

ANCIENT ISRAEL

From Abraham
to the Roman Destruction
of the Temple

Revised and Expanded Edition

Edited by
Hershel Shanks



BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ancient Israel: from Abraham to the Roman destruction of the Temple/
edited by Hershel Shanks.—Rev. ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-880317-53-2 (hardcover). — ISBN 1-880317-54-0 (paperback)

1. Jews—History—To 70 A.D. I. Shanks, Hershel.

DS121.A53 1999

933—dc21

98-52678

CIP

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4710 41st Street, NW
Washington, DC 20016

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Printed in the United States of America.

Design by AURAS Design, Silver Spring, MD
ISBN 1-880317-53-2 (clothbound)
ISBN 1-880317-54-0 (paperbound)

Exile and Return

From the Babylonian Destruction to the Reconstruction of the Jewish State

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The Exile to Babylonia

The rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the multitude, were carried into exile by Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard. But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen.

(2 Kings 25:11–12)

THE CALAMITIES THAT BEFELL JUDAH WHEN KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR of Babylon crushed Zedekiah's rebellion and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. are stated concisely but poignantly in the narrative prose accounts in the books of Kings and Jeremiah. The king's sons were executed before his eyes; then Zedekiah himself was blinded and imprisoned. The Temple was burned; the Temple officials, military commanders and noblemen were executed; and, finally, the survivors were exiled (2 Kings 25:7–21; Jeremiah 39:1–10 and 52:1–16).

Following this, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as governor. Gedaliah established his administrative center at Mizpah. Although the biblical account does not indicate the extent of Gedaliah's authority, there was apparently some hope for peace and economic recovery under his leadership.¹ This hope was thwarted, however, by the assassination of Gedaliah and the flight of his supporters and others to Egypt. Thus, in addition to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its leaders to Babylonia, this dispersion to Egypt further weakened

the nation (2 Kings 25:22–26; Jeremiah 40:1–44:30). All these developments profoundly affected the course of Jewish life in Palestine and abroad, that is, in the Diaspora.

many exiles? In reprisal for Gedaliah's assassination, the Babylonians deported still more Jews to Babylon. According to Jeremiah, 745 people were deported in 582 B.C.E. (Jeremiah tells us that, previously, 832 people had been deported in 586 B.C.E. and 3,023 in 597 B.C.E., when King Jehoiachin was defeated [Jeremiah 52:28–30]).

There are several surprises in Jeremiah's figures. First, the number of deportees to Babylonia at the time of Gedaliah's assassination was not much smaller than the number of those taken into exile at the destruction of Jerusalem (only 87 fewer). Second, the number deported in the exile of 586 B.C.E. is itself not very large (832). And third, neither of these deportations was as large as the exile of 597 B.C.E.: Of the total number of deportees (4,600), virtually two-thirds (3,023) went into exile with the captivity of King Jehoiachin in 597 B.C.E.

No figures are given in 2 Kings for the number of deportees in 586 B.C.E. (when Jerusalem was destroyed), and no reference is made to a deportation following Gedaliah's assassination. Numbers are given, however, for the first deportation under Jehoiachin. According to 2 Kings 24:14, 10,000 people were exiled at that time (including 7,000 soldiers and 1,000 craftsmen and smiths). This number greatly exceeds the figure given in Jeremiah. Whatever the true figures, it is clear enough that it was the leadership of society that was removed and that about 90 percent of the population remained in Palestine.²

The lack of specific figures in 2 Kings for the exile of 586 B.C.E. is not surprising; the writer wished to stress the destruction of the city and its Temple and the fate of the survivors. But one thing is clear: For the writer of 2 Kings, as for the editor of Jeremiah, the Babylonian Exile began in 597 B.C.E., when Nebuchadnezzar removed and imprisoned King Jehoiachin and appointed Zedekiah as a puppet-king to reign in his stead.

Neither is it surprising then that the concluding words of 2 Kings concern King Jehoiachin. There we learn that in the 37th year of his exile (561 B.C.E.), the king was released from prison and granted a position of status by the Babylonian king Evil-merodach (Amel-Marduk in Babylonian records) (2 Kings 25:27–30; see also Jeremiah 52:31–34). Why was this important to the biblical writers? Because their hope for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty (the divine election of which played such an important role in their theology of history) lay with Jehoiachin, not with Zedekiah. Zedekiah had been appointed king by the Babylonians only after Jehoiachin had been taken hostage; Zedekiah's reign was viewed by many as only temporary.³ In Babylonia, Jehoiachin was regarded as the exiled Judahite king,

both before and after the deportation of 586 B.C.E. It was certainly not accidental that the leader of the first wave of Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem was Jehoiachin's son, Sheshbazzar, and that the builder of the Second Temple was his grandson, Zerubbabel.⁴

In short, according to the editors of 2 Kings and Jeremiah, the Exile to Babylonia began in 597 B.C.E. when King Jehoiachin was taken hostage by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:12–17; Jeremiah 52:28–30). This was the first and largest of three separate deportations; a second deportation occurred at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. (2 Kings 25:8–12; Jeremiah 52:12–16) and, according to Jeremiah, a third occurred after the assassination of Gedaliah in 582 B.C.E. (Jeremiah 52:30).

The Book of Chronicles presents quite a different picture: Here there is only one deportation, at the time of the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C.E., and indeed very little is said about it (2 Chronicles 36:20–21). Although the Chronicler records the deportation of Jehoiachin himself in 597 B.C.E. (2 Chronicles 36:10), he does not associate the beginning of the national Exile with that event. Rather, the Chronicler states that “the precious vessels of the house of the Lord” were removed to Babylon with the exile of Jehoiachin; the removal of the Temple vessels is what is important, not the removal of the people.

Second Chronicles is a simplified retelling of the story in which the historian has stressed what he considers most significant. The Temple—its plan, construction, furnishings, administration and service—is of paramount importance throughout the Chronicler's history. In Ezra 1–6 (a continuation of the narrative of 2 Chronicles 36), the Chronicler regards the return of the Temple vessels at the end of the Exile as an important link in establishing continuity between the cultic establishment of the First and Second Temples (Ezra 1:7–11, 5:14–15, 6:5).⁵ For the Chronicler, when the Jews returned from Exile, they returned not with a king to reestablish the older political order, but with the Temple vessels to continue the cultic order that had allegedly existed in ancient times.

Equally important for the Chronicler is his claim that the Exile resulted in the land becoming desolate and lying fallow (in effect keeping its own sabbath) (2 Chronicles 36:21). This description of the land seems to have been derived from a tradition (Leviticus 26:1–39) preserved in the Holiness Code; the code states that the punishment for idolatry is banishment to a foreign land, with the result that the land lies fallow:

And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheath the sword after you; and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste. Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbaths.

(Leviticus 26:33–34)

The Chronicler also made use of Jeremiah's prophecy of an exile of 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11, 29:10), not simply to indicate that this would be the duration of the Exile, but to stress that the land would have a tenfold (seven years times ten) sabbath rest:

He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

(2 Chronicles 36:21)

The prophet Zechariah also uses the 70-year designation to characterize the period of divine anger (Zechariah 1:12; 7:3,5) and is also certainly dependent on Jeremiah. If the number 70 was important, one had to begin counting at some point. Both Zechariah and the Chronicler chose to begin with the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.,⁶ not the captivity of Jehoiachin in 597 B.C.E.

The Chronicler's account of the Exile appears to have been shaped by his editorial concerns. It is thus less useful for historical reconstruction than the traditions in 2 Kings and Jeremiah, especially when Chronicles is in disagreement with these two sources. What does seem fairly certain, however, is that the Babylonian Exile began before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. When the deportees in 586 B.C.E., and at any subsequent time, reached Babylonia they joined a Jewish community that was already established. Given that the Judahite leaders were among the last to be deported, the task of reestablishing the community began in earnest after 586 B.C.E.

Moreover, in the late eighth century B.C.E., exiles from Israelite Samaria had been settled by the Assyrians in western Syria, Mesopotamia and Media (see 2 Kings 15:29, 17:6; 1 Chronicles 5:26). The annals of Sargon II indicate a deportation/settlement (and also military conscription) of about 27,000 Israelites.⁷ The preaching of Ezekiel shows that not all of these communities had been assimilated by pagan cultures; much of this biblical book is concerned with the reunification of the Judahite and Israelite branches of the nation after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. Indeed, some passages in Ezekiel read as if they were actually directed at specific Israelite—that is, northern—communities in exile. The Jews of the military colony at Elephantine in Egypt (see below) may also have been of northern, Israelite origin.⁸

Thus, while we may date the Babylonian Exile from 597 and 586 B.C.E., this event was but part of a long process of establishing Israelite/Judahite settlements in Mesopotamia and Babylonia, a process that had begun earlier and that would continue. Most of Israel was not deported, and many of the descendants of the exiles never returned; the Jewish people had become a people both in their ancestral homeland and in the Diaspora.

“By the Waters of Babylon”: The Jewish Exiles in Babylonia

The familiar words of Psalm 137, “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion,” are often cited as expressing the mood of the Babylonian exiles. This is not surprising; the psalm is a poem of great beauty, in which plaintive lyricism is mixed both with frustration (“How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?”) and with nostalgia and loyalty (“If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!”). What it expresses was certainly part of the experience of Exile for many of the deportees. But it falls short of conveying all we know of Jewish life in Babylonia and thus ought not to be taken as characteristic of the Exile experience as a whole. A more representative text—certainly of the social and economic dimensions of life by the waters of Babylon—is found in a letter written by Jeremiah to the deportees after 597 B.C.E.:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

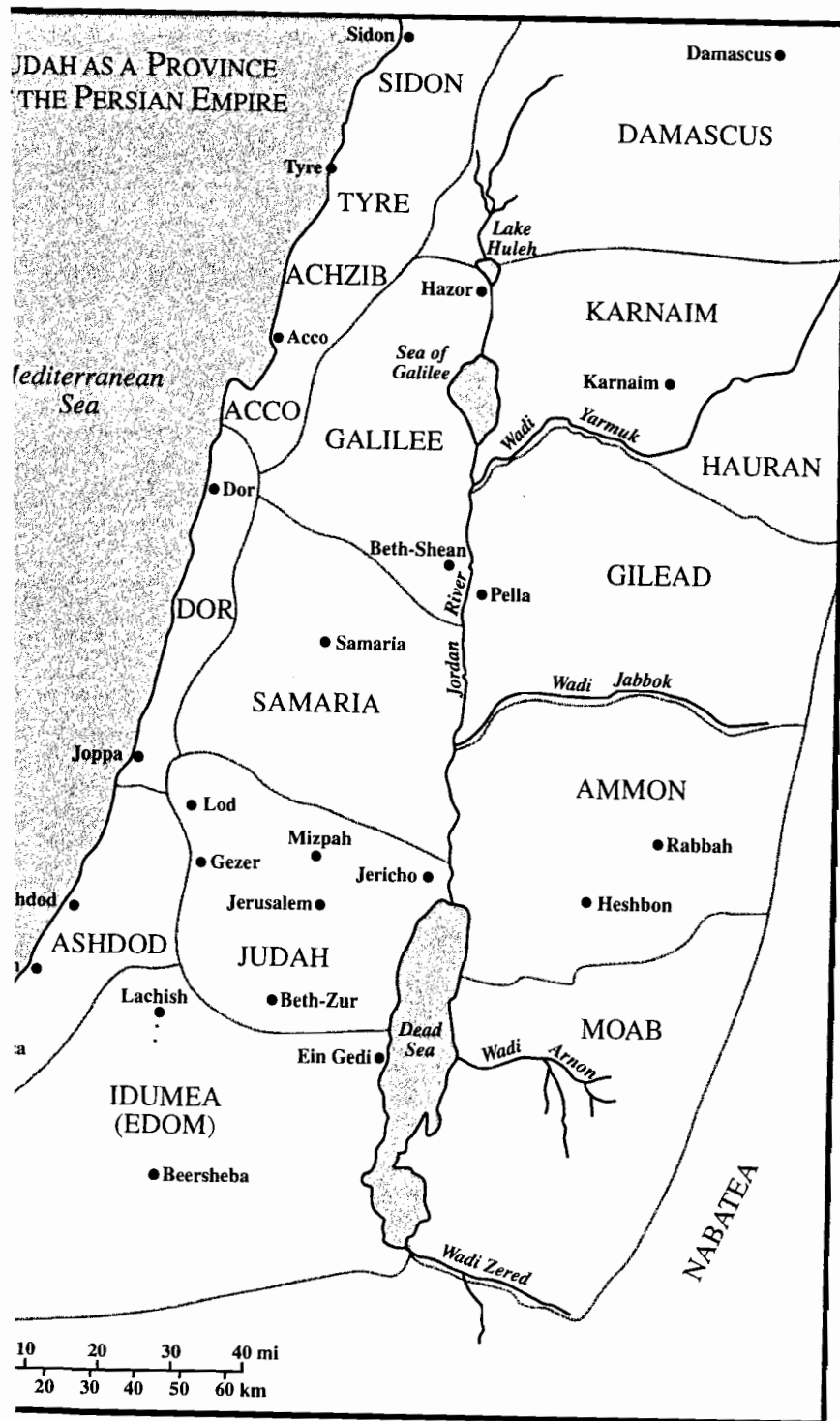
(Jeremiah 29:5–7)

Indeed, this seems to be how things worked out, though hardly in deference to the prophet's appeal.

Although our knowledge of Jewish life in Babylonia is fragmentary, we are nonetheless able to put together a general picture of the situation from allusions in contemporary biblical texts, from later biblical texts and from extrabiblical sources.

With the exception of some members of the royal Judahite family and aristocracy, the people did not live in “captivity”; they were settled on deserted agricultural land where they were free, as Jeremiah says, to “build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce.” Their status probably did not permit them to be landowners; more likely, they were land-tenants on royal estates.⁹ We know that some Jews were settled beside “the river Chebar” (Ezekiel 1:1–3, 3:15,23), an irrigation canal of the Euphrates (Akkadian, *nāru kabari*) that flowed through Nippur. One Jewish settlement beside the Chebar was known as Tel-abib (Ezekiel 3:15); if this settlement was even then a tell, or mound containing a buried ancient city, it might be evidence that the Babylonians settled the Jewish deportees at or near the sites of ruined, abandoned cities, perhaps as part of a program to develop unused land resources. Further support for this suggestion comes from the fact that Jewish exiles were apparently also settled at Tel-melah and

Life in Babylonia



Tel-harsha (Ezra 2:59). Other places of Jewish settlement mentioned by name are Cherub, Addan/Addon, Immer (Ezra 2:59; Nehemiah 7:61), and Casiphia (Ezra 8:17). The locations of these cities are not known. Some Jews were probably also conscripted into military and other imperial services, as was the custom both of the Assyrians and of the Babylonians in their dealings with deportees.

Evidence of Jews in the *nāru kabari* (Chebar) region also comes from a number of cuneiform documents discovered in excavations at Nippur. The so-called Murashu texts contain the records of a large Babylonian family banking firm. Copies of contracts made by Jews and other documents concerning Jews testify to the existence of Jewish communities in 28 settlements in the Nippur area. Although dating from the Persian period (fifth century B.C.E.), these records indicate that Jews had prospered in agriculture, trade and banking during the century after their settlement there. There appears to be no discrimination against the Jews even though they were descendants of foreigners. Jews made the same kinds of contracts at the same interest rates as others. Several held positions of prestige, one in the Murashu firm itself, another in government service. One Jew held a military fief, for which he was obliged to render military services or to furnish a substitute.¹⁰

Indications that some of the Jews of the Exile managed to accumulate wealth also appear in Ezra 1:5-6 and 2:68-69, which speak of contributions in gold, silver and precious goods for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Ezra 2:65 mentions male and female slaves who returned with their Jewish masters. Not only were Jews permitted to own slaves, some were financially able to do so.

The recognized leader of the Jewish community during the Babylonian Exile was the Davidic monarch Jehoiachin. Although his leadership was only titular, it was nonetheless significant. From the very beginning of Jehoiachin's captivity in 597 B.C.E., there was apparently hope for his restoration to power, even though the prophet Jeremiah counseled against a naive optimism in this regard (Jeremiah 28-29). Ezekiel indicated his own loyalty to the hostage king by dating events from the year 597 B.C.E. and expressing the hope that Jehoiachin's family would again shepherd the people in their native land (Ezekiel 34:20-31, 37:24-28). In addition to the biblical texts, two sets of epigraphic data may testify to the status of Jehoiachin in exile: First, a number of seal impressions found throughout Judah bear the inscription "Belonging to Eliakim, steward of Yaukin"; second, a cuneiform document from the official archives in Babylon lists rations of foods to be supplied from the royal storehouses to King Yaukin of Judah, his five sons and other Judahite officials. William F. Albright, who discovered the first of the Yaukin seals at Tell Beit Mirsim, suggested that Yaukin was a

**Jehoiachin,
a leader
in exile**

form of Jehoiachin and that Eliakim was the Judahite administrator of the crown properties of Jehoiachin following the king's deportation. Recently, however, scholars have questioned this identification.¹¹ Albright argued that Zedekiah, the puppet-king appointed by the Babylonians, decided not to confiscate Jehoiachin's wealth because he was insecure in his own position. Zedekiah was unsure whether Jehoiachin would be restored.¹² As for the significance of the ration for Jehoiachin in the Babylonian cuneiform archives, we may cite Albright:

Now we know that Jehoiachin was not only the legitimate king of the Jewish exiles in Babylonia from their own point of view, he was also regarded by the Babylonians as legitimate king of Judah, whom they held in reserve for possible restoration to power if circumstances should seem to favor it.¹³

Jehoiachin was released from prison in 561 B.C.E. by Nebuchadnezzar's successor, Amel-Marduk, and thereafter received provisions by royal allowance (2 Kings 25:27–30 and the Babylonian cuneiform archives). Thus, the exiled king and his family enjoyed some measure of freedom in Babylonia. This did not, however, result in Jehoiachin's restoration to power in his native land. We do not know what prompted Jehoiachin's release, and we can only guess at how this action may have related to internal Babylonian politics.¹⁴ All we know is that Jehoiachin spent the remainder of his life in Babylonia as the recognized head of the exiled Jewish community.

The release of Jehoiachin and the attendant hopes at reestablishing the monarchy could well have inspired his contemporary, the incumbent chief priest Jehozadak, to embark on the task of editing the authoritative texts of the emerging Bible: the Pentateuch and Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings).¹⁵ The task of compiling and redacting these texts was certainly the most significant accomplishment of the exiled community. It is impossible to conceive of this activity without the involvement of the learned priestly stratum of Babylonian Jewish society.

Jewish communal leadership in Babylonia appears to have been in the hands of officials known as "elders"—the elders of the Exile, of Judah and of Israel (Jeremiah 29:1; Ezekiel 8:1, 14:1, 20:1). Texts concerning the return to Jerusalem also mention "the heads of families" (e.g., Ezra 2:68, 8:1). The family was apparently the basic unit of social organization in Babylonia. Whether families kept the strict genealogical records indicated in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 is moot; one group of priests was chided (and subsequently disenfranchised) for not having done so (Ezra 2:59–63; Nehemiah 7:61–65). The genealogical tables in Ezra 2:36–58 and Nehemiah 7:39–60 show a keen interest in the families of the cultic orders, that is, the priests, Levites, *nethinim* (temple servants), and a group known as the "sons of Solomon's servants."

A passage in Ezra 8:15–20 indicates that these families were concentrated in particular places; Ezra secured a number of Levites and *nethinim* from "the place Casiphia."

This raises the question of cultic or religious activities among the exiles in Babylonia. From a hoard of papyri known as the Elephantine papyri, we know that a Jewish temple existed in Egypt at Elephantine (Yeb) during the fifth century B.C.E.¹⁶ From Josephus we know that in the Hellenistic period another Jewish temple was built in Egypt at Leontopolis.¹⁷ We also learn from Josephus of a Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim.¹⁸ The Deuteronomic restriction on multiple shrines and the command to make pilgrimage to and perform cultic rites at only one place (Deuteronomy 12) was interpreted as applying only to worship in the land of Canaan, not outside. It thus leaves open the question of worship in the Diaspora.

It is sometimes suggested that the synagogue (as a substitute for the temple) came into being at this time. But there is no specific evidence for this, and the question has been debated with no clear resolution.¹⁹ Part of the difficulty stems from the lack of agreement on exactly what is meant by synagogue: Is it the institution known from later times, with clearly defined functions relating to the reading of the law and prayers, or is it simply a meeting place for community activities?²⁰ Whichever, the origins of the synagogue are obscure. Nor is it clear that its original purpose, functionally speaking, was to provide a place of worship for those who either did not have a temple or found it inconvenient to get to a temple. There were, for example, synagogues in Jerusalem during the Roman period, before the destruction of the Second Temple; such synagogues clearly were not needed as substitutes for the nearby Temple and its rituals. Hence, many of the functions associated with later synagogues (dating after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E.), such as Torah study, law, charity and hospitality, may also be associated with the Second Temple equivalent. From the earliest periods (the sixth century B.C.E. to the Hellenistic period), typical gathering places around city gates and other open areas could well have served as models for the later closed and architecturally discrete entity known as the synagogue.²¹

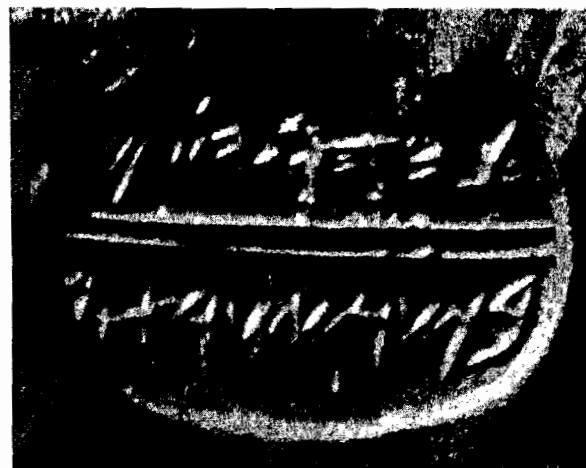
The question of how and where Jews may have worshiped in Babylonia needs to be addressed in the context of the communal character of Jewish prayer. Prayer may be offered in solitude, as was the case with Daniel in Babylon; Daniel prayed three times daily in his chamber, facing a window that opened toward Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10–11). But the experience of prayer in Israel was rooted in community worship. It is through the shared experience of worship that one becomes accustomed to a specific number of daily prayers (the reference in Daniel is the earliest to the thrice-daily practice that later

A temple in Babylon

became standard in Judaism), and it is through group conditioning that prayers come to have a standard form: in the case of Daniel's prayer, thanksgiving, petition and supplication (Daniel 6:11).

A shared experience similarly influences religious rites of fasting. It inculcates the custom of observance, determines the dates on which one fasts and sets the standards of what is appropriate for fasting (from what one abstains, conditions of sorrow and mortification, penitential prayers, personal adornment, etc.). We learn from Zechariah 7:1–6 that it had become the custom during the 70 years of the Exile to fast in the fifth and seventh months, that is, in the month in which the Temple had been burned (the seventh day of the fifth month, according to 2 Kings 25:8, although in Jeremiah 52:12 it is the tenth day of the fifth month) and the month in which Gedaliah had been assassinated (the seventh month [2 Kings 25:25; Jeremiah 41:1–2]). A longer catalogue of fast days appears in Zechariah 8:18–19. It includes fasts in the fourth and tenth months, that is, in those months in which the wall of Jerusalem had first been breached by the Chaldeans/Babylonians (the ninth day of the fourth month [2 Kings 25:3–4; Jeremiah 52:6]) and during the previous year, in the month in which the siege of Jerusalem had begun (the tenth day of the tenth month [2 Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 52:4]). Zechariah's consideration of fast days was clearly inspired by a delegation from Beth El, which questioned the appropriateness of fasting during the time of joy and celebration signaled by Cyrus's Edict of Return and the imminence of the rededication of the Second Temple;²² but the fact that some Judahites were concerned about the continuation of fast days indicates that fast days were observed in many quarters of Judahite society on the eve of the restoration of the Temple.

If Jews in Babylonia observed these fasts, they must have had some place to convene. Esther 4:16 indicates that fasting was a communal phenomenon among Jews in the Exile: "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do." But neither a temple with sacred precincts nor a public house of prayer would have been necessary for such gatherings; any open place with adequate space would have sufficed. "The place (*maqôm*) Casiphia," with its concentration of Levites and temple servants, skilled in liturgy, could have been such a place of gathering; if so, it was certainly not the only place. In this connection, Psalm 137 speaks of weeping (rites of mourning) beside the waters (that is, water canals) of Babylon. Ezekiel 1:1–3:15 mentions the banks of the river Chebar (the canal *nâru kabari*) as the place of the prophet's "visions of God" (appropriately so, if it was a place of community worship). Later texts dealing with the Jewish Diaspora of the Greco-Roman world testify to the



NAHMAN AVIGAD, "SEALS OF EXILES," ISRAEL EXPLORATION JOURNAL 15:4

Exilic seal impression. Made by a sixth-century B.C.E. seal only three-fourths of an inch long, this impression reads "Belonging to Yehoyishma, daughter of Sawas-sar-usur." Yehoyishma, which includes the divine element *yeho*, a form of Yahweh, is a type of name that originated in Babylonia during the Exile. Sawas-sar-usur is a well-known neo-Babylonian name that means "Shamash [the Babylonian sun-god] protect the king!" Thus, the Jewish woman who owned this seal had a Yahwistic name, but her father had a neo-Babylonian pagan name.

Israeli archaeologist Nahman Avigad suggested that one of the first exiles in Babylonia gave his son the local name Sawas-sar-usur. By the time this man had a daughter, there was a resurgence of national and religious feeling among the Jews in Exile. Perhaps seeking divine help to return to Jerusalem, Sawas-sar-usur gave his daughter a Jewish name that means "Yahweh will hear."

existence of public places of prayer by the seaside or beside rivers.²³ One such witness comes from the New Testament, in the story of Paul in Philippi:

We remained in this city some days; and on the sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer.

(Acts 16:12–13)

Thus, while there may have been special places of public assembly, such as the area around a city gate, where religious rituals were performed, it is clear that there were no buildings associated with these places.

We may assume that not all Jews were faithful to the religion of their parents; some may have assimilated into Babylonian culture. But of this we have no direct evidence. We do know that Ezekiel was concerned with Jews adopting Babylonian cults (Ezekiel 8:14). But his concern was directed primarily at the situation in the Jewish homeland rather than in the Exile. Deutero-Isaiah's oracles against idol

Assimilation

worship (Isaiah 44:9–17, 46:1–13), Zechariah's vision of the Woman in the Ephah (Zechariah 5:5–11) and the oracles on the End of False Prophecy (Zechariah 13:2–6) all point to the lure of paganism during the period of the Exile and the severe threat to Yahwism that it represented. The attraction of idols was, and remained, a problem for spiritual leaders in the Jewish Diaspora, as may be seen from later writings, including the letter of Jeremiah and the Wisdom of Solomon 13–15 (from the Apocrypha). In addition, we know that some Jews adopted Babylonian names. Others, while using Hebrew/Aramaic names, replaced the more traditional Israelite/Jewish element *yahu* (a form of Yahweh) with the more general divine element *el*.²⁴ This indicates a degree of assimilation, but not an abandonment of traditional Jewish religion.

Members of the house of Jehoiachin had Babylonian names, probably out of deference to their royal patrons. Nahman Avigad has published a seal of a woman who had a traditional Jewish name, but whose father bore a Babylonian name, perhaps reflecting the renewal of national aspirations among Babylonian Jews of the second generation in Exile—to which the oracles of Deutero-Isaiah also bear witness.²⁵ Most notable in this connection are the names of Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:8, 5:14) and Zerubbabel (Haggai 1:1,14; Zechariah 4:6–10a), both members of the Davidic family and governors of Judah, whose names clearly reflect the pagan milieu of Babylonia.

In short, the Jewish deportees were settled in Babylonia as land-tenants of royal estates in undeveloped areas. As such, they joined other ethnic minorities in the Mesopotamian/Babylonian region, including some previously settled Israelite communities. With the exception of some members of the royal family, the Judahites were not imprisoned or held as captives. They were free to engage in agriculture and commerce and to accumulate wealth, although on a modest scale. They were not coerced to abandon their traditional cultural ways or social organization. The imprisoned (and later freed) king Jehoiachin was their titular head, although *de facto* leadership was in the hands of elders, priests and/or heads of families. Their major pragmatic challenge was compiling their sacred writings, the Torah and the Former Prophets. Their corporate life included religious observances of prayer and public fasting. We have no evidence that they erected public buildings for such communal activities. Some Jews were assimilated into Babylonian culture; others were not. When the opportunity arose, a number of Jewish families returned to their homeland to reconstruct a national life there. Many, however, remained in Babylonia, where the Jewish Diaspora continued as an important cultural phenomenon for more than two millennia.

“And These from the Land of Syene”:

The Jewish Diaspora in Egypt

The fate of the Jewish exiles in Babylonia would probably be of little concern to us if the restoration of the Jewish state in the late sixth-early fifth century had not been the work of Jewish leaders who came from Babylonia. These leaders led the initial return to Jerusalem, the subsequent rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel and, finally, the cultic/national reforms and the reconstruction of the city under Ezra and Nehemiah. In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the local Judahite population (which had not been exiled) is regarded with contempt; the only citizens who seem to matter (and the only Temple personnel allowed to function) are those with proper genealogical records brought from Babylonia. Nonetheless, there were Jews who never left the land, and there were Jewish Diaspora communities in places other than Babylonia—most notably in Egypt.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah mention no return of Egyptian Jews to Judah during this period. This may have been because there were none, or none worth mentioning, or none the Babylonian Jews wished to acknowledge. Nevertheless, we are reminded of the words of Jeremiah “concerning all the Jews that dwelt in the land of Egypt, at Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Memphis, and in the land of Pathros ...” (Jeremiah 44:1–14):

I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, so that none of the remnant of Judah who have come to live in the land of Egypt shall escape or survive or return to the land of Judah, to which they desire to return to dwell there; for they shall not return, except some fugitives.

(Jeremiah 44:13–14)

On the other hand, Deutero-Isaiah, a prophet active among the exiles in Babylonia, included the Jews of Egypt among those he envisioned as returning to Zion: “Lo, these shall come from afar, and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene” (Isaiah 49:12).

“The land of Syene” was the southern frontier of Egypt at the first cataract of the Nile (modern Aswan), as in the formulaic expression “the land of Egypt ... from Migdol to Syene, as far as the border of Ethiopia [or Nubia]” (Ezekiel 29:10). Syene was located at the southern border, and Migdol was on the northeastern frontier. The military encampments at both of these sites had settlements of foreign mercenaries and their families.

The existence of a Jewish community at Syene is known from the Elephantine papyri (the major fortress at Syene was on an island in the



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Elephantine papyrus. Following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., a Jewish community thrived on Elephantine Island, in the Upper Nile River. This well-preserved papyrus—folded several times, bound with a string, sealed with a bulla and endorsed—was discovered among a hoard of letters, deeds and other documents belonging to the community. According to the papyri, a Jewish temple, oriented toward Jerusalem, stood on Elephantine Island in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E.

Nile later called Elephantine; Jewish troops stationed there referred to it as Yeb).

The existence of Jews in the Migdol area, on the northeastern border of Egypt, may also be alluded to in the Elephantine documents. Jeremiah, as we have seen, speaks of Jews at Migdol and at nearby Tahpanhes (later called Daphni, modern Tel Dafneh) and also at Noph (Memphis) and Pathros (Nubia). According to Jeremiah, Johanan ben Kareah led his group of refugees to the area of Migdol and Tahpanhes after Gedaliah's assassination disrupted the political and social order (Jeremiah 43:8–13).

Excavations east of the Suez Canal under the direction of Eliezer Oren of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev have revealed that, in the early sixth century B.C.E., this area was fertile and densely populated, and had a navigable water system, as well as irrigation and drainage canals. Migdol was not only an Egyptian military center but a commercial and industrial area. Imported pottery types testify to the existence of a large foreign element in the population, which is not surprising because the Egyptians had, since the reign of Psammetichus I (664–610 B.C.E.), come to rely on foreign mercenaries to garrison their border stations and to fill the ranks of their regular army. Nor is it surprising that Jeremiah's catalogue of areas of Jewish residence follows a line of defense systems established by the Egyptians, from the northeast border (Migdol) to Nubia (Pathros). It was in these centers that Jewish soldiers and their families lived, and so it was to these centers that their compatriots would have come when settling in Egypt.²⁶

A good deal of information concerning life in the Jewish settlement at the border station of Syene/Yeb during the fifth century B.C.E. comes from the Elephantine papyri. The papyri—Aramaic archival documents, including copies of correspondence, memoranda, contracts and other legal materials—first came to light at the end of the 19th century and were published by numerous scholars over a 60-year period (1906–1966). They have recently been the subject of intensive investigation (with corrections of some mistakes made by earlier scholars) by Bezalel Porten of Hebrew University.²⁷ The documents date from 495 to 399 B.C.E. and are thus roughly contemporaneous with the reconstruction of the Jewish state under Ezra and Nehemiah; but the Jewish community at Elephantine had existed for at least a century before the earliest Elephantine documents.

The most intriguing aspect of Jewish communal life at Elephantine was a temple dedicated to the Hebrew God Yahu (YHW, a variant form of YHWH). According to the papyri, the temple had been destroyed by the Egyptians at the instigation of the priests of the local cult of Kimura in the 14th year of Darius II (410 B.C.E.). Exactly when the Temple was built is unknown, but it was sometime prior to the Persian conquest of Egypt in 525 B.C.E. Jedaniah, the Jewish communal leader at Elephantine, wrote to Bagohi, the Persian governor of Judah, requesting assistance in rebuilding the Elephantine temple. Jedaniah also wrote to Delaiah and Shelemiah, the sons and successors of Sanballat, governor of Samaria, with the same request. Other correspondence with Jerusalem included requests for information on the correct procedure for observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover) and on matters of cultic purity.

Although Jedaniah represented his Elephantine temple as a regular Jewish sanctuary, just like the Jerusalem Temple, scholars have tended to regard the cult of Yahu at Elephantine as a syncretistic mixture of Yahwism and Canaanite (especially northern Canaanite) cults of Bethel, Anat-Bethel, Eshem, Eshem-Bethel, Herem-Bethel and Anath-YHW. This is because the names of these deities are referred to in judicial oaths and salutations used by Jews in the Elephantine documents. Accordingly, a northern, Israelite origin of these colonists has been suggested. Porten, on the other hand, contends that “the evidence for a syncretistic communal cult of the Jewish deity dissipates upon close inspection” (although “individual Jewish contact with paganism remains”). According to Porten, the temple was established by priests from Jerusalem who had gone into self-imposed exile in Egypt during the reign of King Manasseh (c. 650 B.C.E.) to establish a purer Yahwistic temple there.²⁸

Whether or not the cult of Yahu at Elephantine was syncretistic, or the Jews of Elephantine were themselves syncretistic, one thing remains clear: Pagan religion was more influential in the life of the Jews of

Upper Egypt than it was in the life of Jews in Babylonia. The tradition preserved in Jeremiah 44:15–30 records the worship of a goddess called “the Queen of Heaven” (compare Jeremiah 7:18) by the Jews of Johanan ben Kareah’s community in the Pathros-Migdol area of Egypt. Similar tendencies probably prevailed among the Jews in Upper Egypt. This may explain why Jeremiah judges the Jews of Egypt so harshly. This may also be why we read nothing of the Jews of Egypt playing any sort of role in the reconstruction of the Jewish nation during the Persian period.

Return and Restoration Under the Persians

For we are bondmen; yet our God has not forsaken us in our bondage, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.

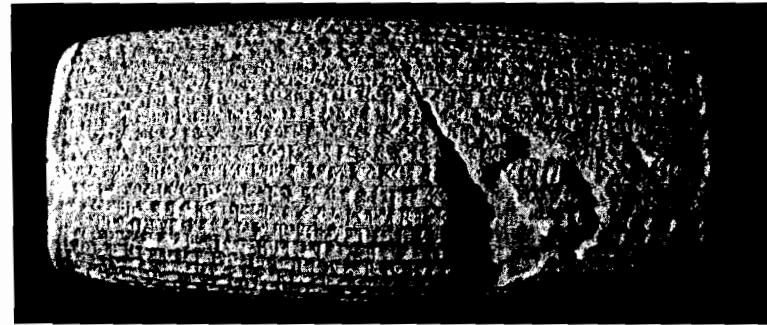
(Ezra 9:9)

When Cyrus the Great, the Achaemenid ruler of Persia, conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.E., the Persians succeeded the Babylonians as the major imperial power of the Near East. In contrast to their Assyrian and Babylonian predecessors, the Achaemenid Persians presented themselves to their subject states as a benevolent power concerned not just with garnering taxes but also with maintaining peace and order throughout the empire. The territories formerly administered by the Assyrians and Babylonians were reorganized into a system of satrapies and provinces; local governments were strengthened; roads and systems of communication were developed; and—most important for the Jews—displaced and exiled peoples were encouraged to return to their ancestral homelands and to reestablish local religious and political institutions in order to play supportive roles in this new concept of empire.

This is the political background of the decree of Cyrus preserved in 2 Chronicles 36:23 and Ezra 1:2–4:

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, “The Lord, the God of Heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and has charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people—may His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the House of the Lord God of Israel—He is the God who is in Jerusalem; and let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods, and with beasts besides freewill offering(s) for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”

(Ezra 1:2–4)



ZEV RADOVAN, JERUSALEM

Cyrus Cylinder. The inscription written in cuneiform on this 10-inch-long clay barrel tells how the great god Marduk chose Cyrus (559–529 B.C.E.) to supplant the impious tyrant who was then king of Persia, and of how Cyrus went on to conquer the equally odious king of Babylon, Nabonidas. It then proclaims, “I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king,” and describes his new religious policy of toleration, which allowed subject peoples to return to their homelands and repair their ruined sanctuaries.

The Bible records a similar decree of Cyrus that permitted the Jews to resettle Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple in about 539 B.C.E. (2 Chronicles 36:23 and Ezra 1:2–3).

Although the text of this decree is preserved only in the Bible, it is not dissimilar in spirit and style to an edict of Cyrus known as the Cyrus Cylinder. In this document, Cyrus credits his accomplishments to the Babylonian deity Marduk for the benefit of his Babylonian subjects, just as in the Bible he is said to have acknowledged the assistance of Yahweh; his policy of rebuilding ruined sanctuaries and resettling dispersed populations is also reflected in the Cyrus Cylinder:²⁹

To the cities of Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunna, the cities of Zamban, Metuma, Der, as far as the region of Gutium, the holy cities beyond the Tigris whose sanctuaries had been in ruins over a long period, the gods whose abode is in the midst of them, I returned to their places and housed in lasting abodes. I gathered together all their inhabitants and restored to their dwellings.

The exiled Jewish community of Babylonia greeted Cyrus as a liberator and saw his work as fulfilling a divine purpose in national redemption:

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: “I am the Lord, who made all things, who stretched out the heavens alone ...” who says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose”; saying of Jerusalem, “She shall be built,” and of the Temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.”

(Isaiah 44:24,28)

But the task of national reconstruction was not without difficulties. The returning exiles found that their hopes conflicted with the new

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territorial hegemonies that had come into being during their absence—most particularly Samaria, which aspired to exercise control over the Judahite territory.³⁰

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According to biblical sources, there were successive waves of Jewish repatriation under Persian rule. The first was led by Sheshbazzar, the son of King Jehoiachin, who had been taken into captivity in 597 B.C.E. (Sheshbazzar is called Shenazzar in 1 Chronicles 3:18). This first return occurred not long after 539 B.C.E., when Cyrus conquered Babylon and subsequently issued a decree that provided for the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple (Ezra 1:1–11). Sheshbazzar was entrusted with the Temple vessels (Ezra 1:7–8, 5:14–15) and is reported to have laid the foundation for the rebuilt Temple (Ezra 5:16). The rebuilding of the Temple becomes a centerpiece of the Book of Haggai and First Zechariah (chapters 1–8), which presumes that this took place in the time of Zerubbabel (520 B.C.E.), the son of Shealtiel and grandson of Jehoiachin.³¹ The nature of the actual work done at the time of the first return, however, remains a mystery. No figures are given for those who returned under Sheshbazzar; it was at best a modest and unpretentious beginning.

A major wave of returning exiles was led by Zerubbabel, and by the high priest Joshua, son of Jehozadak, apparently during the early years of the administration of Darius (522–486 B.C.E.; see Ezra 2:2, 3:2,8, 4:2–3, 5:1–2; Nehemiah 7:7, 12:1,47; Haggai 1:1, 2:2; Zechariah 3:1–4:14). A census of the returnees, who numbered 42,360 people, plus 7,337 servants and 200 singers, is given in Ezra 2:1–67 and Nehemiah 7:6–73.

Zerubbabel and Joshua apparently first established an altar on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and then began to construct the Temple in the second year of Darius's reign (520 B.C.E.). The foundations of the Second Temple were laid on December 18, 520 B.C.E. to much fanfare and celebration.³² The involvement of Zerubbabel as a key player in the actual refoundation ceremony no doubt caused intense messianic expectation; he was hailed by Haggai as “servant” and “signet” (Haggai 2:23) and by Zechariah as “my servant the Branch [or shoot]” (Zechariah 3:8).³³ The Temple was completed in the sixth year of Darius (516 B.C.E.), with the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah and the support of the Persian court, despite strong local resistance (Ezra 6:1–15).

This repatriation and restoration should be understood against the background of Darius's career. When Darius came to power in 522 B.C.E., he suppressed rebellions throughout his realm, including revolts in Babylon led by Nebuchadnezzar III (522 B.C.E.) and Nebuchadnezzar IV (521 B.C.E.). Darius also reorganized the satrapies and provinces and the command of the armies. He introduced

imperial coinage, a road and postal system, and royal building projects. The return of the Jewish exiles and the appointment of Zerubbabel as governor over Judah was part of Darius's reform of the empire's political structure.³⁴

Though some of Zerubbabel's supporters saw in these circumstances the opportunity for the restoration of monarchy under Davidic rule, the majority of Judahites clearly understood that the dual leadership of priest and governor was the only form of local rule that would be tolerated by the Persians. The dual messianic sentiments concerning Zerubbabel expressed by the prophet Zechariah (“and he will bear royal majesty, and shall sit upon his throne and rule. A priest will be on his throne, and there will be peaceful counsel between the two of them” [Zechariah 6:13]) unequivocally express the eschatological hopes of the community that were acceptable to the Persians.³⁵

It is commonly thought that Darius removed Zerubbabel from office because of the messianic claims that were supported by those who wanted to reinstate the office of kingship. But there is no evidence of this. The argument is based primarily on the low state of Jewish affairs at the next wave of immigration and on the silence of our sources concerning Zerubbabel after the Temple construction began. It is not clear whether he was still in office in 516 B.C.E., when the work was completed. But Zerubbabel was not the only person in the post-Exilic history of Ezra-Nehemiah who vanished from the scene without explanation. True, Zerubbabel was no ordinary figure; he was the last active claimant to the Davidic throne of whom we have knowledge from the Hebrew Scriptures. Naturally, we speculate on what may have happened to him. But the evidence for any clear conclusion is absent.

Equally intriguing, and subject to speculation, is the figure of Joshua, the high priest who led the return with Zerubbabel. He receives as much attention as Zerubbabel (perhaps even more) in Zechariah 3–6. He and Zerubbabel are linked together as “the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:14). Joshua's authority was focused primarily on religious affairs; the coronation scene in Zechariah 3 underscores his significance at the center of the Temple. Whether or not his working relationship with Zerubbabel survived the rededication of the Temple, the pattern of leadership involving a high priest and governor survived for many years to come.³⁶

Unfortunately, Judah's Samaritan neighbors sought to influence the Persians to limit the development of the nascent Jewish community. Initially, “the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin” (that is, the rulers of Samaria) offered to assist Zerubbabel in rebuilding the Temple of Yahweh, claiming that they too were worshipers of the Hebrew God and had been since they were settled in the land by the Assyrians. Zerubbabel rebuffed the Samaritans' proffered assistance,

Samaritans

however, and this led to their harassing the returning Judahites through correspondence with Persian officials (Ezra 5:1–6:18).³⁷

The Yahwistic inhabitants of what was formerly Israel, whose help Zerubbabel rejected, were descendants of Syrian-Mesopotamians. After the Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom in 722 B.C.E., they sent colonists to settle the district. These Syrian-Mesopotamian colonists subsequently adopted the religion of the land (2 Kings 17:24–41). The biblical writers explain the hostility of the Samaritans, as these people came to be known, as resulting from the petty jealousy of a people whose mixed ethnic background and syncretistic Yahwism precluded participation in a renewed Jewish cult. It is not difficult to see the political agenda, however, in strained relations between the peoples of these two regions. We are told that the “people of the land discouraged the people of Judah” throughout the reign of Cyrus (that is, from 539 to 530 B.C.E.) to the time of Darius I, during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes, 486–465 B.C.E.), and in the days of Artaxerxes I (465–424 B.C.E.; Ezra 4:4–23).

Despite the opposition of the Samaritans, the appointment of a Davidic scion (Zerubbabel), who was raised in Babylonia, with the support and full knowledge of the Achaemenid leadership was a stroke of political genius. It was also consistent with Persia's overall policy of installing loyal representatives of the conquered indigenous populations who could prevent insurrection and foster loyalty to the imperial throne.³⁸ Pairing the Davidic Zerubbabel with Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, as high priest was a move meant to assuage local concerns and give the newly established subprovince of Yehud (Judah) maximum freedom in invigorating its historic religion while limiting autonomy on the political level. The relative success of such an approach is best observed through the absence of organized opposition to Persia for at least two generations or more. The negative aspect of this was the apparent increase in the appeal of non-Yahwist religious practices in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Nonetheless, recent scholarship has attributed to the Persian period an unprecedented flurry of literary activity that surely found its support and inspiration in the reestablished Jewish community of Palestine.³⁹

Several political factors emerged in the fifth century B.C.E. to disturb the relative security of the Levant during the reign of Darius I (522–486 B.C.E.). The first and foremost of these were the Greco-Persian wars, which began at the end of the sixth century and ended in 449 B.C.E. with the Peace of Callias between Persia and Athens.⁴⁰ Though Persia managed to retain most of its holdings in the Levant during this struggle, the turmoil created among the local population was intense. So uncertain was the outcome of these wars in the fifth

century that Egypt and Babylonia both sought to reestablish a degree of independence.⁴¹ The Babylonians succeeded in breaking away from the Persian satrapy of Beyond-the-River (which stretched from the Euphrates river in the east to the Mediterranean in the west and included Judah) in 481 B.C.E., and Egypt began its satrapal revolt in 464 B.C.E., sensing an opportune moment to reassert its power.⁴² The Egyptian attempt at independence was unsuccessfully supported by the Greek military.

The end result of these activities was the reassertion in several ways of Persian military control over local areas. First, the Persians constructed numerous fortresses on both sides of the Jordan River to control the major trade routes that linked Mesopotamia and Egypt. The fortresses were maintained by imperial garrisons charged with preventing the local populace from joining the Greek forces.⁴³ Second, the existing road system was also strengthened to serve the political needs of the Persian government. Some of the most important reverberations of these momentous events are reflected in the oracles of Second Zechariah (Zechariah 9–14) envisioning the destruction of Israel's enemies and the restoration of Zion. In the Greek tragedy *The Persians*, Aeschylus captures the poignant response of the Greeks to these events.

The prophetic responses collected in the books of Second Zechariah, and to some degree in Malachi, also reflect the unusual demographic conditions that predominated in Yehud at least until the mid-fifth century B.C.E., and perhaps until the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Recent excavations and archaeological surveys have revealed that Yehud was relatively impoverished and modestly settled in the early post-Exilic era (c. 520–450 B.C.E.).⁴⁴ This contrasts strongly with the contemporaneous urban settlements along the coastal plain and the Shephelah, which shared in the prosperity generated by the vibrant commercial activity of the day. Such cities as Dor, Jaffa and Shiqmona and the Philistine cities of Ashkelon and Gaza were clearly brought fully into the mainstream of east Mediterranean trade; their material culture reflects the finest imports of Greek origin, attested only a bit later in the interior. The expectations of the restoration community, therefore, were clearly not met in this first period of Persian dominance of the Levant. Hence, Second Zechariah's concerns with the gathering of the dispersed (Zechariah 9:11–17, 10), the repopulation of greater Israel (Zechariah 9:1–10), and the full repopulation of Jerusalem (Zechariah 14) reflect the eschatological yearnings of Israel at a critical time in its history, the first half of the fifth century B.C.E.

These developments bring us down to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra came to Jerusalem in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes (458 B.C.E.; see Ezra 7:7). Nehemiah came to Jerusalem in

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the 20th year of Artaxerxes' reign (445 B.C.E.; Nehemiah 2:1) and was governor until Artaxerxes' 32nd year (433 B.C.E.; Nehemiah 5:14). Nehemiah also served a second term as governor sometime before Artaxerxes' death (424 B.C.E.). This follows the chronological sequence of Ezra and Nehemiah suggested by the current arrangement of the biblical materials.

From the late 19th century until fairly recently, the prevailing opinion had been that Nehemiah actually preceded Ezra (based on the understanding that the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7:7 was Artaxerxes II [404–358 B.C.E.]) and that the two were never contemporaries. An alternative opinion was that Ezra came to Jerusalem during the reign of Artaxerxes (465–424 B.C.E.), but that he was preceded by Nehemiah, of whom he was later a contemporary (the date "the seventh year of Artaxerxes" of Ezra 7:7 being understood as a scribal corruption, probably of "thirty-seven"). More recently these views have been challenged and historical reconstructions proposed in which the traditional order of Ezra and Nehemiah has been restored. These historical reconstructions have resulted, in part, from recent archaeological data, including comparative information on the ruling house of Samaria (the Samaritan papyri of Wadi Dāliyah).⁴⁵ The whole matter remains problematic, however.⁴⁶

Ezra According to the biblical record, the most dramatic and long-lasting cultural and political changes in the post-Exilic Jewish state occurred during the tenure of Ezra and Nehemiah. From the biblical perspective, Ezra's accomplishments were primarily in the religious sphere, although these should be understood within the larger context of the Persian policy of fostering local religio-legal traditions for the purpose of social stability within the provinces. Ezra arrived in Jerusalem not as a governor but as a "scribe skilled in the law of Moses," with a copy of the law (Ezra 7:6,10) and with a commission from Artaxerxes to establish magistrates and judges in order to enact and teach that law (Ezra 7:11–14,25–26). Ezra was also given funds and precious goods to revitalize religious rites in Jerusalem (Ezra 7:15–20, 8:21–34). This may have required some rebuilding. According to Ezra 6:14, the rebuilding of the Temple was accomplished by the royal decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, so Ezra may well have participated in it. Nehemiah's rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 3) may also be understood in the larger context of Persian imperial aims to control their Levantine holdings more tightly.⁴⁷ Eventually, under Ezra's leadership, and after Nehemiah's arrival (Nehemiah 8:9, 10:1), the law was accepted as the constitutional basis of Jewish life. This was done in a formal public ceremony and by contractual agreement (Ezra 9:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–10:39). The prohibition of intermarriage

with non-Jews was an especially important dimension of the acceptance of Jewish law. The missions of Ezra and Nehemiah do not demonstrate that the local community was being rewarded for its loyalty; rather, their missions represented the efforts of the empire to develop economic and social relationships that would tie the fortunes of Yehud to the future of the imperial system.⁴⁸

It has been widely assumed that the "law of Moses" that Ezra brought to Jerusalem was the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) or, if not the Pentateuch in its entirety, then one of the law codes incorporated in the Pentateuch. One suggestion is that he brought the so-called Priestly source (P) of the Pentateuch (P is one of the sources of the Pentateuch according to the documentary hypothesis, which divides the Pentateuch into four different narrative strands). Ezra has thus been credited with a major role in the development of the canon of Jewish Scripture and/or in the editorial process that produced the Pentateuch in the form in which it is now known. As noted, however, the process of editing the major portions of the Hebrew Bible, the Pentateuch and Former Prophets, had probably begun a full century earlier. It is quite possible that by the end of the fifth century the Prophets, both major and minor, were organized and promulgated, as were the Chronicler's history (1 and 2 Chronicles) and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.⁴⁹

What is curious about the assumption that Ezra played such a major role in organizing scripture, however, is that not one of the quotations from Ezra's law code in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah agrees with any specific passage of the Pentateuch (see, for example, Ezra 9:10–12; Nehemiah 8:14–15). Instead, Ezra's reform measures agree in general with dicta contained in various parts of the Pentateuch (although Ezra's prohibition against intermarriage is far more specific than any command in the Pentateuch). Ezra's law code may have been simply a précis or compendium of Jewish law in a form suitable for deposit in the Persian court archives. In sum, we know that Ezra came as a scribe of the law of Moses commissioned by Artaxerxes to be the promulgator and enforcer of that law. We do not know the particular form of that law, however, or how that law relates to the Pentateuch as it has come down to us in its canonical form.

Ezra is frequently referred to as "the father of Judaism," that is, the father of Judaism as a religious system based upon Torah, or law. He was certainly an important person in the history of Judaism and played a significant role in the revitalization of Jewish life based upon Torah. Without diminishing Ezra's importance, however, we must remember that he was not the originator of Judaism as a legal system. This legal system can be traced to the religious reforms of King Josiah in 622 B.C.E.

(2 Kings 22–23; 2 Chronicles 34–35). It was Josiah who promulgated a code of law, most likely an edition of Deuteronomy. Ultimately, however, Judaism as a religion of Torah may be traced to the example of Moses and to the role of the levitical priests in the teaching of Torah in early Israelite culture. It is no wonder that Ezra is depicted as a kind of second Moses, emulating the experience of former times through his actions and words.⁵⁰

Against exaggerated claims for Ezra, we may note that when the Jewish sage Ben Sira extolled the great heroes of Judaism from Enoch to Simon the Just in his eulogy “Let us now praise famous men” (Sirach 44–50), he did not even mention Ezra. For Ben Sira, the heroes of the Persian period were Zerubbabel, Joshua and Nehemiah. According to Ben Sira, it was Nehemiah who “raised for us the walls that had fallen, and set up the gates and bars and rebuilt our ruined houses” (Sirach 49:13).

hemiah

Nehemiah’s principal accomplishments are described in the Book of Nehemiah. He rebuilt the gates and walls of Jerusalem, despite the concerted resistance of Sanballat, governor of Samaria, Tobiah, governor of Ammon, and Geshem, the leader of the Arab Kedarite confederacy (Nehemiah 1–4, 6, 12:27–43). Nehemiah also enforced legislation on mortgages, loans and interest for the betterment of the economic life of the Judahite citizens (Nehemiah 5). He repopulated Jerusalem by means of a public lottery in which one-tenth of the Jewish population was moved into the city (Nehemiah 11). He established Jewish control over the cultural and economic life of the city (Nehemiah 13:15–22). He established cultic reforms to ensure that the Levites and Temple singers would not disperse to the countryside (Nehemiah 13:10–14). Finally, he enforced Ezra’s legislation concerning intermarriage, especially as it affected the priestly orders (Nehemiah 13:1–9, 23–29). Of Nehemiah’s varied accomplishments, the greatest attention is given to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and for good reason: This was a major move in the implementation of Persian imperial policy that demonstrated Yehud’s continuing cooperation with the powers that be. There is no doubt that Nehemiah’s adversaries understood the full import of those actions.

These reforms indicate that during Nehemiah’s administrations as governor, he exercised far more control over local affairs than did his predecessors, although he exercised authority within the larger framework of Persian concerns for tighter regulation of local affairs. This is consistent with what we now know about administrative changes allowing more autonomy in the western Persian provinces in the late fifth century B.C.E. The hostility of Nehemiah’s neighboring governors also reflects this situation. Each maneuvered for greater control over his own area and entered into alliances (in this case against Judah) aimed

at establishing his own hegemony. The positioning of the Samaritan governor Sanballat as leader of the conspiracy against Nehemiah reflects the history of Samaritan desire for hegemony over Judah after its collapse in 586 B.C.E. and the assassination of the puppet governor Gedaliah.⁵¹ Let us survey what is known about this period from archaeological sources.

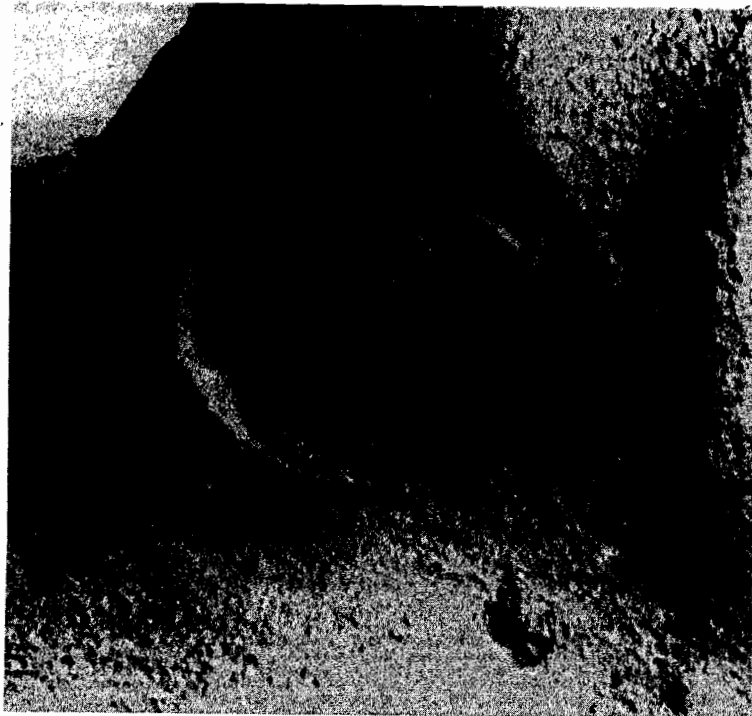
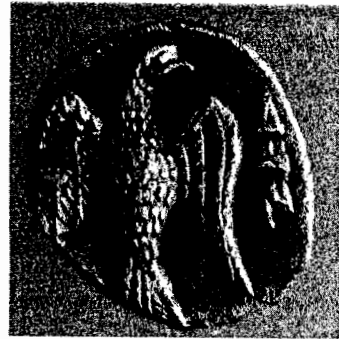
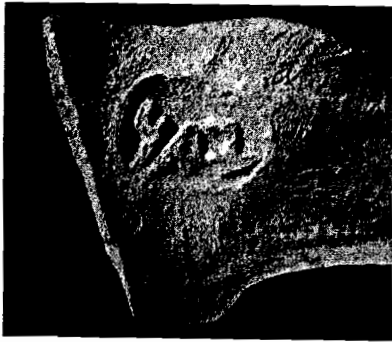
Until fairly recently, the Persian period was characterized as the dark age of Israelite history. This is no longer true, partly because of the availability of newer materials, but especially because of the work of Ephraim Stern of Hebrew University and other archaeologists in Israel whose surveys and discoveries have opened new vistas for study of this era of profound change and development.⁵²

Stern has made a number of pertinent observations: During the Persian period, the land of Israel was divided into two culturally distinct regions. The separation was as definite as that between two countries. One region consisted of the hill country of Judah and Transjordan (and to a lesser extent Samaria); the other included Galilee and the Mediterranean coastal plain. Judah’s local culture was a continuation of its earlier culture (as noted by William F. Albright, who called the Persian period Iron Age III), although its culture also reflected Assyrian, Babylonian and Egyptian influence. Galilee and the Mediterranean coast, on the other hand, were influenced by Greek and Phoenician cultures. Strangely, the material culture of the Persian period reflects almost no influence of the ruling Persians—the exceptions being a few pottery types and some Persian-style jewelry manufactured by Phoenicians. The major influence of the Persians on Israelite culture seems to relate to government, military organization, economic life and taxation. The reorganization of the empire by Darius I—who installed local leaders and requested that local laws be collated and religious laws implemented—no doubt greatly influenced the pace and level of literary activities in the conquered territories during his reign.⁵³ The most direct influence can be seen in coins and seals. Changes in seals impressed on the handles of jars used in connection with the collection of taxes indicate administrative reforms—leading to increased local control—at the end of the fifth century.⁵⁴ Imperial Achaemenid motifs in seals and seal impressions gradually are replaced by designs in local Aramaic script. A similar change is noted in coins, where we find the gradual appearance of the province name in Aramaic. Sometimes we even find coins with the governor’s name in Aramaic.

The extent of Judahite hegemony in the time of Nehemiah—that is, the borders of the province of Yehud—is reflected in several toponymical references in Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as in the distribution of Yehud seal impressions and coins found in the area. Ezra

Archaeological evidence from the Persian period

The borders of Judah



Yehud stamps and coin. From Tell en-Nasbeh (biblical Mizpah) in the north to Beth Zur in the south, from Gezer in the west to Jericho in the east, archaeologists have discovered jar handles and coins stamped Yehud, the name for Judah in the Persian period (539-332 B.C.E.). The distribution of these stamps helps modern scholars to establish the borders of Judah at this time.

A falcon with spread wings shares space with the Yehud stamp on the obverse of a small fourth-century B.C.E. silver coin discovered near Jericho. (A lily appears on the reverse.) The two pottery handles, found at Ramat Rahel and also dating to the fourth century B.C.E., probably came from wine jars. The Yehud impression was literally an official stamp of approval.

(2:21–35) and Nehemiah (7:25–38, 3:2–22, 12:28–29) list names of places in the territory of Benjamin, the Jordan Valley from Jericho to Ein Gedi, the Judahite hills from Jerusalem to Beth Zur, and the districts of Lod and Adulam in the Shephelah. These areas, as Stern has noted, correspond approximately to the region where Yehud seals, seal impressions and coins have been found—from Tel en-Nasbeh in the north to Beth Zur in the south and from Jericho and Ein Gedi in the east to Gezer in the west. Evidence of the borders also comes from archaeological surveys conducted by Moshe Kochavi, Israel Finkelstein and Avi Ofer; these archaeologists have discovered lines of forts erected by the Jews during the Persian period as defenses against the province of Ashdod in the west and Edomite territories in the south.⁵⁵ The lines of demarcation of the province of Judah on the south established by these forts correspond to the borders indicated in the biblical lists cited above and to the distribution of Yehud seals and impressions.

A list in Nehemiah 11:23–35, however, gives much wider boundaries for Judah. This may not be a description of the actual borders of Judah, but rather a statement of the territory that Judah considered its own, an idealization based on older biblical boundaries. The actual borders probably were much smaller.⁵⁶

The size of the province of Judah and its capital city, Jerusalem, were limited not simply by the amount of power Nehemiah and his successors could arrogate but also by the available Jewish population. Excavations in Judah and Jerusalem have shown that the city grew significantly in the Persian period, as did the province of Judah. The population nearly doubled to about 17,000 and Jerusalem's size increased approximately fourfold.⁵⁷ There is no doubt that the population of Judah decreased significantly in the Exilic period and that in the restoration period the population remained small. By the time of Nehemiah, however, there was significant and important growth and change in the demographics of Judah. The biblical tradition that the land was denuded of its people in the early sixth century B.C.E. is not simply an overstatement by the editors of 2 Kings and Jeremiah or a fiction imposed by the Chronicler to promote the idea of sabbatical rest for the land. The rebuilding of the Jewish population took several hundred years; it was not until the second century B.C.E. that there was a sizable Jewish population in Judah and Jerusalem.

With the work of Nehemiah, biblical historiography ends. Our knowledge of Jewish life during the remainder of the Persian period (until the conquest of the area by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.E.) is sketchy at best. From the Elephantine papyri we learn that the governor of Yehud in the year 408 B.C.E. was Bagohi and that in the same

**Persian
period
sources**

year Samaria was governed by Delaiah and Shelemaiah, sons of Nehemiah's adversary, Sanballat. The Jews of Yeb (Elephantine) wrote to these Samaritan and Judahite leaders seeking assistance in rebuilding their temple. Josephus records an incident from the time of Artaxerxes II (404–358 B.C.E.) in which the Persians "defiled the sanctuary and imposed tribute on the Jews" (and also that "the people were made slaves") for a period of seven years. This, he says, resulted from the interference of Artaxerxes' general Bagoses who tried to appoint Jesus (that is, Joshua/Jeshua) son of Eliashib as high priest and became enraged when Jesus was murdered by his brother, the high priest Joannes (Johanan).⁵⁸ Some scholars believe the Bagoses of this story is Bagohi, the governor of Judah known from the Elephantine papyri.⁵⁹

The last Persian period incident recorded by Josephus occurred on the eve of Alexander's conquest of the area. According to Josephus, the Samaritans led by Sanballat built a temple on Mt. Gerizim. The reference is to Sanballat III,⁶⁰ grandson of the earlier Sanballat who had opposed Nehemiah's rebuilding of Judah. The building of a Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim around 332 B.C.E. is evident not only from Josephus and the sources he used,⁶¹ but also from the archaeological evidence. Foundations of a temple at Tel er-Ras, on Mt. Gerizim, have recently been excavated.⁶² Josephus claimed that this temple was built when expelled priests from the Jerusalem Temple and other malcontents from Jewish society took refuge with the Samaritans. This may or may not have been the case. It is more likely that this temple was an expression of the Samaritans' own national identity as a Hebrew people who claimed descent from the old Joseph tribes of the north (Ephraim and Manasseh) and who desired to worship God at the ancient and (from their understanding) true sanctuary at Shechem.

Because Josephus's account bears certain similarities to a brief note in Nehemiah 13:28 concerning Nehemiah's expulsion of a son-in-law of Sanballat I from Jerusalem, some scholars have been inclined to date the building of the Samaritan sanctuary (and the alleged schism) to that earlier time (about 425 B.C.E.). Others have dated the event to the time of Ezra (about 450 B.C.E.), although the biblical traditions on Ezra make no reference at all to the Samaritans, even in cases of intermarriage. In fact, the biblical record does not mention a Samaritan schism during the time of Ezra or Nehemiah. The history of the Samaritans as an autonomous religious community residing at Shechem belongs to a later time, no earlier than 332 B.C.E.⁶³

In sum, the restoration of the Jewish nation in the land of Israel following Cyrus's edict of return was accomplished through successive waves of immigration of both leaders and their followers from the Babylonian Exile. We are not told of any role played by those who had remained in the land or by returnees from the Diaspora in Egypt. Although the biblical record covers a period of about 115 years (from

538 to 423 B.C.E.), or longer if Ezra was active during the reign of Artaxerxes II, the reporting of the period is episodic, focusing on the specific actions of five leaders: the return of the Temple vessels under Sheshbazzar; the rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel and Joshua; the renewal of the cult and establishment of Mosaic law as the constitutional basis of society, with the prohibition of mixed marriages, by Ezra; and the rebuilding of the gates and walls of Jerusalem and the development of its economic and religious life by Nehemiah. Of these five leaders, Nehemiah is credited with the greatest specific political and social accomplishments. Resistance to the development of a Jewish state came primarily from Samaria because of cultural differences aggravated by political conditions. The biblical account may be understood against a dual background: the political history of the Persian Empire and the archaeology of the land to which they returned. From the latter, we gain a clearer picture of the political realignments and the development of Judah as a semi-autonomous province in the late sixth century B.C.E., under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua together with subsequent governors and high priests until the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah in the second half of the fifth century B.C.E. Without these developments, it would be difficult to imagine the subsequent evolution of Judaism as a religion that would survive the loss of the Second Temple and have so great an influence on Western religions.

technical terms for those in compulsory service in state industries. See Graham, "Vinedressers and Plowmen," *BA* 47 (1984), pp. 55–58.

² It is extremely difficult to estimate actual population on the basis of ancient sources. For a general discussion of this and related issues see Magen Broshi, "Demography" in *OEANE* vol. 2, pp. 142–144. Norman K. Gottwald (*The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], p. 423), estimates that 95 percent of the population of Judah remained in Palestine.

³ Many in Jerusalem viewed Jehoiachin as the legitimate king, as demonstrated by the oracle of the prophet Hananiah ben Azzur of Gibeon (Jeremiah 28:1–4) and other sources. For Jeremiah's alternative, and apparently minority, opinion, see Jeremiah 22:24–30. See especially Martin Noth, "The Jerusalem Catastrophe of 587 B.C. and Its Significance for Israel," in *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Studies* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), pp. 260–280.

⁴ This is based on the understanding that the Shennazzar of 1 Chronicles 3:18 is Sheshbazzar. For a more detailed discussion of this question see Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* Anchor Bible 25B (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), pp. 10–11.

⁵ See Peter R. Ackroyd, "The Temple Vessels—A Continuity Theme," in *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel*, VT Supplements 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 166–181.

⁶ The Chronicler was followed in this interpretation by the author of 1 Esdras, who cites only one deportation at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, with reference to the removal of the sacred Temple vessels and without reference to the exile of Zedekiah (1 Esdras 1:52–58). Josephus, writing at a later time and conflating all of the biblical traditions (including 1 Esdras), gives the three exiles of 2 Kings and Jeremiah (*Antiq.* 10.101, 149–150, 181–182) and includes a fourth deportation not mentioned in the Bible: the removal of 3,000 Jews to Babylonia on the death of Jehoiakim and the accession of Jehoiachin (*Antiq.* 10.98).

⁷ Several texts from Sargon II refer to this deportation. See *ANET*, pp. 284–285; D.J. Wiseman, "Records of Assyria and Babylonia," in *Documents from Old Testament Times*, ed. D. Winton Thomas (New York: Torchbooks/Harper and Row, 1961), p. 60.

⁸ This was first suggested by A. Von Hoonacker, *Une communauté judéo-araméenne à Éléphantine en Égypte*, *Schweich Lectures, 1914* (London: British Academy, 1915).

⁹ Bustenay Oded, "Judah and the Exile," in *Israelite and Judaeon History*, ed. John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), p. 483.

¹⁰ On the Murashu texts, see especially Elias J. Bickerman, "The Babylonian Captivity," in *CHJ*, vol. 1, pp. 345–348; Michael D. Coogan, "Life in the Diaspora: Jews at Nippur in the Fifth Century," *BA* 37 (1974), pp. 6–12.

¹¹ See Peter Machinist's review of *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, by J.M. Miller and Hayes, *BAR*, November/December 1986, p. 4.

¹² William F. Albright, "The Seal of Eliakim and the Latest Preexilic History of Judah," *JBL* 51 (1932), pp. 77–106.

¹³ Albright, "King Jehoiachin in Exile," *BA* 5 (1942), p. 54.

¹⁴ An interesting scenario is presented by James D. Newsome, Jr. (*By the Waters of Babylon: An Introduction to the History and Theology of the Exile* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1979], pp. 92–97).

¹⁵ See also John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), pp. 352–353; and C. Meyers and E. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (see endnote 4), pp. 5 and 16. For the effect of the organization of the Bible on these developments, see David Noel Freedman, "The Earliest Bible," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 22 (1983), pp. 167–175; *The Unity of the Bible* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1991).

¹⁶ See Bezalel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1968); "Aramaic Papyri and Parchments: A New Look," *BA* 42 (1979), pp. 74–104; "The Jews in Egypt," in *CHJ*, vol. 1, pp. 372–400. A publishing history of the Elephantine materials is found in Porten's studies and most recently in *OEANE*, vol. 5, pp. 393–410.

¹⁷ *Antiq.* 12.388f.

¹⁸ *Antiq.* 11.346–347.

¹⁹ For a survey of conflicting opinions, see Peter Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.* (London: SCM Press, 1968), pp. 32–35. For the most recent discussion of this issue see Lee I. Levine, "The Nature and Origin of the Palestinian Synagogue Reconsidered," *JBL* 115 (1996), pp. 425–448.

²⁰ Gottwald (*Hebrew Bible* [see endnote 2], p. 427) and Yehezkel Kaufmann (*History of the Religion of Israel, from the Babylonian Captivity to the End of Prophecy* 4:1–2, [New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1970], pp. 41–43) argue for and against synagogal origins in Babylonia on the basis of the differing criteria of what made a synagogue.

VI. Exile and Return

¹ On the economic dimensions of Gedaliah's governorship, note Jeremiah 40:10, "As for me I will dwell at Mizpah, to stand for you before the Chaldeans who will come to us; but as for you, gather wine and summer fruits and oil, and store them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken." A recent study by J.N. Graham using seal impressions (including a seal of "Gedaliah who is over the household") and other archaeological data argues that Gedaliah was established as governor to oversee a state-managed agrarian system intended to generate tribute for the Babylonians and also contribute to the local welfare. It is further argued that the "vinedressers and plowmen" (2 Kings 25:12 and Jeremiah 52:16) were

²¹ Levine, "Nature and Origin" (see endnote 19), p. 443.

²² See C. Meyers and E. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (see endnote 4), pp. 377ff.

²³ Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 115–116.

²⁴ See especially Bickerman, "Babylonian Captivity" (see endnote 10), pp. 355–357; Coogan, "Life in the Diaspora" (see endnote 10), pp. 11–12.

²⁵ Nahman Avigad, "Seals of Exiles," *Israel Exploration Journal* 15 (1965), pp. 228–230.

²⁶ See Eliezer D. Oren, "Migdol: A New Fortress on the Edge of the Eastern Nile Delta," *BASOR* 256 (1984), pp. 7–44; "Sinai," in *OEANE*, vol. 5, pp. 41–46.

²⁷ See endnote 16 and, more recently, Porten, "Egyptian Aramaic Texts" in *OEANE*, vol. 2, pp. 234–236.

²⁸ See endnotes 16 and 27.

²⁹ See Thomas Fish, "The Cyrus Cylinder," in *Documents from Old Testament Times* (see endnote 7), p. 43.

³⁰ For a summary of the rather complex arguments relating to whether or not Samaria exercised control over Judah in the neo-Babylonian and early Persian period, see Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*, vol. 1, *The Persian and Greek Periods* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 79–84. The opinion adopted in this version is one put forward in C. Meyers and E. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (see endnote 4); and *Zechariah 9–14: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary Anchor Bible 25C* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993), especially pp. 15–29 and *passim*. See also E. Meyers, "The Persian Period and the Judean Restoration from Zerubbabel to Nehemiah," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick D. Miller, Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 509–521; "The Shelomith Seal and Aspects of the Judean Restoration: Some Additional Reconsiderations," *Eretz Israel* 17 (1985), pp. 33–38.

³¹ C. Meyers and E. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (see endnote 4), pp. xlvi, 63–64, 244–255. The relevant verses are Haggai 2:10, 20 and Zechariah 4:7–10.

³² See C. Meyers and E. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (see endnote 4), *ad loc.* as indicated in endnote 31, where they draw attention to parallel (re)foundation ceremonies in Mesopotamian literature. Such an approach is also followed by David L. Petersen in *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), pp. 238–244.

³³ See commentaries cited in endnote 32 *ad loc.* and E. Meyers, "Messianism in First and Second Zechariah and the 'End' of Biblical Prophecy," in "Go to the land I will show you": *Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young*, ed. Joseph E. Coleson and Victor H. Matthews (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 127–142.

³⁴ Ephraim Stern, "The Persian Empire and the Political and Social History of Palestine in the Persian Period," in *CHJ*, vol. 1, pp. 71–72.

³⁵ See C. Meyers and E. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (see endnote 4), pp. 336ff; especially notes and comments on verse 13, pp. 357–362 and 366–375.

³⁶ See endnote 35. In the same volume see also the discussion of "Joshua and the Priestly Vestments" (Zechariah 3:1–10), pp. 178–227, and especially the notes to verse 7, pp. 194–197, which elaborate on the expanded priestly functions added to Joshua's duties as high priest.

³⁷ See Peter R. Ackroyd, "The Jewish Community in Palestine in the Persian Period," *CHJ*, vol. 1, pp. 141–143. The complicated "opposition" narratives in Ezra convey a sense of the difficulties the Jewish community met in the rebuilding endeavor. The Aramaic source referred to here (Ezra 5:1–6:18) is consistent with the presentation in Haggai and First Zechariah, attributing their composition and dating to the year of the refoundation of the temple in the sixth year of Darius.

³⁸ See J.M. Cook, *The Persian Empire* (London: J.M. Dent, 1983), pp. 61, 71.

³⁹ The impetus for such views was surely the pioneering work of Julius Wellhausen, who formulated the "documentary hypothesis," in which significant portions of the Hebrew Bible were assigned to the Exilic and post-Exilic periods, especially D and P, the so-called Deuteronomistic and Priestly strands. In recent times it has become fashionable to assign most of the historical writings to the Persian period too, leading to a strident attack on the whole question of Israelite origins. Typical of these attacks are Philip R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel*, JSOT Supplement Series 148 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); and Niels Peter Lemche, "Early History Revisited," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 4 (1996), pp. 9–34. In denigrating the reliability of much of the Hebrew Bible as a source for understanding pre-Exilic Israelite history, they have willy-nilly proposed the Persian period as the most creative epoch in ancient Israel's literary history. While we believe that the intensity of literary activity is great in this period, even inspired by Darius's call to collect local

traditions (so Cook, *Persian Empire* [see endnote 38], pp. 72ff.), we believe such scholarly attacks are motivated by prejudice and narrow-mindedness. See William G. Dever's response to these debates in "Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up? Archaeology and Israelite Historiography, Part I," *BASOR* 297 (1995), pp. 61–80 and the bibliography there.

⁴⁰ See endnote 30, especially C. Meyers and E. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, pp. 15–26.

⁴¹ Cook, *Persian Empire* (see endnote 38), pp. 91ff.; Kenneth G. Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah*, SBL Dissertation Series 125 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

⁴² C. Meyers and E. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14* (see endnote 30), pp. 20–21; Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration* (see endnote 41), pp. 143ff.

⁴³ Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration* (see endnote 41), pp. 165ff. and figs. 1–4.

⁴⁴ C. Meyers and E. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14* (see endnote 30), pp. 22–26; C.C. Carter, "A Social and Demographic Study of Post-Exilic Judah," (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1991; forthcoming with JSOT Supplement Series).

⁴⁵ See especially Frank Moore Cross, "A Reconstruction of the Judean Restoration," *JBL* 94 (1975), pp. 4–18, 279; also in *Interpretation* 29 (1975), pp. 187–203. Shemaryahu Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," in *IDB*, Supplementary Volume, pp. 317–328.

⁴⁶ See Geo Widengren, "Problems in Reconstructing Jewish History in the Persian Period: The Chronological Order of Ezra and Nehemiah," in *Israelite and Judaean History* (see endnote 9), pp. 503–509. See also Aaron Demsky, "Who Returned First—Ezra or Nehemiah?" *BR*, April 1996, p. 28.

⁴⁷ Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period, 538–332 B.C.* (Warminster, UK/Jerusalem: Aris and Phillips/Israel Exploration Society, 1982). See also Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration* (see endnote 41), pp. 226ff.

⁴⁸ Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration* (see endnote 41), pp. 244–247.

⁴⁹ See endnote 15.

⁵⁰ See Kenneth Koch, "Ezra and the Origins of Judaism," *Journal of Semitic Studies* (1974), pp. 173ff; *The Prophets: The Babylonian and Persian Periods*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), vol. 2, p. 187.

⁵¹ In his memoirs, Nehemiah describes "the former governors who were before me" as having laid heavy burdens on the people by exacting food, wine and taxes and as having had subofficials who acted in a heavy-handed

manner (Nehemiah 5:15). Albrecht Alt suggested that the reference in Nehemiah was to the governors of Samaria who had administered the Judahite territory in the period between Zerubbabel and Nehemiah. Alt was the first major scholar to contend that Samaritan hegemony over Judah, up to the time of Nehemiah, provided the background for Samaritan-Judahite hostilities during the Persian period. See Alt, "Die Rolle Samarias bei der Entstehung des Judentums" and "Judas Nachbarn zur Zeit Nehemiah," in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Munich: Beck'sche Verlag, 1953), vol. 2, pp. 316–337. Nahman Avigad, on the other hand, claims that Judahite seal impressions and bullae of the Persian period bear witness to the existence of Jewish governors during this time, three of whom—Elnathan, Yeho'ezer and Ahzai—are known by name (Avigad, *Bullae and Seals from a Post-Exilic Judean Archive*, Qedem 4 [Jerusalem: Hebrew Univ., 1976]). Eric M. Meyers has gone even further and argued that Elnathan was the son-in-law of Zerubbabel (E. Meyers, "The Shelomith Seal" [see endnote 30], pp. 33–38). Stern (*Material Culture* [see endnote 47]) and S. McErnue ("The Political Structure in Judah from Cyrus to Nehemiah," *CBQ* vol. 43 [1981], pp. 353–364) have been strong in their support of Alt. But see also Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian* (see endnote 30).

⁵² See Stern, *Material Culture* (see endnote 47); "The Archaeology of Persian Palestine," in *CJH*, vol. 1, pp. 70–88. See also Carter, "Social and Demographic Study" (see endnote 44); and C. Meyers and E. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14* (see endnote 30), p. 23 and bibliography there.

⁵³ See Cook, *Persian Empire* (see endnote 38), pp. 72ff.; C. Meyers and E. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (see endnote 4), pp. 277–179, 287–292. Zechariah's image of "the flying scroll" (5:1–4) captures the essence of the intensity of literary activity in this period. This unparalleled image surely has to do with the emergence of a fixed body of law in Judah at this time.

⁵⁴ Stern, *Material Culture* (see endnote 47), pp. 236–237.

⁵⁵ See Hoglund *Achaemenid Imperial Administration* (see endnote 41), pp. 165ff; and Carter, *Social and Demographic Study* (see endnote 44).

⁵⁶ Stern, *Material Culture* (see endnote 47), pp. 245–248; "The Persian Empire" (see endnote 34), pp. 82–86.

⁵⁷ See Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14* (see endnote 30), pp. 24–25.

⁵⁸ *Antiq.* 11.297–301.

⁵⁹ Others see this story as alluding to the Persians' punitive actions in suppressing a revolt in the satrapy of Abar Nahara during

the time of Artaxerxes III (Ochus as he is surnamed by modern authorities) (358–336 B.C.E.). Specifically, in 351/350 B.C.E. a rebellion led by Tennes, king of Sidon, was put down by Ochus's general Bagoas. The memory of Bagoas's campaign in Syria-Palestine may be preserved in the apocryphal Book of Judith (with Holofernes representing Bagoas). See Dan Barag, "The Effects of the Tennes Rebellion on Palestine," *BASOR* 183 (1966), pp. 6–12.

⁶⁰ Cross, "Aspects of Samaritan and Jewish History in Late Persian and Hellenistic Times," *HTR* 59 (1966), pp. 201–211; "Papyri of the Fourth Century B.C. from Dāliyeh: A Preliminary Report on Their Discovery and Significance," in *New Directions in Biblical Archaeology*, ed. David Noel Freedman and Jonas C. Greenfield (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 45–69.

⁶¹ *Antiq.* 11.304–347.

⁶² James D. Purvis, *The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Origin of the Samaritan Sect*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 104–109.

⁶³ Purvis, "The Samaritan Problem: A Case Study in Jewish Sectarianism in the Roman Era," in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon Levenson (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982), pp. 323–350.