-Babylonian administration of the empire consisted of provincial governments required to pay tribute and taxation. As long as order in the province continued, the provinces were left alone. With Jerusalem and many of the towns and villages having been laid waste and with the exile of its leaders to Babylonia, Judah provided little threat to the empire. It had little to offer as tribute and taxes to the metropole and its ruler. Judah became a Babylonian province under the governorship of Gedaliah in the new capital of Mizpah (Tell Bet Mirsim) following the sacking of Jerusalem and the exile in 586 BCE. He was a political appointee by the Babylonian court and had a prominent ancestry: his father (Ahikam) and grandfather (Shaphan) had been leading officials in the court of the Davidic kings, since Josiah and the reform (2 Kgs 25:22). However, due to the fanaticism of rebels led by Ishmael, a descendant of David, Gedaliah was assassinated for collaboration with the Babylonians.

The financial structure of the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods consisted of three sectors: the palace, the temples, and private households, which would support the empire's needs for treasure and loyalty.¹¹ Redistribution of resources required that an institution not only had sizable wealth, but also provided land and goods to those holding important offices and members of the aristocracy.¹² Private archives point chiefly to the ownership of property, especially estates, by the upper class involved in the state's public institutions.

Public archives identify two important institutions, both the palace and temple, which held the primary positions in the economic history of the first millennium of ancient Babylonia.¹³ The house of the king was primary. The palace raised cattle, controlled mining operations for silver, and oversaw trade, both within Babylonia and colonies and other nations. The palace also made and oversaw loans and distributed rations to the nation's poor who needed food, oil, and clothing to survive. To do so intimated that the palace owned or controlled the majority of the land within the state. Of course, there was a 'middle class' of merchants and

11. Dandamayev, 'An Age of Privatization in Ancient Mesopotamia'. A different view of the temples' economic clout is offered by Jursa, 'Debts and Indebtedness in the Neo-Babylonian Period'. Jursa sees the temples during the Neo-Babylonian period as far more economically anemic.

12. Van De Mieroop, 'Economic Theories and the Ancient Near East', 59.

13. Jursa, 'Grundzüge der Wirtschaftsformen Babyloniens im Ersten Jahrtausend v. Chr.'; Renger, 'On Economic Structures of Ancient Mesopotamia'; and Lipiński, *State and Temple Economy*.

artisans. The making of various items, including pottery and idols and the crafting of valuable items including jewelry, were important skills. These goods contributed to the economic wealth of palace and temple.

The military was also important not only in fighting the empire's wars, but also economically, in that spoils of war and gifts were given to the soldiers, especially the high-ranking officers, for their success. The army also secured foreign workers for imperial projects. This also led to the integration of communities of non-Babylonians into the empire.

Of course, the palace's taxation of goods and the temple gifts and sacrifices were substantial sources of revenue for the two great political and economic engines of the empire. Beginning in the seventh century BCE, the palace moved the metropole into market exchange, which led to specialization in trade between the various social classes and between different countries. A more entrepreneurial spirit during this period was at work in trade and commerce, leading to the aristocracy's increased accumulation of wealth. In addition, rentier life was possible from patrimonies inherited by descendants. Noteworthy for the Judahite exiles who remained in Mesopotamia following the Persian conquest is the development of financial houses that provided loans to various ethnicities needing funds for the startup and continuation of businesses. The Murashû documents of Nippur, dating from the end of the fifth century BCE, contain many Hebrew personal names, indicating the presence of one very influential Jewish business family in the local economy during the Achaemenid period.¹⁴

III. Jewish Communities during the Exile

The destruction of Samaria ultimately led to the end of any continuing Israelite identity and statehood, leaving Judah alone after 722 BCE to continue its existence as a nation. After the fall of Jerusalem and the ravaging of much of the territory of Judah in 586 BCE, two different groups of Judahite communities continued in different geographical locations: those who remained in a decimated Judah and those who went into exile in Babylonia. The destruction of Judah was extensive, as is demonstrated by the evidence of both archaeology and texts. Extensive archaeological data points to the extent of the destruction of the

14. See Zadok, *The Jews in Babylonia*.

kingdom.¹⁵ The decline in the local economy of Judah is indicated by the near disappearance of Greek ceramics and the diminution of pottery types, indicating decline in trade that would arise from a weakened economy.¹⁶ The important cities in Judah that were destroyed included Jerusalem, Ramat Rahel, Lachish, Gezer, Beth-Shemesh, Ein Gedi, Arad, Kadesh Barnea, Mesad Hashavyahu, Tell Keisan, Megiddo, Dor, Akko, Tell 'Erani, Tell el-Hesi, Tell Jemmeh, Tell Malhata, and Tell er-Ruqeish, along with many of the Philistine coastal cities. These cities were left in ruins throughout the time of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Only a few urban sites escaped destruction: Tell en-Nasbeh, Tell el-Fûl, and Bethel, along with the towns in the tribal area of Benjamin and in the southern region of the Negev. Following the assassination of Gedaliah, Israel appears to have been divided into two regions: the northern province of Samaria and the southern area, which would become partially occupied and controlled locally by the Edomites. The Edomites had been allies of the Babylonians against Judah. The Samaritan governors simply transferred their province from the Assyrians to the Babylonians. However, Judah was not inserted into a heavily organized administrative system, since the new Judahite governors gave their primary attention to Babylonia and regions in the vicinity.¹⁷ The devastation of Judah offered little to exploit. Its inhabitants were burdened with the requirement of annual taxes and lived lives of desperation as more and more non-Judahite groups migrated into the land and took up residence (see Lam. 2:2; 5:2-5, 9-11).¹⁸

The leaders of Judah in Jerusalem, who survived the conquest of the city and were not among the executed, were sent into exile. Members of the royal family, courtiers, administrators, chiefs of clans, the wealthy, high-ranking priests, and skilled artisans made the journey to Babylonia. They were the *'am haggôlâ*, 'the people of the exile', who were considered by the Chronist, Jeremiah (24:1-10), and by Ezekiel (33:23-29) as the legitimate descendants of the covenant people. They were in contention during and after the exile with the *'am hâ'āreš* ('people of the land') who remained behind and mixed with those who migrated into the

15. Ephraim Stern points to the archaeological evidence from this period, and concludes that the nation experienced 'a state of total destruction and near abandonment' (Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 2:321-26).

16. Lehmann, *Untersuchungen zur späten Eisenzeit in Syrien und Libanon*.

17. See Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 2:308-309.

18. See Smith-Christopher, 'Reassessing the Historical and Sociological Impact of the Babylonian Exile'.

country. The exiles considered themselves the truly chosen (the good figs in Jer. 24:1-7) who would one day return to inherit once again the land, rebuild the temple, and reestablish the Davidic monarchy (Jeremiah 30–31). The bad figs were the ‘people of the land’ who would be scattered, mercilessly treated, and no longer allowed to occupy the land (Jer. 24:8–10). This view likely had the support of the followers of Jehoiachin and his surviving courtiers, who had been imprisoned in Babylon in 598 (2 Kgs 25:27–30) and certainly became dominant in Judah once the several returns took place.

Due to lack of evidence, it is not possible to know much about the exiles in Babylonia.¹⁹ Peter Ackroyd argued that while their conditions were ‘uncongenial’, he still thought they lived together in their own communities, were allowed to carry out a normal life of agricultural existence and to experience a good deal of freedom in their livelihoods and traditions, and were loyal to their captors.²⁰ Bustenay Oded contends that the exiles were not imperial slaves made to engage in a state of permanent physical labor; yet, they were still forced to work on projects on occasion.²¹ Some Babylonian economic records indicate that the exiles and other non-Babylonians also served the military settlements of the state. Thus, when needed, the exiles performed services for the palace, temple, large estates, and soldiers. It therefore appears more likely that the exiles would have had the status of slaves (foreigners and those captured in war) who performed the labor of the empire (see Isa. 52:3) and yet were still otherwise allowed to conduct their livelihoods. It is no coincidence that metaphors of slavery and imprisonment are numerous in biblical texts dating from the exilic and early post-exilic periods (Isa. 43:6; 45:14; 52:2; Jer. 34:13; Mic. 6:4; Pss. 105:18; 107:14; and frequently Job). At least some Jewish captives became *corvée* laborers as well as craftsmen for royal and temple projects.²² This situation would have continued throughout the entire period of their captivity under Babylonian hegemony.²³

19. See Zadok, *The Jews in Babylonia*; Bickerman, ‘The Babylonian Captivity’.

20. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 32.

21. Oded, ‘Observations on the Israelite/Judean Exiles in Mesopotamia’. The Murashû documents indicate that some, although not all, exiles were slaves while others at least during the following Persian period achieved economic prosperity. See Dandamayev, *Slavery in Babylonia*.

22. Oded, ‘Judah and the Exile’, 483. See, for example, the Etemenanki cylinder that lists the lands within the Babylonian Empire that contributed works and lumber for the building of the ziggurat of Marduk in Babylon (Unger, *Babylon*).

23. Oded, ‘Observations on the Israelite/Judean Exiles in Mesopotamia’.

The merging of communities of non-Babylonians into roles that promoted the well-being of the empire would have led to the enculturation of some of them into the ideology of the Babylonian metanarrative. Thus, many found their minds colonized by the traditions of their conquerors. There is no indication that all of the exiles would have lived in their own communities and carried on their particular legal, religious, and economic activities. Rather they mostly would have been laborers of the state working for the palace and temples or in helping to develop fallow lands possessed by these institutions and the upper class.²⁴ Their labor would have been largely agricultural, although those with important skills would have found positions within the appropriate guilds of scribes and artisans and some would even have been involved in entrepreneurial business enterprises. It would have been difficult for the exiles to maintain their own cultural and religious traditions, especially if they wished to achieve a higher status in the empire.

Some of the exiles of Judah perhaps lived in their own villages located on state lands in Babylonia and were even allowed to form their own communal worship of YHWH without direct interference (Psalm 137). The Babylonians did not engage in religious intolerance and persecution or require those conquered to worship their deities. Subsequently the exiles could practice their own religion dedicated to YHWH, although now they had to transform their theology to focus on a universal deity who did not have to have a temple, to be present and worshipped (since the one in Jerusalem had been destroyed).

Babylonian contracts from the Neo-Babylonian period²⁵ contain the names of 2500 persons. Some of these names, as many as 70, are clearly Jewish, although there could have been others, because a number of Babylonian and West Semitic names are closely related to Jewish ones. For example, in addition to those in the Bible like Zerubbabel (Zer-Babili), son of Saltier (Šalti-ilu, Ezra 2:2; 3:2), Mordecai (Ezra 2:2), Bilshan (Bel-šunu), Shenazzar (Sin-šar-user), son of Jehoiachin (1 Chr. 3:17), Mordecai, son of Yair (Est. 2:5, etc.), and Sheshbazar (Ezra 1:11), the Babylonian texts include West Semitic names like ʿTaba-^dIš-šar, daughter of Ya-še-ʿ-a-ma, Ni-ri-ya-a-ma, son of Bel-zera-ibni, Šá-ab-ba-ta-a-a, son of Nabu-šarra-bullit, Ig-da-al-ya-a-ma, son of Naniddina, and Baniya, son of Amel-Nana.²⁶

24. One of the building inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar states that he required 'lands of the Hatim' to engage in forced labor in building the Etemenanki (cf. Schmid, *Der Tempelturm Etemenanki in Babylon*).

25. Zadok, *The Jews in Babylonia*, 38-40, and 'Some Jews in Babylonian Documents'.

26. Dijkstra, 'Religious Crisis and Inculturation', 103.

It would have been likely that the exiles included scribes and teachers who would have settled in Babylonia. Certainly administrative officials and a well-educated aristocracy, all of whom would probably have been literate in Hebrew and Aramaic, were taken into exile. Thus, education was probably significant among this group. The meager written and material evidence makes it impossible to know if any schools were established among the exilic communities. Yet the large number of texts likely written, redacted, and preserved during this period and in the early post-exilic times points to the necessity of some type of education due to the lengthy period of exile (more than two generations).

Did some of the Jewish intelligentsia have access to any Neo-Babylonian literature? This, of course, is impossible to know conclusively, but the literary themes of this culture seem to be well known to Jewish exiles as evidenced by the books of Second Isaiah and Job. The knowledge of Neo-Babylonian royal ideology and religious mythology intimates that some of the educated captives eventually had access to and perhaps could read the scribal texts in Aramaic and perhaps even Akkadian. It is not unthinkable that some of the Jewish scribes among the captives may have served in the Babylonian administration.

Cuneiform was known by some scribes in Israel and Judah from the early Assyrian period even into the early Hellenistic age.²⁷ In addition, Isaiah 28:11 possibly refers to Akkadian ('an alien tongue'). The exiles' knowledge of Akkadian likely would have been necessary, although the uneducated might have relied only on Aramaic, leaving it up to Jewish scribes to master this difficult language. This was possible due to the fact that Aramaic was the alphabetic language becoming the *lingua franca* of the empire, while Akkadian would have been known in the Levant since the Late Bronze Age. That Jewish scribes knew Aramaic well is evidenced by its considerable influence on later Hebrew texts.²⁸

Contextualization in Babylonia would have been pursued by the intelligentsia of the Jewish exiles whose exposure to a vastly different civilization provided them the opportunity to have first-hand knowledge of Babylonian culture, including its literature. Contextualization connotes a means of interpretation based on the understanding that texts and authors are integrally linked to their culture, time, space, social institutions, and political structures. If removed from these locations, due to

27. Horowitz, Oshia, and Sanders, 'A Bibliographical List of Cuneiform Inscriptions', and *Cuneiform in Canaan*.

28. Horowitz, Oshia, and Sanders note that a few Neo-Babylonian texts have been found ('A Bibliographical List of Cuneiform Inscriptions').

such things as immigration, prior interpretation of reality becomes twisted, leading to the necessity of adapting earlier knowledge to a new world. In Babylonian captivity, the exiles would necessarily have to readjust their past written and oral records to understand the present and to cultivate hope for the future. Most important among the exiles were the prophetic voices of Habakkuk, Ezekiel, and especially Second Isaiah.

The Exile and Cultural Transformation

Cultures constantly change, but behavioral and intellectual adjustments and reformulations become even more precipitate when a nation with its own customs, ideas, and social behavior suddenly encounters a new and substantially different setting. The symbiosis of new events that a people experiences with the emerging discourse results in necessary cultural and behavioral adaptations reflected in an ever-evolving tradition. Cultural imperialism engulfed the exiles who had witnessed and endured the fall of what they had been taught was the inviolable sacred city of Jerusalem and, when accompanied by slaughter, execution of many leaders of the rebellion, and the exile of the skilled and elite leadership, the danger was the end of their own civilization that would dissolve among the components of what was said by the imperialists to be a superior expression of life. This crisis of ethnicity, identity, and survival would be a threat to the continuation of the exiled people of Judah. Many likely merged into the surrounding peoples and traditions.

In addition, if the conquered Judahites in Babylonia could not reshape their theological traditions of election and providence to allow for a new understanding of God's activity in the life of the imperiled nation and the larger world, then the exiles would be lost to history as a distinct *ethnos* and world view. Their colonized minds would have lost an active resistance to the empire with the result of the loss of their distinctiveness as a culture and a people. The challenge was not only that of deportation, but also in resisting a vast empire with an advanced cultural tradition in the form of literature, architecture, military power, economic development, and religious symbols.

The colonized exiles do not simply adopt the culture of the empire, since their colonial orientations inevitably merge in different ways with the civilization of the imperialists. Yet, even in adopting the major cultural features of the ruling metropole, the exiles are never accepted as equals by the Babylonian imperialists. The loss of the indigenous language and defining traditions from the past would result in separating colonials from their native language (from Hebrew to Aramaic) and from defining traditions that express their culture and values.

While the claim of cultural superiority was critical for imperial domination, strategies of resistance were necessary to oppose and gain at least some independence from the dominating power. These strategies emerged from identifiable groups in exile: prophets, priests, and royals. Hence forms of resistance to the empire and its culture result in a less than 'pure' form of such things as the imperial language and traditions. This distortion leads to the rejection of imperial culture and its ideology of rule.²⁹

Interculturalism in Judah

Dijkstra has lamented the fact that investigations of the Babylonian crisis confronting Judah around 600 BCE have not been utilized through the lens of interculturalism that occurred when the exiles entered into captivity.³⁰ Empires transform the cultures of the conquered through metanarratives, art, literature, and colonization of the mind. Imperialism rejects any expression of egalitarianism, since the privileged in the metropole rule the majority who dwell in marginal spaces and in the subjugated territories. Through the systematic penetration and domination of the cultural life of the conquered, including the values and behaviors orchestrated through imperial institutions (e.g., schools, temples, and royal administration), there is the imperial attempt to create a new colonial consciousness.³¹ While culture, including art, literature, and religious symbols, plays a role in this domination, the major tools are discourse and education.³²

Control and exploitation produce an angry response among a segment of the colonized who then seek to subvert the empire's domination. In addition to conquest by empires and the indoctrination into imperial knowledge and culture, enculturation is also intensified when peoples migrate into new cultural regions, leaving them bereft of many of their former cultural roots associated with their homelands. This migration may come as a result of necessity (e.g. famine and the new sources

29. Bhabha, *The Location*, 85-92.

30. As pertains to the Babylonian exile, enculturation involves introducing and conditioning the people of Judah as forced immigrants to a new culture in order that they may become functioning members within it. Similar is contextualization which involves the process of the interpretation of texts. Texts, like their authors, are intrinsically connected to their temporal space, culture, language, social world, geographical location, and political reality. See Dijkstra, 'Religious Crisis and Inculturation', 99.

31. Petras, 'Cultural Imperialism in the Late 20th Century', 139-40.

32. Kieh, 'The Roots of Western Influence in Africa'.

needed for additional food) or of force (conquest). In imperialism the center dominates the periphery and holds sway over all of its dependents.³³

One way that migrants who form diaspora communities attempt to maintain their identity is to remember their important traditions of the past. Edward Said has observed that ‘appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present’.³⁴ Of course there are as many views of the past as there are of the present. In responding to empires, colonial leaders, who come to resist imperial pressure, often act to shape social groups by an appeal to past traditions that have been formative in indigenous cultural expressions and then alter them to allow either assimilation into the new context or to resist the imperial cultural power. This means that colonial spokespersons revise the values and ways of behaving in their own past traditions, leading to new views that confront the empire and its affirmations transmitted through sources of indoctrination, like colonial education. Colonial leaders set about the task of forming social groups that will become those who transmit the emended conceptualities and actions to a larger public, whether their views are compliant or resistant. Obviously, conflict among the colonialists themselves will emerge, since competing groups among the conquered will have alternative visions of cultural engagement with the empire.

The Exiles and Enculturation

One of the most challenging difficulties facing the exiles, then, was continuing enculturation of the emerging generations in native beliefs and customs, now that the temple and worship centers were no longer present to serve as the symbols needed for traditional socialization. In addition, the schools of scribes and children of the elite had to be replaced with some form of educational institution, possibly that of family scribal guilds. This becomes obvious from the literature that is written or redacted in the exile. Furthermore, meeting places for worship and community activities may have been structured within informal assemblies that eventually led to what we know as synagogues, although the first archaeological evidence for this institution comes from the latter part of the third century BCE in the environs of Alexandria. The preservation of past conventions and observances would have required some public interaction of the exiles in worship and discourse.

33. Petras, ‘Cultural Imperialism in the Late 20th Century’.

34. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 3.

Diversity of Exilic Communities

While the explicit evidence for these communities is often limited, one nonetheless may posit the existence of several competing groups within the exiled community of Judah in Babylonia and the early Persian period.

The Prophetic Party of Second Isaiah

This group consisted of a prophetic leader and his followers who, during the exile, committed acts of sedition against the Babylonians and supported the new power arising in the east in the form of Cyrus II. Following the exile they constituted a party of outward accommodation to the leading empire that controlled them, but eventually were transformed into apocalyptic seers who saw the endtime as imminent and the destruction of the ruling empire as inevitable. While still under the domination of foreign empires, they spoke and wrote a ‘hidden transcript’, composed by marginals who sought to dissemble the privileged positions of their foreign and native oppressors and exploiters. Apocalyptic language allowed them to use a code that communicated to insiders, but appeared to be nonsense to the uninitiated.

The Zadokite Priestly Party of the Priestly Code

With the death of Josiah, the dreams of the Levites to achieve the status of priests, who were active in and perhaps even controlled for a brief time the Jerusalem temple, ended. Yet the struggles of Zadokites and Levites for legitimacy and power were not to end until the restoration and perhaps even as late as the middle of the Hellenistic period. Each had its scribes who redacted priestly and Deuteronomic traditions that cast them in a favorable light. The Zadokites, who perhaps had already achieved control of the temple prior to the Babylonian conquest, achieved their status and authority through the Priestly Code. They were the ones who descended from Phinehas and ultimately Aaron and received the right to preside as priests in the sanctuary. Ezekiel, a former priest turned prophet of judgment, had been a Zadokite.

The Nationalistic Party of the Royal Families and Courtiers

Two kings in exile and their surviving families (Jehoiachin and blind Zedekiah) also contended for the legitimacy of dynastic succession. Their descendants were to include after the exile Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, two of the first governors following the early returns to Judah.

The Party of Traditional Sages

Job's three opponents and even the imposter Elihu are presented as traditional sages seeking to reaffirm the older teachings of the wise: the justice of God, retribution, the discipline of suffering, and divine deliverance of the sufferer. The political implications of these views are a part of the desire that this group had to achieve for its members coveted positions of power and influence within the reconstituted community by the patronage of dominant priests and governors.

The Party of Radical Sages

This group of sages disputed the teachings of the ancestors and traditional YHWH religion in the effort to reconstitute anew the restored community. The stakes were high for them, for failure surely would lead to their decimation. However, success would mean a new order which they would shape and undoubtedly lead.

Apostates

There is textual evidence that some of the exiles worshipped other gods. In Jeremiah 44:16-18 (post-Jeremiah) the exiles respond to Jeremiah's accusation of their apostasy, that they and their ancestors worshipped the 'Queen of Heaven' (likely Ishtar) and received food and protection from their enemies. But when they returned to the worship of YHWH they knew only disaster.

Another community, led by the 'People of the Land' had been left behind when the groups of the elite were exiled. This group, who did not go into captivity, consisted largely of not only commoners (mainly unskilled and untutored) but also of outsiders who had moved within the land to take up residence in an unprotected country.

Emigrants

Finally, there was the group of emigrants who, following their assassination of Gedaliah, left to seek refuge in Egypt, forcing Jeremiah to accompany them. It is likely that Jeohohaz and his family, exiled in Egypt, were regarded as the legitimate descendants of David.

The Exile as the Diaspora

What does the word 'diaspora' entail? The differences and complexities in understanding this term are significant. However, diaspora is best understood to refer to an 'exilic or nostalgic dislocation from homeland'. Interpreted in this manner, the term points to ideological

and socio-political features for a community existing away from its homeland.³⁵

As noted earlier, postcolonial interpretation seeks to discover a people's comparable experiences of past and present to assess the psychological and cultural difficulties occasioned by being uprooted from familiar settings and transitioning to a new situation. Postcolonial biblical interpretation's diasporan hermeneutics examine the many literatures and oral traditions of peoples who have been transplanted elsewhere to live in an alien environment. For Homi Bhabha, the goal of the diasporan interpreter is to be a 'vernacular cosmopolitan' able to translate between cultures and to reinterpret traditions. In the taking up of residence and existence under a dominant power, exiles became marginals who had no place to dwell except in the interstices of cultures, caught betwixt and between past and present locations and experience. Thus they participate in intercultural exchange, but become wanderers in the world. The hope exists, however, to maintain elements of older tradition with new interpretations that adapt to new situations and resist the forces of imperial hierarchy, cultural uniformity, and political hegemony that would extinguish a people's ethnic and cultural identity. Postcolonial scholars direct their attention to the interrelationship of those moving across borders and dwelling in a new world that is completely alien to their previous experience.

Exile, a policy used to relocate colonial leaders to various and different locations by the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires, is the forced movement of people from their homelands to another geographical location.³⁶ During the dominance of these two metropolises (Assyria and Babylonia), those transported to Assyria and Babylonia were primarily the upper class leadership and nobility as well as skilled artisans, scribes, and others with special skills that could be of assistance to imperial rulers. Further, the term 'exile' suggests the results of hybridity as the culture and language of resettled communities change due to engagement with the majority civilization.³⁷ Inevitably this involuntary relocation transforms the exiled community into a disadvantaged minority. As marginalized people, exiles dwell on the periphery of culture, governments, and economics. They are the Other whose voice is silenced by the majority culture. The colonized in new spaces must learn to speak to the majority in ways that express their loyalty to them without

35. Brazier and Mannur, 'Nation, Migration, Globalization', 4.

36. Segovia, 'Postcolonial and Diasporic Criticism in Biblical Studies', 187.

37. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, 68-70.

denying their own interests, with the goal, however, of maintaining their defiance towards the empire and their hopes for liberation and a new beginning.³⁸ As the voice of otherness, diasporan theology calls out for liberation from oppression; uses hidden transcripts to expose, critique, and provide an alternative vision and narrative to the metropole; values the diasporan experience as the crucible for solidarity and community, giving expression to hope; and engages in hybridity as fundamental to cultural life without requiring the complete abandonment of formative, past tradition.

IV.

The Prophetic Resistance to the Empires: Jeremiah and Second Isaiah

The exilic and post-exilic prophets of Judah not only directed messages of judgment against their own rulers and other leaders of the nation for social oppression, but also often spoke messages of condemnation against the colonizers who had brought the small country into subjection. Postcolonial features of hybridity, mimicry, the ‘other’, migration, and ‘translated writings’ are featured in many of their oracles. While cultural adaptation among the exiles would have necessarily taken place in Babylon and even in Egypt where some survivors sought refuge, the texts of the exilic and early post-exilic periods that reflect on the exile and current situations point to resistance of the empire.

Jeremiah and the Babylonian Exile³⁹

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, a levitical priest in Anathoth of the former tribe of Benjamin, located only two to three miles north of Jerusalem, and yet in a very different culture from the former kingdom of Israel. As the son of a Levitical priest in the old northern territory, Jeremiah inherited no love for the Davidic Dynasty and the Zadokite priests who controlled the temple of Jerusalem and sought to end the

38. Segovia, ‘Toward Intercultural Criticism’, 322. Also see his essay, ‘Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora’.

39. Among the important studies of Jeremiah, see Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremias*. Also see Hyatt, ‘The Deuteronomistic Edition of Jeremiah’; Nicholson, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*; Thiel, *Die Deuteronomistische Redaction of Jeremiah*; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1 & 2*; Clements, *Jeremiah*; and Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20, 21–36, and 37–52*.

existence of rival temples and sacred high places.⁴⁰ Jeremiah disputed the David–Zion traditions that were heralded in Jerusalem and among those loyal to their leaders (for example, the oracles concerning the House of David in 21:11–23:8;⁴¹ ‘The Temple Sermon’ in 7:1–15, 26:1–24; and the ‘inhabitant of the valley’ or Jerusalem, 21:13; cf. 22:6–7). Instead, he turned to the older traditions of the Exodus, Wilderness Wandering, and Entrance into the Land (e.g. the collection of oracles in 2:1–4:4) to shape his theological discourse.

The prophet Jeremiah, who was active in the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE, lived in one of the most chaotic and destructive periods in the history of Judah and early Judaism. According to the superscription (1:1–3), he began to prophesy in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (627 BCE), and some forty years later was forced to go to Egypt with the assassins of Gedaliah, the governor of Mizpah, perhaps only a short time after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. From there, he disappeared from history.

Traditions from the North, particularly those associated with Moses, predominate in the call and in the earliest preaching of Jeremiah. Jeremiah reflects upon the Exodus, Wilderness Wanderings, and Settlement in 2:2–9, where his indebtedness to the Song of Moses is clear. From this song, Jeremiah learned that YHWH’s grace toward Israel frames the entire sweep of world history. Within this frame, however, lies Israel’s ingratitude, her corrupting ways with other gods, which result from settled and agrarian living, and YHWH’s punishment of Israel for what in his eyes is wrongdoing. YHWH stays the hand of the enemy only as Israel is about to be completely destroyed, then with a remnant YHWH begins a new work of salvation, at which time the enemy is defeated. Jeremiah follows the Song of Moses in depicting the Mosaic Age as the idyllic period of national history, a time of purity when Israel

40. Stevens, *Temples, Tithes, and Taxes*.

41. Zedekiah (‘Righteous of YHWH’ or ‘Righteous is YHWH’), in contrast with the future Davidic king whose name—and entire being—will be ‘YHWH is our righteousness’ (23:5–6). The oracle concerning ‘a righteous branch’ (23:5–6), a later addition by an editor of this collection, is similar to Assyrian and Babylonian oracles pronouncing the future reign of kings and the results of their reign (*ANET*, 606, and Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 24–37). The name of the ‘righteous branch’ is *šidiqiyāhū*, which means ‘YHWH is my righteousness’. This future king, unlike the preceding rulers in the collection save for Josiah (22:15–16), will exemplify what the royal house should have been but only rarely was. Another addition, perhaps from the same editor, also attributes to Jeremiah an oracle concerning a ‘righteous branch’ who will execute justice in the land (33:15).

was YHWH's 'devoted bride' or 'first fruits' (2:2-3; cf. Deut. 32:10-12). He also views Israel's settlement in the land as the time when things began to go bad (2:7; cf. 2:21; 8:13; Deut. 32:13-18).

From Deuteronomy 1–28, which was originally a Northern document, Jeremiah learned that the Mosaic covenant was conditional in nature, and that obedience to this covenant was the basis on which land tenure rested. Though the Mosaic covenant could be broken—as it repeatedly was by Israel—at the same time it could also be reconstituted. Jeremiah preached both messages—the brokenness of the covenant and YHWH's decision to remake it—more clearly than any other prophet (2:20; 5:5; 7:5-10; 31:31-34; 32:37-41).

Jeremiah's preaching betrays indebtedness to the Northern prophet Hosea, whom we discussed in the previous chapter. From Hosea, Jeremiah learned that the covenant is like a familial bond—between husband and wife or between father and son; that sin is rooted in a lack of the knowledge of YHWH; and that a breach of covenant amounts to religious harlotry or adultery. Jeremiah follows Hosea in representing YHWH as a deeply compassionate God, one who experiences personal hurt by having to vent his wrath, and one who wants, after the punishment is over, to receive his wayward child home again (31:16-20; cf. Hos. 11:8-9).

During his long ministry in Jerusalem, Jeremiah also appropriated theology from Southern traditions associated with Abraham and David. One event associated with Abraham loomed very large for Jeremiah, as it did also for Isaiah and certain other prophets, and that was Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction (Genesis 18–19). From this, Jeremiah realized that YHWH punishes entire cities for unrighteous living (5:1-8), and that a point can be reached where mediation for such cities is no longer possible (7:16-20; 11:14-17; 14:11-12; 15:1-2). Not only immoral prophets, but also seemingly innocent people, such as the man who brought the news of Jeremiah's birth to his father, are likened by Jeremiah to the inhabitants of these proverbial cities (23:14; 20:15-16) and must suffer a similar fate when Jerusalem is destroyed. In his early preaching, Jeremiah stated that the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant were contingent upon Israel's repentance (4:1-2), but later he affirmed that YHWH's covenants to Abraham and David were eternal and remained intact. YHWH in future days would make good his promise to bless the nations through Israel, and Israel could count on David's royal line surviving, despite the nation's demise. This is fully in keeping with the basic tenets of Southern theology.

During his lengthy prophetic ministry, catastrophic events occurred. These events included the death of Josiah at Megiddo at the hands of Necho II of Egypt in 609 BCE, the fall of Assyria in its last stand at the battle of Carchemish (605 BCE), the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (626 BCE), the incorporation of Judah into this empire (605 BCE), the first invasion of Judah due to the rebellion of King Jehoiakim, likely resulting in his assassination, the surrender of Jerusalem to the besieging imperial army (597 BCE) followed shortly by the exile of Jehoiachin and an entourage of the leaders of the revolt (597 BCE), and finally the devastation of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE resulting in the exile of the skilled workers and upper-class leadership to Babylonia.

In the collection of the 'Oracles against the Nations' (Jeremiah 46–51), most of which appear to have been post-Jeremiah oracles of judgment and spoken and composed by later prophets, perhaps within his 'school', there are several that betray the exilic experience. The two principle targets of prophetic judgment are Egypt and Babylonia.

The explanation of Jeremiah's presence in Egypt, where he disappears from history, incorporates the narrative explanation of the assassination of Gedaliah at Mizpah by Ishmael, whose band of rebels flees to Egypt to escape Babylonian retribution. According to the narrative, Jeremiah, together with Baruch, are forced to accompany them. This story became the necessary link for Jeremiah's oracles against Egypt in the 'Oracles against the Nations' (chaps. 46–51). The oracle against Egypt occurs in 46:13-26 and is followed by an oracle of salvation to Jacob in 46:27-28 that speaks of deliverance after the time of punishment. The speech of judgment against Egypt is placed within the context of Nebuchadnezzar's coming invasion of Egypt. Imitating the language of the oracles concerning the 'Foe from the North', this prophet issues warnings in Migdol, Memphis, and Tahpanhes to prepare for the sword that shall devour them. The Egyptians may not expect protection from the Apis bull⁴² who has already fled the coming destruction, because King YHWH

42. The Apis bull was the animal manifestation of the god Ptah of Memphis. This bull represented the god's fertility and power. He also was the representation of the divine Nile and the god of the annual flooding of the river, Hapy. Treated as a divine being, only one such bull lived at a time. Up to the time of the XIIth Dynasty Amon was a Theban god of no more than local importance, but as soon as the princes of Thebes had conquered their rival claimants to the rule of Egypt, and had succeeded in making their city a new capital of the country, their god Amon became a prominent god in Upper Egypt. It was probably under that dynasty that the attempt was made to assign to him the proud position, which was afterwards claimed for him of 'king of the gods'. In spite of Amon's political ascension, he also enjoyed

has ‘thrust him down’ and directed the Babylonian invasion. YHWH is the one who makes impotent the high god, Amon of Thebes,⁴³ the Egyptian kings, and their gods. Even the hired mercenaries of Egypt provide no defense against the invaders. A great multitude of Egyptians have already fallen, and those who survived spoke of returning to their own people, ‘the land of their birth’, to escape the invading army. Using the language of exile, the Egyptians, like Israel of old during the Exodus, are to prepare their baggage, not for liberation, but rather for exile. Memphis, like Jerusalem before, will become a ‘waste, a ruin, without inhabitant’.

The very long section of oracles against Babylon (Jeremiah 50–51) depicts the fall and destruction of what the prophets of Judah considered the great destroyer of nations. The greatest of Judah’s enemies that wreaked great havoc among its villages and towns, and finally destroyed Jerusalem and took its captives into exile was Babylonia (586 BCE). Zedekiah, who foolishly rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar in 589 BCE, had hoped in vain for Egyptian support. However, this never materialized even though in 587 an Egyptian army did set out to confront the Babylonians. For whatever reason, the army returned to Egypt, leaving hapless Zedekiah and the pro-Egyptian party to face the wrath of the great king.

During this second invasion, the Babylonian ruler showed no mercy. Many of the leaders were executed, including Zedekiah’s own children. He was then led away to captivity where he died without a successor. He was the last king to sit on David’s throne.

The savagery of the invaders who will come to destroy Babylonia is mentioned, although Cyrus the Persian is not mentioned by name, only the Medes. The gods, especially Marduk, who commissioned the king to rule by building new temples and refurbishing the old, as well as to extend his empire on their behalf, are mentioned first. In 50:2, the prophet utters the following:

popularity among the common people of Egypt. He was called the vizier of the poor. It was said that he protected the weak from the strong and was an upholder of justice. Those who requested favors from Amon were required to demonstrate their worthiness or to confess their sins first.

43. Amon was the Egyptian high god of Amun and became identified with the chief deity who was worshipped in other areas during that period, *Ra-Herakhty*, the merged identities of *Ra* and *Horus*. This identification led to another merger of identities, with Amun becoming Amun-Ra. In the *Hymn to Amun-Ra* he is described as ‘Lord of truth, father of the gods, maker of men, creator of all animals, Lord of things that are, creator of the staff of life’.

Declare among the nations and proclaim,
 set up a banner and proclaim,
 conceal it not, and say:
 'Babylon is taken,
 Bel is put to shame,
 Mer'odach is dismayed.
 Her images are put to shame,
 her idols are dismayed'.

Babylonia's enemies are also described as the Foe from the North. They will be devastated by their invaders. The empire that caused great destruction and death to many in Judah and beyond will now face the same ruin. The earth will quake with the fall of the mighty empire, while wild animals will traverse its ruins.

With the fall of Babylonia, the people of Judah shall come weeping and seeking YHWH. They ask the way home to Zion, promising now to join an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten. Now they give praise to YHWH for his vindication.

Serai'ah, the son of Neri'ah, son of Mahsei'ah, is commissioned by Jeremiah to take these words and read them to the captives in Babylon so that they may know that Babylonia, one day, will fall and they will be redeemed. 'The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Serai' the son of Neri'ah, son of Mahsei'ah, when he went with Zedeki'ah king of Judah to Babylon, in the fourth year of his reign. Serai'ah was the quartermaster' (Jer. 51:59).

Second Isaiah and the Babylonian Exile

The text known as Second Isaiah occurs in Isaiah chapters 40–55, following the oracles and their additions in chapters 1–39. The book concludes with oracles composed and possibly spoken by Second Isaiah's school of followers who lasted into the Persian period of the post-exilic age. The empire that subdues Judah is the Neo-Babylonian one (626–539 BCE; cf. chaps. 46; 47; 48:20–21). Furthermore, in Second Isaiah, a new foreign king, given the title of Messiah, is Cyrus of Persia (560–530 BCE; cf. 41:2–3, 25; 44:24–45:13; 48:14). The leaders and skilled laborers of Judah were taken into Babylonian captivity. Second Isaiah composes and likely speaks the message to the exiles to leave Babylon, cross the desert, and return to Zion.

Second Isaiah's interpretation of sixth-century national and international events draws heavily on First Isaiah's interpretation of the nation and the great empires. An understanding of the eighth century and of First Isaiah's interpretation is therefore essential.

When the prophet behind First Isaiah was young, the Neo-Assyrian Empire began to intrude into the territory of Israel and Judah. Tiglath-pileser III (745–728 BCE) made his first great western campaign in 743–738 BCE. A coalition of western states under Uzziah of Judah was defeated, leading to the payment of tribute. A second campaign in 734–732 BCE resulted in Gilead, Galilee, and Damascus becoming Assyrian provinces. Pro- and anti-Assyrian parties thereafter entangled the politics of Israel. Menahem of Israel paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser in 738 BCE. The anti-Assyrian Pekah (736–732 BCE) assassinated Pekahiah and then, in 734 BCE, joined with Rezin, king of Aram, in an unsuccessful attempt to force neutral Judah to join their anti-Assyrian coalition. Consequently, Hoshea (732–723 BCE) was appointed king of Samaria by the Assyrians. Relying on Egyptian aid, he rebelled in 725 BCE, which precipitated the destruction of Samaria in 722 BCE by Sargon II, and the deportation of 27,290 Israelites.⁴⁴

In the south, Judah managed to carry out a religious reform under the strong Hezekiah. Like the renaissance under Josiah a century later, it sought a revival of national life and a restoration of the boundaries of the ancient Davidic empire. Hezekiah's own coalition against Assyria, however, did not prove long lasting. In 701 BCE, he found himself besieged in Jerusalem, 'like a bird in a cage', according to Assyrian annals.⁴⁵ Though Jerusalem was not destroyed, Hezekiah had to capitulate, his heavy tribute ending dreams of a return to the glorious days of old.

As Babylon declined, a new figure came to the fore, Cyrus the Persian. The Persians were an Indo-European tribe who settled in the ancient territory of Elam. Their name is derived from Persua (modern Fars), one of their first strongholds. The Persian prince Cambyses had married the daughter of the Median king Astyages, from which union with Cyrus was born. The Median army revolted against Astyages and handed him over to Cyrus around 550 BCE. Having consolidated his position in the east, Cyrus then led a campaign into Asia Minor against Croesus of Lydia, taking Sardis and making Lydia a Persian province in 546 BCE. His propaganda depicted him as liberal toward those whom he defeated. He treated Croesus well and won over the Greek colonies in Asia Minor. Nabonidus' unpopularity contrasted with Cyrus' popularity. Nabonidus' return to Babylon in 539 BCE made possible the celebration of the New Year Festival, apparently for the first time since he had left for Teman ten years before, but the king's sacrilegious behavior in the ceremonies

44. *ANET*, 284.

45. *ANET*, 288.

alienated the priests. The famous ‘Cyrus Cylinder’ shows how their allegiance had shifted to Cyrus. In language akin to Second Isaiah’s about Cyrus (cf. 41:2, 25; 44:24–45:13), it declares, ‘[Marduk] pronounced the name Cyrus, king of Anshan, declared him to be (come) the ruler of the world... Marduk beheld with pleasure his good deeds and upright mind (lit. heart) (and therefore) ordered him to march against his city Babylon.’⁴⁶ Second Isaiah shared this view of Cyrus as liberator and respecter of native religions, declaring him to be the anointed of YHWH (45:1). In the fall of 539 BCE, Nabonidus fled and Cyrus’ army entered Babylon without a battle. Cyrus himself later entered, forbade looting, and appointed a Persian governor, leaving native institutions and traditions undisturbed.

Soon after, Cyrus issued a decree, preserved in Ezra 6:3-5, allowing the temple of Jerusalem to be rebuilt, with the funds to come from the royal treasury. Judah became the province of *Abr Nahara* in the Persian Empire, under a Persian governor.

The Yahwistic Metanarrative of Second Isaiah

The message of Second Isaiah seeks to convince the exiles that the time of languishing in exile is at an end. There is to be imminent liberation from Babylonia, due to the coming conquest of Cyrus of Persia. Thus, as in the Exodus from Egypt, the Babylonian captives are to prepare to return to their homeland. The gods and kings of Babylon cannot keep the captives from leaving, for they are about to fall to the new empire of Persia. Israel in exile and after the return will be the heir of the covenant formerly made with the House of David (2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89). Second Isaiah also argues that the exile to Babylonia enables Judah to become a ‘light to the nations’, the proclaimer of YHWH as the true God who all peoples are to worship.

The prophet is commissioned in 40:1-11 in a heavenly ceremony, which recalls other call narratives in Exodus 3–4, Jeremiah 2–10, Isaiah 6, and Ezekiel 1–2. The distinctiveness of Second Isaiah’s call is the importance placed on the new Exodus-Conquest, which culminates in the journey to the homeland. The book then subverts the popular discouragement obstructing the new Exodus (40:12-31) in a disputation, which contains a series of questions that show that nothing can hinder YHWH’s intent to save the people from exile, including the nations (vv. 12-17), the gods represented by Babylonia and kings (vv. 18-24), and members of the divine court (vv. 25-31). This is followed by a trial

46. *ANET*, 315-16.

scene that pits YHWH against the gods, and Israel against the nations (41:1–42:9). In two parallel scenes (41:1–20 = 41:21–42:9), YHWH judges the nations and their gods to be in the wrong, and upholds Israel as his image and servant. Chapters 42:10–43:8 describe YHWH's victory over chaotic waters and primordial night (vv. 10–16); Israel made blind by the darkness will have light for the journey (vv. 18–20). While Israel's punishment is deserved (vv. 21–25), the people have been forgiven but now are allowed to return to Zion (43:1–8).

The next major section, 43:9–44:5, reminds Israel that it is God's witness to the nations of YHWH's supremacy by its reenactment of the Exodus-Conquest. In 44:6–23, Israel is called to witness to the living and victorious YHWH, in contrast to the statues of the gods that represent powerless deities.

In 44:24–45:13, Cyrus, the Persian king, becomes the center of attention. First mentioned in 41:2–3 and 41:25 as YHWH's instrument, he is called by name in 45:1 and is identified as the anointed (messiah) of the one God. He is divinely commissioned to carry out God's plan for Israel's liberation and new beginning as a nation. In 45:14–25 (also 44:26–28), Cyrus is to rebuild the temple city of Zion.

In chapters 46–47, Second Isaiah announces that the city of Babylon will be destroyed and its departing inhabitants will carry with them the statues of its helpless gods. Chapter 48 admonishes the exiles to make preparations for leaving Babylon and the return home. How many Jewish exiles left is unclear, but they did face the challenge of rebuilding the temple city to fulfill Second Isaiah's visions of the imminent future.

In chapters 49–55, Zion and the servant become the focus of the prophet's interest. The servant recalls Moses the prophet who speaks to Israel in captivity, promising that they will journey to the land of promise (chap. 49). In 50:1–51:8 God once again will be present to his people in captivity and liberation even as he was with their ancestors in Egypt. He will bring to their knees their current enemy, the power of the raging sea of chaos, and all nations who threaten to oppress Zion. Chapters 54 extols Zion, the goal of the Exile, now restored with husband, children, and buildings. Chapter 55 invites all to come to Zion to the banquet, and from that holy shrine, to witness to YHWH's victory that brought them there.

Though they provide little biographical information, the speeches do permit fairly precise dating. They assume that the readers or hearers know that Cyrus, king of Persia, will soon conquer the Babylonian Empire. Such an assumption was only possible after Cyrus deposed his sovereign Astyages in 550 BCE, incorporating Media into the Persian Empire, and conquered Lydia in 546 BCE. That conquest, along with the

palpable decline of the Babylonian Empire, signaled one of those great changes of fortune that every so often reshaped the ancient Near East. The speeches do not mention the entry of Cyrus' army into Babylon in 539 BCE. All of this points to a likely dating of the speeches during the 540s BCE.

It is clear that the prophetic composer of Second Isaiah was aware of Neo-Babylonian culture: the imperial world view, military conquest, economic policies, which adversely affected the victims of conquest, some indication of a possible knowledge of cuneiform,⁴⁷ and some knowledge of royal inscriptions.⁴⁸ In particular, in his effort to resist the empire and to negate the colonization of the minds of his fellow captives from Judah, his attack on cult images points to his concerted efforts to subvert the authenticity of Babylonian cosmology and imperial greatness that, among other things, presented Babylon as the center of the cosmos. In his own likely hidden transcript that eventually became public, the author of Second Isaiah satirizes the animation and knowledge of crafted idols.⁴⁹ The idol satires also undermined an important industry that especially profited Babylonian priesthoods, but this, once known, would have raised the ire of the temple priesthoods. Even so his would prove to be an important strategy of resistance to Babylonian imperialism and would reaffirm the sovereignty of YHWH that would pave the way for several returns to the Jewish homeland during the early Persian period.

The Subversion of the Babylonian Metanarrative

According to its metanarrative, Babylon is the center of the earth and holds together the created order. In addition, it is the sacred metropole of an ever-enduring empire that will not fall to invaders. In his theology of resistance, Second Isaiah seeks to undermine the major features of their imperial world view by means of an intentional mimicry that expresses both the rage of the exiles against their captors as well as the internal desire to become like them.

The exile's rage and mimicry constituted a vision of themselves as rulers and members of a new Jewish empire to which all nations would flow. Second Isaiah's prophetic composer speaks of the fall of those nations who have fought against Israel (41:11-13; 49:25; 51:22-23;

47. Note Paul, 'Deutero-Isaiah and Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions'.

48. Behr, *The Writings of Deutero-Isaiah*; and Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets*, 170. See Berger, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften*.

49. See especially Berlejung, *Die Theologie der Bilder*.

54:15-17) and will even be a ransom for the exiles (43:3-4). Eventually they will come to their former victims in chains, lick the dust from their feet, and even devour their own flesh (45:14; 49:23, 26a). Even so, YHWH, the sovereign Lord of the world, will address these nations (42:6; 49:6) and announce that his salvation will reach all who turn to him and wait for his redemption. Recognizing the redemption YHWH has brought to the exiles (41:5; 42:10-12), they will turn to him of their own choosing, recognize YHWH as the true God, and serve Israel. Israel's role will be that of becoming a 'light to the nations' (49:6). Thus the subjugated nation will one day replace the empire and become the universal sovereign over all other peoples.

One sees another part of this cultural and religious subversion in the composer's description of the divinely chosen ruler or Messiah. In the first of the major sections of the text chapters (Isaiah 40-48), the prophet adapts the language of cuneiform royal inscriptions. Shalom Paul outlines a variety of phrases in these inscriptions, which Second Isaiah would likely have known, based on his language use.⁵⁰ One is the predestination and subsequent affirmation of the king's legitimacy by a divine call. Others include the royal terms, 'shepherd', 'servant', and 'beloved', common to Mesopotamian titlars. Second Isaiah utilizes these to speak of Cyrus II and the servant in the Servant Songs (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).⁵¹ Subsequent to the divine calling of the

50. Paul, 'Deutero-Isaiah and Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions'.

51. See Hallo, *Early Mesopotamian Royal Titles*, 132-42. In Sumer the phrase is 'called by the god by name' (*Sum.mu.pàd.da DN*). Other similar titlars were 'named with a (good) name by the god' (*Sum.mu.[du10].sa4.a DN*), 'beloved of the god' (*Sum.ki.ág DN*), 'favorite of the god' (*Sum.še.ga DN*), 'servant' (*Sum.arad₂*), and 'shepherd' (*Sum.sipa*). These were later found in the Akkadian royal instructions. For example: 'name had been called or designated' by the gods, Akkadian *šumšu/zikiršu/nibissu/nibīt šumišu nabû* and *šumišu/zakār šumišu/nibīt šumišu zakāru*. These are identical to the calling of Cyrus and the 'servant' in Second Isaiah ('I have called you by your name, 43:1; and 'he designated my name', 49:1). Other Akkadian expressions of royal titles include 'the beloved of the god' (*nāram ili*), 'the favorite of the god' (*migar ili*), and 'the chosen of the god' (*itūt [kūn libbi] ili*). These correspond to two titles in Second Isaiah: 'my beloved' (41:8) and 'my chosen one whom I desire' (42:1). A number of kings in Assyria and Babylonia are said to be predestined by the gods to a particular task, while they were still in the womb of the mother. This expression occurs not only in reference to the call and commissioning of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5) but also to the 'Servant' (42:6; 49:1, 5-6, 8). However, in Second Isaiah it is only the 'Servant'. Additionally, the Akkadian terms for 'shepherd' (*rē'ûm*) and 'servant' (*wardum*) are found in reference to Cyrus ('my shepherd', 44:28) and the 'servant' in speaking of YHWH's chosen one throughout the Servant Songs (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).

ruler, the Mesopotamian king is given his primary duty to perform, namely the protection and well-being of those within his empire, including colonials. This is quite similar to the mission of the servant who will 'set the captives free' (cf. Isa. 42:7), that is, liberate them to experience a new beginning.⁵²

Second Isaiah also seeks to undermine the Babylonian metanarrative by identifying Cyrus II as the chosen savior of the exiles in Babylon (44:24-28). In Second Isaiah he is both 'my shepherd' (Isa. 44:28) and 'my anointed' one (Isa. 45:1). The first title is taken from the ideology of kingship in the ancient Near East⁵³ ('shepherd' as a royal title is also found in Jer. 17:16; Zech. 10:2; 11:16; 13:7), while the second is limited to Israel/Judah. Powerful kings including Hammurabi in the eighteenth century and Assurbanipal in the seventh century BCE, were two who bore the title 'shepherd'. Shepherd, in Mesopotamian royal language, referred first to the king's cultic authority as the head of the priesthood and the mediator between humans and the gods; and second to the task of the ruler to protect and provide for his people.⁵⁴ The 'anointed one' is not found in the ancient Near Eastern ideology outside of Israel. In Israel it refers to a prophet's ritual anointing of the one whom YHWH has chosen to rule (1 Sam. 16:6; 24:6-7, 10-11; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sam. 1:14, 16; 19:21-22; 23:1; Pss. 20:6-7; 28:8; 84:9; 89:38, 51; 105:15 par. 1 Chr. 16:22; Ps. 132:10 par. 2 Chr. 6:42; Ps. 132:17; 1 Sam. 2:10; Lam. 4:20; and Hab. 3:13). It is not used of the kings of Northern Israel, but rather of those in the line of David. The responsibility of the Davidic king to build and maintain the temple is now passed on to Cyrus II who will follow the direction of YHWH and rebuild the temple, beginning with the laying of foundations. Thus, Cyrus II becomes the heir of the Davidic and Zion traditions in their revision by Second Isaiah. Jerusalem and the temple will be rebuilt, although no mention is made of the reconstitution of the Davidic monarchy. Now it is Judah who will enjoy God's eternal covenant, not the Davidic dynasty, while Cyrus is the 'anointed one'

52. See the inscription: 'The people of Sippar, Nippur, Babylon, and Borsippa who, through no fault of theirs, have been kept imprisoned in it (i.e. the conquered city of Dur-Yakin), I destroyed their prison and let them see the light' (Paul, 'Deutero-Isaiah and Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions', 182).

53. Gadd, *Ideas of Divine Rule*, 38-39. Also see Bernhardt, *Das Problem der altorientalischen Königsideologie*, 68 n. 1. For 'shepherd' in Akkadian and Sumerian, see Seux, *Epithètes royales akkadiennes et sumériennes: nāgidu* (p. 189), *re'u/rē'ū* (pp. 243-50), *utulla* (p. 356), and Sumerian *sipa* (pp. 441-45).

54. See Soggin, 'רועה *r'h* to tend'.

chosen to carry out Judah's redemption. The identification of Cyrus II with the messiah reshapes the meaning of the Jewish tradition to point to any deliverer sent by God to redeem the oppressed, elect people.

As Bhabha's discussion of ambivalence and mimicry suggests, one sees in Second Isaiah one of the colonized who resists the imperial meta-narrative. In so doing, he is shaped by the conflict between the desire to be the ruler (or at least the representative of the sovereign YHWH who directs history), the view of Cyrus as the new messiah, and the repulsiveness of domination. Assuming he is the 'Servant' in the Servant Songs, the royal imagery embedded in the language of these psalms points to the prophet's assuming the role of the ruler. In imagining himself as the dominant ruler, the colonized servant comes to look down on his conquerors, but as the dominated, he negated the possibility of becoming what is despised. The author's overstatement found in the use of imperial imagery of rule mocks the pretensions of colonialism and becomes a form of resistance to colonial discourse. Mimicry in colonial and postcolonial literature is most commonly seen when members of a colonized society imitate the language, dress, politics, or cultural attitude of their colonizers, but often with a disdain and mockery that subverts their false attitudes of superiority and legitimate rule. Yet Second Isaiah's mimicry allows him to assume a role that rejects the conqueror's expressions of power. Under colonialism and in the context of immigration, mimicry is seen as a pattern of behavior: one copies the person in power, because of the desire to have access to that same power oneself. In the case of the prophetic composer of Second Isaiah, likely the Servant, he mimics the Babylonian tradition of rule and adds that YHWH (not Marduk who is implied but not mentioned by name) providentially controls human destiny.⁵⁵

The proclamation of Second Isaiah also gives expression to the diasporan experience in Babylonian captivity.⁵⁶ Second Isaiah's meta-narrative of Judah has the primary purpose of forging a shared memory and history among his fellows in exile to give them hope for a future and to prepare them for the approaching journey home to Judah. He accomplishes this by setting forth a message of liberation from Babylonian captivity that YHWH is bringing about through the Persian invasion. This portrait of liberation is informed by the language and events of the primal story of the freeing of Jewish ancestors from Egypt

55. See Bhabha, *The Location*, 85-92.

56. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*.

narrated particularly in the first twenty chapters of the book of Exodus and poetically presented in the texts of Psalms 78:12-54, 105:16-45, 106:7-33, and 136:10-16. Second, his metanarrative of new beginnings adapts the formative traditions of Judah's past to a new geographical location that represents an alien environment. The contemporary diasporan experiences may suggest themes and questions that require a new amalgam of cultural hybridity and different traditions with which to interpret life in the exile.⁵⁷ Third, Second Isaiah's metanarrative uncovers comparable experiences in the traditions of Israel's past which aid in understanding the terror of being removed from the familiarity of situations to new and different ones. He especially draws on the Exodus and the David-Zion traditions in accomplishing this understanding. And fourth, the imperial metanarrative of Babylonia is used by the prophet of the exile to offer symbols and understandings that may be integrated with Judah's past traditions.⁵⁸ Second Isaiah does this, for example, with the use of 'wilderness' (40:3) and 'passing through the waters' (43:1-7) to recall the Exodus experience.

In Second Isaiah's poetic narrative of cultural resistance, it is apparent from the fourth Servant Song that the hidden transcript of the prophet of the exile becomes public and leads to his execution. The fourth servant song (52:13-53:12) indicates that the servant is an individual, likely the prophet himself, who was executed, dying a vicarious death for his people in exile. It is certainly possible that this servant was a prophetic leader like Moses during the Exodus from Egypt who pronounces a proclamation of freedom from foreign slavery. If this is an accurate portrayal of the servant, then it would be possible that his message of deliverance, coupled with the approaching conquest of Babylonia and its empire by Cyrus and his army, would have been considered damaging to Babylonian efforts to repel Cyrus' invasion, once it was heard and reported to the authorities. The Babylonians knew they could not successfully resist invasion from without and at the same time rebellion from within. The more radical exiles among the subjugated saw the coming of the Persians as the Jewish community's means of liberation from an oppressive rule.

57. Smith-Christopher, *The Religion of the Landless*, 11; and Cuellar, *Voices of Marginality*.

58. See Kim D. Butler's study of diasporas that focuses on three key elements: exile and return, relationships with the host lands, and interrelationships within the diasporan group: 'Defining Diaspora', 191.

Second Isaiah's Cultural Hermeneutics and the Transformation of Tradition

Making use of fundamental theological traditions and their language that permeated Israel's earlier culture and faith, the prophet speaks of the creation of the cosmos (Genesis 1–2; Psalm 104) and the individual (Gen. 2:5–8, 18–24; 22:8–10; Job 10:8–12), the Exodus (Exod. 12:29–15:19), Zion (2 Sam. 7; Psalms 46; 48), and the covenant with the House of David (2 Sam. 7:1–17; Psalms 2; 89; 110). His expansive Exodus tradition includes not only the departure from Egypt, but also the journey through the wilderness (Exod. 15:22–19:1) and the entrance into the land (Joshua 1–12; Judges 1). These traditions were celebrated in Israelite liturgy in the First and Second Temple periods. In using and adapting these to the exile, the prophet would have drawn from rituals of resistance that would have occurred secretly within the context of a private assembly or communal worship.⁵⁹

The danger to the prophet, of course, was the exposure of his secret transcripts to the Babylonian authorities, something that appears to have happened, if he indeed is the Servant.

Second Isaiah is important because of the transformative, intercultural theology present in his speeches. This is present in particular in his understanding of YHWH, the reshaping of older prophetic speech consisting largely of brief oracles of judgment and salvation to present a fluid discourse that incorporated the theological metamorphosis of ideology, the reformulation of traditions that included circumcision now becoming a rite of passage into the Jewish community and to signify social identity, and the resistance to and subversion of the Babylonian imperial metanarrative, the purpose of which was to legitimate this empire.

Especially in the first large section (chaps. 40–48), Second Isaiah urges his fellow exiles to regard Babylon as the Egypt of old that their ancestors had known. In recalling the narratives of the old Exodus, wandering in the Sinai wilderness, and entrance into the land of Canaan, the prophet used these salvific traditions to speak in similar terms of the new Exodus from Babylon, God's coming to nurture his people in the desert during the Wilderness migration, and then the divinely guided return to the homeland in Judah. These would be the divine acts by which the Judahites will become the true Israel once again. Cyrus is the instrument of YHWH who will bring about the destruction of Babylon, the liberation of the exiles, and the rebuilding of the cities of Judah and especially Zion. In the ancient Near East, the rebuilding of the temple

59. Scott, *Hidden Transcripts*, xi; and Young, *Rituals of Resistance*.

city was the task of the victorious deity. Zion will not be left in ruins. The rebuilding of the temple city and its sanctuary is central to Babylonian religion, particularly carried out by the high god Marduk, who the Babylonians believed to be the creator, the guide of history, and one who chose them to rule what became the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Marduk was also the arbiter of human destiny in Babylonian religion.

In the second large section (chaps. 49–55), the prophet who perhaps is the Servant in all of the Servant Songs, announces the defeat of Babylon to be followed by the journey homeward to Zion. Once there, in a city made of jewels (54:11–12), a great banquet will be held for all to celebrate this new-found redemption. While the exiles are collectively identified as the Servant in 44:21, this is likely a later editorial insertion. The Servant, who is called to a mission to Judah and through it the world, appears in the songs to be the prophet (Jer. 1:3–10; Isaiah 6) who is the individual subject or speaker: 42:1–4 (5–9); 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12. Furthermore, the mythic tradition of YHWH's defeat of chaos is used to speak of the liberation of the exiles (52:9–11).

While there are numerous examples of hybridity and cultural transformation by means of new ideas and manners of behavior in the formulation of the tradition of the new Exodus to Zion, three are especially important: first, the trial speeches (41:1–42:9); second, which will be discussed in a subsequent section, the idol satires; and third, the language of the supremacy of YHWH. In Second Isaiah the trial speeches are not only directed against a sinful Israel of the past but also against the foreign nations, particularly Babylonia and its deities. In these speeches, the prophet states clearly for the first time in the history of Israel the affirmation of YHWH as the one God (41:4; 43:1–10; 44:6, 8; 45:21–22).⁶⁰ As the creator and redeemer throughout the prophet's disquisition, YHWH becomes the sovereign ruler of the cosmos (see, e.g., Isa. 40:12–18, 21–26; 41:2–6; 45:5–8; and 51:9–10). Monotheism has now entered into Israel's theological discourse of faith.

Second Isaiah and the Divine Warrior

Second Isaiah also appropriates and then transforms one of the earliest theological designations of YHWH: he is the Divine Warrior who fights on Israel's behalf in undoing the Canaanites and especially Baal, their god of War. YHWH is now the one who will defeat the rulers of the earth and bring their kingdoms to an end (40:23–26), and in particular he will destroy Daughter Babylon, the 'mistress' of an empire that its people

60. Machinist, 'Mesopotamian Imperialism and Israelite Religion', 238–58.

thought would endure forever (47:1-15). As the Divine Warrior, he provides liberation for the weak and renews their strength, while he also brings the powerful nations to their end (40:29; 41:1). As the providential God who directs human history, YHWH brings from the east a victor to trample nations, some of which comprise those of the extended Babylonian Empire (41:1-6). This chosen liberator is Cyrus, king of Persia (44:28; 45:1).

Economics in Second Isaiah and Resistance

Resistance to the empire was not simply through cultural hermeneutics that led to the reshaping of past theological traditions to revitalize the faith and to resist the empire, but also included economic features best understood through the application of social-scientific studies, including Marxist and Neo-Marxist formulations of product, ownership, classes, and alienation. Second Isaiah's continuous proclamation of the exile's return from exile threatened one source of foreign laborers for the economic institutions of the palace and temples in ancient Babylonia. Indeed, this declaration, if private, was the captives' major hope for liberation and, if it became known in a public transcript, it would have threatened to collapse the entire Babylonian economy dependent on foreign workers to survive. In addition, God's freeing of captives would also bring to an end the supply of resources in the empire that enabled its major institutions of palace and temples to continue. An empire based on the exploitation of its foreign slaves and captured artisans and scribes would suffer enormous economic decline if the transcript became public and was affirmed by different conquered groups in exile.

The strong emphasis on monotheism (40:18; 44:6-8) in opposition to Babylonian polytheism also had revolutionary consequences, especially in regard to economic considerations and royal ideology that pointed to divine and legitimate earthly locations.⁶¹ According to Second Isaiah, YHWH is both the creator and director of history, not Marduk.⁶² As creator, Marduk in Babylonian religion is the one who provides the food necessary for consumption, and as the one who directs history he establishes the empire by supporting the Babylonian kings' conquest and rule of the nations who become the imperial colonies. By transferring these two roles to YHWH and denying the existence of other gods, including

61. See the relevant essays in Pongratz-Leisten, *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*.

62. For Marduk's myth of creation see the 'Enuma Elish', *ANET*, 60-72, 501-503; and for his role as the god of history, see *ANET*, 308-309.

Marduk, the prophet attempts to decolonize the minds of the Jewish captives who were in exile. The rule of Persia is seen to be more benign and less intrusive, while establishing a context in both Babylonia and in the homeland in which the religion and nation of Judah are able to thrive.

In addition, the idol of Nabu (46:1), the scribe and minister of Marduk and in some texts his son, resided in the temple of Ezida, located in Borsippa. Nabu is especially the god of wisdom, which includes knowing the secrecy of divination and sorcery (47:9-13). Further, the attribution of counsel to YHWH (46:10) demonstrates that YHWH is the God of wisdom, not Nabu, and through strategic planning will bring destruction to the empire. The weakness of the Babylonian gods is demonstrated by their being taken as plunder in captivity by Cyrus (46:1-2).

The idol satires were directed not only against the gods of Babylonia in a merely theological dispute to deny they were indeed deities, but also, more importantly, against the imperial ideology that stressed Babylonian kings ruled by means of the decision of the gods, in particular Marduk (40:18-20; 41:5-7, 21-29; 42:8, 17b; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20-21; 46:1-2, 5-7; and 48:5). This attack against the idols had the major objective of undermining the divine legitimation of Babylonian power and cultural supremacy and at the same time damaged the vitality of idol crafting in the Babylonian temples. Isaiah 40:18-20 demonstrates the prophet was familiar with the Babylonian 'mouth washing' ritual (*mīs pī*).⁶³ This ritual pointed to priestly participation in awakening the idol, crafted by skilled artisans, to life.⁶⁴ In this passage, *misken* is likely identified with Akkadian *musukkannus* used in Mesopotamia for ornamental purposes in the making of furniture. Nebuchadnezzar's Wadi Brisk inscription reads: 'A canopy of *musukkannu*-wood, the durable wood, I had covered with real gold' (for the goddess Gula).⁶⁵ The pericope in 40:18-20 indicates the prophet's awareness of the Neo-Babylonian skillful making of votive objects and idols.

Further, as demonstrated in 46:1-2, the prophet parodies the procession of the statues of Bel (Marduk) and his son Nebo (Nabu) who go, not along the processional way to be enthroned in their sanctuaries, but rather into exile, lacking the power to resist their captivity. This captivity, to be carried out by the Persians under Cyrus II, echoes the

63. Berlejung, *Die Theologie der Bilder*, 369-91; and Williamson, 'Isaiah 40, 20'.

64. See Walker and Dick, 'The Induction of the Cult Image'; and Jacobsen, 'The Graven Image'.

65. VAB 4 164 [Nbk 19-WBr] B vi 12-13.

Babylonian taking of Israel's cultic paraphernalia into captivity, including the ark of the covenant. During the Babylonian *akitu* festival, the most important festival in the Babylonian year, Nabu's statue would travel by boat up the Euphrates from the Ezida temple in Borsippa to enter Marduk's temple complex, Esagil. Nabu would join the statue of Marduk in the ritual procession through the Ishtar Gate along Babylon's sacred way. Marduk would then be carried to the Esagil located next to the E-temen-an-ki, 'the House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth'. These cult statues proceeded together, drawn in chariots by ceremonial animals, to the temple complex.⁶⁶ While these idols are to be taken into exile, YHWH is heralded as the one true God (46:1-7). In Babylonia, the making of idols with gold overlay, silver chains, and mulberry wood that resists rot by skilled craftsmen was an economic necessity for the temples' wealth and provided an income for an important guild of workers. Consequently, the condemnation of this business was another way of undermining the Babylonian economy (44:9-20).

The Persians, to whom we turn in the following chapter, treated with respect the cults of the conquered nations, even returning cult images and sacred treasures to their original temples. With the Persian king Cyrus' rise to power, the Judeans are permitted to return to their land, rebuild their temple, and resume life there, albeit life as a colony of the Persian Empire.

66. See Hallo, 'Cult Statue and Divine Image', 14-15; and Midmead, *The Akitu Festival*.