The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures

ISSN 1203–1542

VOLUME 10, ARTICLE 7

**RUSSELL HOBSON,
JEREMIAH 41 AND THE AMMONITE ALLIANCE**

JEREMIAH 41 AND THE AMMONITE ALLIANCE

RUSSELL HOBSON
UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

The story of the murder of seventy Northern pilgrims by Ishmael b. Netaniah at Mizpah is well known, but the motivations behind this grizzly act are only infrequently discussed. Opinions among the commentators include seeing the episode as a rebuke of those sympathetic to Babylon,[1] an act of jealousy,[2] or a raid on property[3] or human capital.[4] However we understand the wider context of Ishmael's assault on Mizpah and the administration installed there, the murder of the pilgrims remains an aspect of the narrative that eludes satisfactory explanation.

This episode occurs in the context of the appointment by the conquering Babylonians of a governor over the newly formed Judean province.[5] This governor, Gedaliah b. Ahikam, is selected from outside of the Davidic line and heads an administrative centre at Benjaminte Mizpah. His appointment attracts refugees that have been scattered in the face of the Babylonian onslaught, who come to find security and the restoration of a peaceful life under his administration. Military forces and civilians alike gather to Gedaliah

---

[1] G.L. Keown, P.J. Scalise, and T.G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1995), 244.

[2] J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 21C; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 119; J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NIBCOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 660.

[3] See W. Rudolph, *Jeremia*, (HAT; 3rd ed., Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), 228 for this suggestion. W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 297–98, entertains several possibilities but remains agnostic on the exact reason for the murders.

[4] See W. McKane, *Jeremiah XXVI–LII* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 1016–29, for a full discussion of the episode and the presentation of this view, as well as a convenient summary of the views held by other commentators not mentioned here.

[5] On the political status of Gedaliah's appointment as governor, vassal or local representative, see J. Weinberg, "Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam in Mizpah: His Status and Role, Supporters and Opponents," *ZAW* 119 (2007) 356–368.

from the surrounding hinterland, and from as far away as Ammon, Moab and Edom. Fields are tended, harvests reaped, and economic life begins to return to the local region.

This brief period of restoration comes to an end when Ishmael b. Netaniah, a Judahite with the support of the Ammonite king Baalis, realises a plot to assassinate Gedaliah and some of his accompanying forces at Mizpah. Two days later Ishmael entraps and then kills almost an entire troupe of 80 pilgrims travelling towards Mizpah from the north. While one can imagine some anti-Babylonian motivation behind events that led to Gedaliah's assassination and the killing of the troops in the garrison at Mizpah, it is more difficult to imagine a reason that Ishmael might have had for killing the pilgrims.

The origins of the pilgrims are given in the Masoretic text as Shechem, Shilo and Samaria,[6] that is, cities associated with cultic centres in the north throughout the period of the patriarchs, the pre-monarchic period, and the divided monarchy.[7] They are described as 'shaving their beards, and tearing their garments, and gashing themselves, and with cereal offerings and incense offerings in their hand to bring to the house of Yahweh.' Most scholars take this to mean that the procession was moving south towards Jerusa-

---

[6] The LXX has Salem instead of Shilo, but refers to the same general region.

[7] See O. Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 115–16. The importance of the site of Shechem in the patriarchal narratives indicates that it was a significant cult site from an early period (Gen 12:7; 33:19–20). It was the site of the covenant between the Israelite tribes which took place in 'the sanctuary of the Lord' (Josh 24:26). Excavations on nearby Gerizim have revealed a temple and sacred precinct were constructed there as early as the mid-fifth century, according to Y. Magen, "The Dating of the First Phase of the Samaritan Temple on Mount Gerizim in Light of the Archaeological Evidence," O. Lipschits, G.N. Knoppers, and R. Albertz (eds), *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 157–211. This would suggest that the location had cultic significance in an earlier period. Shilo is associated with the 'tent of meeting' and decisions on matters of tribal confederacy in Joshua 18, and during the period of the later judges the house of God (בית האלהים) was there (Judg 18:31). According to the biblical text it was the site of an annual festival (Judg 21:19), perhaps in which respect Elkanah the father of Samuel is said to offer sacrifices there yearly (1 Sam 1:3). By Jeremiah's time, however, the cult centre at Shilo was in ruins (Jer 7:12, 14; 26:6, 9). More than one cult centre existed in the region around Samaria according to 1 Kings 13, where we find mention of the 'towns of Samaria and all their high places' in the time of Jeroboam. Ahab is said to have set up an altar and temple to Baal (מזבח לבעל בית הבעל) and to have made the Asherah at Samaria (1 Kgs 16:32–33). Each of the points of origin given for the pilgrims, then, is associated with known cult centres from the northern kingdom.

lem, in mourning for the destroyed city, bearing offerings of cereal and incense to sacrifice at the site of the ruined temple.

The omission of sacrificial animals from the pilgrims' possessions is generally taken as an indication that blood sacrifice had ceased at the temple following its destruction.[8] Given that Jer 41:1 specifies these events as transpiring in the seventh month, one would expect Sukkoth celebrations in Jerusalem to call for blood sacrifices among the offerings being brought southward, had the altar been operational.[9]

It is, however, equally likely that the temple in Jerusalem was inaccessible for making offerings in the Neo-Babylonian period, on account of it having been destroyed during the Babylonian conflict as described in 2 Kgs 25:9. In an analogous situation at Elephantine, all types of sacrifice ceased in that temple following its destruction at the hands of the local Egyptian forces.[10] Further, in early Persian period Jerusalem the first ritual act of the returnees was to erect an altar so that the appropriate sacrifices may be reinstated, suggesting the absence of these beforehand.[11]

If the destination of the pilgrims was not Jerusalem, then, we must wonder what is meant by the term בית יהוה in this context. It has been suggested by Blenkinsopp that the pilgrims were headed for a sanctuary at or close to Mizpah or Bethel.[12] Both Mizpah and Bethel were associated with cultic activity that was performed in the presence of Yahweh. In Judges 20–21 decisions of the tribal alliance were taken before Yahweh at Mizpah (20:2–3), and inquir-

---

[8] See the articulation of this argument in D. Jones, "The Cessation of Sacrifice After the Destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C.," *JTS* 14 (1963), 12–31.

[9] Lev 23:23–43 and especially Numbers 29 record an extensive list of animal sacrifices to be made in the seventh month in association with the autumnal feast, the cultic new year and the Festival of Booths.

[10] See AP 30.21–22 in A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century BC* (Osnabrück: Zeller, 1967), 112.

[11] See the description in Ezra 3:2. It is of course indistinguishable to the modern reader whether this impression is the result of historical reality or simply the product of the later author of Ezra 1–6. H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1985), 46, notes '[i]t is by no means improbable that sacrifices continued to be offered [at the Jerusalem temple] throughout the exile … For the purposes of our writer, however, … the continuity of religious tradition ran through the community in exile alone, so that a fresh dedication of the altar would have been regarded as indispensable.'

[12] Lizbeth Fried has pointed out to the author in a private conversation that, were the pilgrims headed for Bethel, they would have already passed this site on their arrival to Mizpah. The likelihood that they were headed to Mizpah instead of Bethel is thus increased, unless one presumes that Ishmael 'went out to meet them' before they passed Bethel, and convinced them to continue beyond their intended destination to Mizpah.

ies were made of Yahweh at Bethel concerning military strategy (20:18, 26).[13]

The offerings that the pilgrims carry are described as מנחה ולבנה, 'cereal offerings and incense offerings,' an unusual pairing in that typically מנחה, when it is not a sin or guilt offering, already contains לבנה.[14] Only rarely are two types of offerings referred to using both of these terms exclusively – here in Jer 41:5, and in Neh 13:4–9.

Towards the end of the fifth century BCE, Yedaniah, the head priest at the Elephantine temple, wrote to the Judean governor and to the sons of the governor of Samaria requesting support for the rebuilding of the temple to Yahu that had once stood on the island. As part of his plea, Yedaniah also communicated his intention to reinstate sacrificial rites once the altar was rebuilt, in particular 'the cereal offerings, the incense offerings, and the burnt offerings.' As is well known, the reply that came back from Judea and Samaria determined that these rites should be reinstated – with one notable omission: while cereal offerings and incense offerings were authorised for sacrifice on the altar at Elephantine, no mention is made of the burnt offerings. A further letter from Yedaniah to the Judean governor indicates that burnt offerings had been expressly forbidden at Elephantine.[15]

It is intriguing that the same types of sacrifices that were officially sanctioned at Elephantine were identical to those mentioned in Jer 41:5. Rather than pointing to a special situation that held at Elephantine, this may reflect the common practice of Judeans in this period offering at sanctuaries away from the principal cult centre. The shared references to worship of the Queen of Heaven in Jeremiah 7 and 44, and at the settlements of Elephantine and Syene, are a further demonstration of this point.[16] As Lipschits has

---

[13] The mention of Mizpah as the location of an ancient sanctuary in 1Macc 3:46 is frequently noted in discussions of its status as a cult centre.

[14] See Lev 2:15; 6:8, and cf. Lev 5:11.

[15] See AP 33.10–11 in Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, 125.

[16] In particular Jer 44:17 refers to the cult of the Queen of Heaven in the context of the Jews living in the land of Pathros, that is, upper Egypt. As such, some connection between the Queen of Heaven mentioned in Jeremiah and the worship of Anat-Yahu at Elephantine and Syene is not difficult to imagine, although the identity of the Queen of Heaven is certainly not a resolved issue, for which see M. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, (2nd ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 101–09. Jeremiah 7 and 44 refers to a diffused cult that is practiced in 'the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem.' At Elephantine the worship of Anat as a possible consort of Yahu was already noted by Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, xix. Yahu's title as the Lord of Heaven (מרא שמיא) in AP 30.15 raises the possibility that his consort at Elephantine may have been given a similar appellation, for which see B. Porten, "Settlement of the Jews at Elephantine and the Arameans at

pointed out, the parallelism between sacrifices mentioned in the Elephantine papyri and Jer 41:5 suggests that 'a cult site where only incense and [cereal] offerings were permitted was inferior to a site where animal sacrifice took place.'[17]

To return to the episode at Mizpah, a logical line of enquiry concerns the backgrounds of the protagonists Gedaliah and Ishmael. Gedaliah's lineage is traced to the scribal elite of Jerusalem, being the son of Achiqam b. Shaphan. Lipschits has suggested that the family of Shaphan represented a pragmatic, pro-Babylonian portion of the Jerusalem political establishment,[18] and it is true that Gedaliah's pro-Babylonian stance does link him politically with the Benjaminite region, which saved much of their territory from destruction by an early capitulation to the Babylonian invaders.[19] Admittedly, there is no evidence for a Benjaminite lineage in relation to Gedaliah b. Achikam, except to say that Blenkinsopp noted in his discussion of the origins of the Gibeonites that names beginning with the element 'ach-/achi-' are common among that group in the Hebrew Bible, and that the Gibeonite region was eventually incorporated into Benjaminite territory.[20]

Ishmael is described in Jer 41:1 as 'one of the royal seed,' and a chief officer of the royal armed forces. While the designation 'royal seed' may indicate an extended rather than immediate familial connection, the equation of Ishmael with the Davidic line seems clear enough.[21] The MT refers to Ishmael as the son of Netaniah b. Elishama in 2 Kgs 25:25 and Jer 41:1. Elishama appears to have

---

Syene," O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 451–470 (462). Arameans at the nearby garrison in Syene built temples to several deities, including the Queen of Heaven (Porten, "Settlement of the Jews at Elephantine," 462–64). It is likely that the traditions that the Arameans brought with them to Syene reflected those that were prevalent in their homeland. Given that this homeland is designated as Samaria, Judah and Jerusalem in one source (*COS* 1.99), some association between the practices in wider Israel and at Syene-Elephantine seems reasonable to assume.

[17] Lipschits, *Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*, 117.

[18] Ibid., 84–88.

[19] O. Lipschits, "The History of the Benjaminite Region Under Babylonian Rule," *TA* 26 (1999) 155–90.

[20] Indeed, 1 Chr 8:29–33 connects Saul with a Gibeonite genealogy.

[21] Ishmael's position as a head of the armed forces may account for his presence in Judah after other members of the royal family had been exiled or put to death by the Babylonians. Alternatively his distant relationship to the legitimate royal line may have meant that he was not considered sufficiently connected to the Davidic line to warrant specific attention. The presence in Mizpah of the 'daughters of the king' in Jer 41:10, apparently free from Babylonian persecution, might also be accounted for in this manner.

been a common name in this period,[22] but the grandfather of Ish-mael could be identified with the royal secretary of the same name mentioned in Jer 36:12.[23]

Somewhat more enigmatic is Ishmael's allegiance with the Ammonite king, Baalis. Looking at this relationship from the per-spective of the Ammonite-Israelite interactions in the Deuterono-mistic History, it may be said there is some evidence of a pro-Davidic, anti-Saulide bias.

Saulide tension with the Ammonites seems to stem from a conflict over the Transjordan region between the Arnon river to the south, the Jabbok river to the north and the Jordan river to the west. Deut 2:37, 3:16, Num 21:24 and Josh 12:2 tell us that the boundary of Ammonite territory was marked by the Jabbok river, and that the land beyond this point was off-limits to the Israelites.

However, the description of the inheritance of Gad in Josh 13:24–28 seems to frame the Ammonite border differently. Verse 25 mentions the regions of Jazer and Gilead, which includes the land between the Jabbok and the Arnon, and ends with the phrase 'and half the land of the Ammonites until Aroer which is before Rabbah.' Thus it seems that at some stage Ammonite territory included land between the Jabbok and the Arnon rivers, extending towards the Jordan.[24]

Dispute over this region probably lies behind the story of the battle between the Gileadites and the Ammonites in Judges 10–11. Here the Ammonites claim that the land between the Jabbok and Arnon rivers is rightfully theirs, having been illegally procured by the Israelites during the conquest. According to the Gileadite view, the land in question was taken from the Amorites, while the Am-monite land beyond the Jabbok river was left intact.

In 1 Samuel 11 the dispute between the Ammonites and the Gileadites reaches a crescendo that draws the newly anointed Isra-elite monarch, Saul, into a battle which occurs in the context of a wider campaign by the Ammonites throughout the territories of Reuben and Gad. According to 4QSam[a], the Ammonite campaign moves northward over the Jabbok in pursuit of 7,000 Israelites that had fled to Jabesh Gilead in the face of the Ammonite onslaught. Saul's defence of the Gileadites is informed by Judg 21:6–14, which establishes blood ties between Benjamin and Jabesh Gilead. Thus

---

[22] See Lipschits, *Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*, 127–28.

[23] For this suggestion see McKane, *Jeremiah XXVI–LII*, 1014.

[24] See, for example, Jer 49:1, and also M. Ottoson, *Gilead: Tradition and History*, trans. J. Gray (Lund: Gleerup, 1969), 126–27. Scholarly opinion on the extent of the borders of ancient Ammon is divided, but there seems to be a general consensus that enforces the view that Ammonite control of the area was not fixed, but rather expanded and contacted throughout Iron IIA-C. For a detailed analysis see R.W. Younker, "The Emergence of the Ammonites," B. MacDonald and R.W. Younker (eds) *Ancient Ammon*, (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 189–218 (165 with note 6).

the dispute sets the Ammonite, pro-Davidic group in conflict with Jabesh Gilead and the house of Saul.[25]

Might this story be seen to reflect the tensions that surfaced between Davidic and Saulide elements during the seventh to sixth centuries, and might these same tensions have underpinned the attempt by Baalis to destabilise the Benjaminite administration at Mizpah?[26] Lipschits has suggested that Ammon fared similarly to Judea under Babylonian domination, and that the cooperation of Baalis and Ishmael may have been a coordinated act of rebellion.[27] Baalis may have based his assistance to Ishmael on the latter's perceived position as a legitimate Davidic heir. In this respect the abduction of the 'daughters of the king' from Mizpah in Jer 41:10 could be seen as an attempt by Ishmael to sure up his claim to the Davidic throne by taking wives and concubines that were, like himself, also of royal stock.[28]

David's relationship with the Ammonites is informed by his interactions with the Ammonite king Hanun after the death of his father Nahash in 2 Samuel 10–12. While Nahash was alive, following the defeat of Hadadezer of Aram-Zobah in 2 Samuel 8, the Ammonite rulership is said to have paid tribute to David.[29] Follow-

---

[25] See G.E. Yates, "Ishmael's Assassination of Gedaliah: Echoes of the Saul-David Story in Jeremiah 40:7–41:18," *WTJ* 67(2005), 103–12 for the view that the story of Gedaliah's assassination is framed in Jeremiah 40–41 as a variation on the conflict between David and Saul. This conscious inter-textual play underscores Jeremiah's rejection of the Davidic kings and his promotion of Babylonian rule. According to Yates, this framing re-casts the characters in opposite terms, where the redeemed figure of Saul, represented by Gedaliah, ultimately prevails over the corrupted Davidic figure, represented by Ishmael.

[26] For recent discussions of the Davidic-Saulide polemic in the sixth century see Y. Amit, "The Saul Polemic in the Persian Period," O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (eds) *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 647–61; and D. Edelman, "Did Saulide-Davidic Rivalry Resurface in Early Persian Yehud?," J.A. Dearman and M.P. Graham (eds) *The Land That I Will Show You: Essays on the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Honour of J. Maxwell Miller* (JSOTSup, 343; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 69–91. The connection with Ammon in this regard is in Baalis's support for Davidic interests over Saulide interests, for which see below.

[27] See Lipschits, *Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*, 118 n. 286; and idem, "Ammon in Transition from Vassal Kingdom to Babylonian Province," *BASOR* 335 (2004), 37–52 (40).

[28] See C.R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW, 176; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 275–76.

[29] See the similar situation under Uzziah mentioned in 2 Chr 26:8. His successor, Jotham, is said to have extracted tribute from the Ammonites as well, but only after defeating them in battle (2 Chr 27:5). P.K. McCarter has suggested that Nahash's support for David would have served to undermine the authority of their mutual rival, the Israelite king Saul. On

ing the death of Nahash, David is said to act kindly towards the incoming Ammonite king 'just as his father showed kindness to me.'[30] This suggests a degree of good will between Davidites and Ammonites under Nahash, but this situation did not continue under Hanun. David's envoy to Hanun is met with suspicion, and the Ammonites join together with the Aramean states in a battle against the Israelites.

Interestingly it is Joab rather than David who leads the campaign against the Ammonites and their Aramean allies. David, the text tells us, stays in Jerusalem, only emerging at Joab's insistence to take the Ammonite capital city, Rabbah, where he assumes sovereignty over the Ammonites by wearing the עטרת מלכם, either the 'crown of their king,' or 'the crown of Milcom.'[31] If O'Ceallaigh's reading of 2 Sam 12:31a is correct, the text indicates that David had the Ammonite people destroy their own city walls and structures, presumably as part of his assumption of hegemony over the region.[32]

Under threat of usurpation by Absalom in 2 Samuel 16, David flees as far as Mahanaim, north of the Jabbok river, where he is provisioned by, among others, Shobi the son of Nahash. Now, while Absalom is not to be directly associated with the house of Saul, given that he is the heir apparent of the Davidic line, he is in some way associated with Benjaminte fortunes, as we learn from 2 Sam 16:3. Here the servant of Mephiboshet, the surviving son of Jonathan b. Saul, reports that his master awaits Absalom's ascent to the throne in Jerusalem in the hope that 'the house of Israel will give me back my grandfather's kingdom.' This is clearly a reference to the less generous grant made to Mephiboshet by David in 2 Sam 9:7, in which he promised to restore 'all the land of Saul your father.' Evidently Mephiboshet hopes to get a better offer from the new monarch than he did from David. Absalom's rule, it seems, bodes well for the house of Saul.

---

this see P.K. McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (AB, 9; New York: Doubleday, 1984), 273–74, and Yates, "Ishmael's Assassination of Gedaliah," 108 n. 20.

[30] 2 Sam 10:2.

[31] 'The crown of their king,' so KJV, NIV, RSV; 'the crown of Milcom,' so JPS, NAB; LXX has 'the crown of Molkom their king.' Milcom, the Ammonite national deity, is mentioned as such in 1 Kgs 11:5. The crown is reported in 1 Kings 11 as weighing one talent, or around 30 kilograms according to R.B.Y. Scott, "Weights and Measures of the Bible," *BA* 22 (1959), 22–40 (32–33). Thus it was probably made for placing on a cult statue rather than on a human head, as already noted in H. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 326.

[32] See G.C. O'Ceallaigh, "And So David Did to All the Cities of Ammon," *VT* 12 (1962), 179–89 (183–89).

Seen in this light, the assistance that Shobi the Ammonite lends to David against Absalom may reflect an Ammonite preference for the house of David over the house of Saul. Certainly, Absalom terminates his pursuit of David before entering Ammonite territory north of the Jabbok river, preferring to encamp in the region of Gilead, south of the Jabbok (2 Sam 17:26). When the battle finally takes place, it is said to occur in the 'forest of Ephraim' (18:6), which is unlikely to have been located near the Ammonite border.

Clearly, a political alliance between the house of David and Ammon was not set in stone. However, if we accept the report in 2 Chr 12:13 that the mother of Rehoboam was Naamah the Ammonite, it would seem that a political alliance was maintained at some level from the early monarchy into the period of the divided kingdom. Lipschits has already noted the possibility that Zedekiah's escape route from Jerusalem aimed towards the Ammonites, with whom he was allied according to Jeremiah 27.[33] If Ishmael's cooperation with Baalis described in Jeremiah 40–41 is any indication, this relationship continued into the post-destruction period.

By the time of Nehemiah's mission to Jerusalem in the middle of the Persian period, certain Ammonite interests occupied positions of influence in the Jerusalem establishment. Tobiah the Ammonite is described as wielding significant political influence in Judea in this period, exerted through economic control and formal alliances, and also by his marriage into a powerful priestly family.[34]

In the Book of Nehemiah this situation is viewed as intolerable, and a description of Nehemiah's actions immediately follows in which he secures the political landscape by removing Tobiah and appointing trusted allies to positions of authority.[35] Nehemiah, it seems, was no friend of the Ammonites. This is perhaps a reflection of the changing currents in Judean politics from the pre-exilic to the post-exilic period. Ishmael represented the Judean monarchy of the pre-exilic period. The political power of the returnees, on the other hand, lay in the authority of the temple priesthood. The bonds that the house of David had established with the Ammonites were not maintained by the priests who took power when the exiles returned. And, while Ammonite influence in Judean politics

---

[33] See Lipschits, *Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*, 78 n. 155; and Lipschits, "Ammon in Transition," 40, with note 5.

[34] See Neh 6:18, 12:3, 13:4–9, and the discussion in D. Edelman, *The Origins of the 'Second' Temple* (London: Equinox, 2005), 37. It is uncertain whether the Eliashiv mentioned in Neh 13:4–5 is the same Eliashiv that was high priest following Yoiakim, or another priest of the same name. For the suggestion that two historical Tobiad figures underlie the character of Tobiah the Ammonite in the Book of Nehemiah see D. Edelman, "Seeing Double: Tobiah the Ammonite as an Encrypted Character," *RB* 113 (2008), 570–84.

[35] Neh 13:7–9.

had continued during the Neo-Babylonian and early Persian peri-
ods, the returning establishment seems to have actively sought to
disassociate itself from the Ammonites entirely.

The tendency in the scholarly literature is to view the murder
of the 70 pilgrims as an act that was somehow subsidiary to the
assassination of Gedaliah. It is possible, though, that Ishmael's
primary motivation to be the legitimate Davidic heir included a
singular commitment to the Jerusalem cult. If one is to assume that
the pilgrims of Jeremiah 41 were headed for an alternative sanctu-
ary to the one in Jerusalem, then their murder might be seen as an
act of religious politics rather than one of brazen cruelty. Ishmael
may have been reacting to what he viewed as a direct threat to the
authority of the Jerusalem temple.[36] Such a situation would likely
have prevailed following the shift from Judahite to Benjaminite (or
Davidic to Saulide) supremacy in the Neo-Babylonian period and
the subsequent relocation of the regional powerbase to an area
associated with the rival sanctuaries at Mizpah and Bethel.

Ishmael's motivation may lie in the predictions of Jerusalem's
future restoration, and the restoration of the Davidic line that is
reflected throughout the prophetic literature.[37] From the period of
the Assyrian crisis of the late eighth century, belief in Israel's future
hegemony over the nations, the restoration of its capital and the
permanency of the royal line, permeate the prophetic books.[38] For

---

[36] For the opposing view that Ishmael sought to remove any sugges-
tion that the Jerusalem cult continued to function under the Babylonians,
which 'would have been far too capitulative an action, and at odds with
their own anti-Babylonian efforts,' see Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, 275.

[37] For the parallels between the expected restoration of the Davidic
monarchy in the Hebrew Bible and the phenomenon termed 'historical
recurrence' in the broader ancient Near East, see P.R. Bedford, *Temple
Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah* (JSJSupS, 65; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 70–
83.

[38] See, for example, Isa 2:2–4 (with Mic 4:1–3); Isa 11:10–12; Amos
9:11–12; and note the use of the term סכת דויד in the latter. For the view
that Amos 9:11–12 is a late addition see W.R. Harper, *A Critical and
Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark,
1905), 195–96, but compare F.I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Amos*
(AB, 24A; New York: Doubleday, 1989), 893 and 904, who suggest locat-
ing Amos 9:11–15 in the eighth century, seeing a desire for the restoration
of the united monarchy behind the allusion. That a pre-exilic expectation
for the restoration of the united monarchy lies behind the use of the ob-
scure term סכת דויד in Amos 9:11, and also behind other references to a
Davidic restoration in the prophetic and historical literature, see Andersen
and Freedman, *Amos*, 916–17, and also B. K. Waltke, *A Commentary on
Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 214–20. According to W. M.
Schniedewind, "Jerusalem, the Late Judean Monarchy, and the
Composition of Biblical Texts," A.G. Vaughn and A.E. Killebrew (eds)
Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period, (SBLSymS, 18;
Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 375–94 (387), the 'so-called

our present purposes, examples of this anticipated restoration in the prophetic literature form the sixth century can be taken from the books of Jeremiah (e.g. Jer 3:12–18; 17:25–26; 23:2–6; 31:7–14) and Zechariah (e.g. Zech 2:6–13; 6:12–15, 8:20–23 and 14:16–17). Here we read references to groups coming in peace to Jerusalem from various local and remote regions.[39] Cult practices are resumed, and there is the presence of a ruler that signals a restoration of the Davidic line in Judah. In Zech 6:12 the figure is a 'branch' (צמח, cf. Zech 3:8 and Jer 23:5), described as both a king and a priest who will rebuild the palace of Yahweh. In Zech 14:16 the king is Yahweh of Hosts, while in Jeremiah 17:25 the reference is to multiple, perhaps successive, kings and princes of Davidic lineage (see Jer 23:5; 30:9; 33:15). Similar allusions in the earlier prophetic literature show that the theme of Jerusalem's restoration to its former glory, and beyond, was known from at least the late eighth century, and continued into the sixth century.[40]

One striking aspect of the restoration tradition in Zechariah is the reference to an annual pilgrimage in which Jerusalem's defeated enemies will 'go up year after year to worship the king, Yahweh of Hosts, and to celebrate the festival of Sukkoth.'[41] This raises the possibility that for Ishmael there was an expectation that the restoration of his fortunes as the Davidic heir would be heralded by the coming of pilgrims to Jerusalem on Sukkoth, together with the re-

messianic prophecies in Isaiah 7–11 are entirely appropriate to the sociopolitical context of the late eighth century,' and the same can be said for the passage in Amos (Schniedewind, "Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology," 390–91). Further examples can be added from the former and latter prophets alike that tend to see this restoration as purely Davidic and Jerusalem-centred, and these may be tied to the development of the Jewish messianic tradition. One well known example, worth highlighting in this connection, is found in Ezek 17:22–24, cf. Ezek 11:17; 13:9, and the comments in M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20* (AB, 22; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 324. On the phenomenon of the 'Davidic hope' in the biblical text in general see the comprehensive work by A. Laato, *A Star is Rising: The Historical Development of the Old Testament Royal Ideology and the Rise of the Jewish Messianic Expectations* (University of South Florida International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism, 5; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

[39] See H. Cazelles, "Israël du nord et arche d'alliance (Jér. III 16)," *VT* 18 (1968), 147–58 (153), for the suggestion that Jer 3:17 refers to an existing tradition in which the northern tribes are depicted as returning to Davidic control, but see the contrary comments in W. McKane, *Jeremiah I–XXV* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 73. McKane, *Jeremiah I–XXV*, 416–18, reads Jer 17:26 as a possible allusion to an annual covenant renewal festival.

[40] For other parallels between the prediction of the restored Jerusalem in Jeremiah 30–33 and Gedaliah's rule in Mizpah, see Yates, "Ishmael's Assassination of Gedaliah," 107.

[41] Zech 14:16, and cf. vv 18–19.

instatement of cultic activities and the establishment of a recognised monarch.[42] How intolerable, then, was the affront presented by the situation at Mizpah. Here was a pilgrimage not to a restored Jerusalem, but to a competing Benjaminite sanctuary, where resided not a legitimate Davidic king, but a Benjaminite sympathiser to Jerusalem's enemies, the Babylonians. The pilgrims came to celebrate the feast of Sukkoth in the seventh month, yet their sacrifices were inadequate and would be offered at a competing cult centre. The murder of Gedaliah and the killing of the 70 pilgrims were acts driven by a common motive. This was Ishmael's reaction to the threat that Gedaliah's Benjaminite administration posed, not only to his status as the rightful Davidic ruler of an independent Judah, but also to the restoration of its capital and the primacy of the Jerusalem cult.[43]

Chapters 1–6 of the Book of Ezra provide a final comment on this topic. As has been noted above, Nehemiah's interactions with Tobiah the Ammonite indicate that any political ties between Ammonites and Judeans were severed with the transference of political power from the monarchy to the priesthood that prevailed among the returning exiles. In Ezra 1–6, the focus of the text is on the establishment of a Jerusalem cult centre.[44] From the outset the

---

[42] See 2 Chr 5:3; and cf. Exod 23:14–17; 34:22–23; Deut 16:16.

[43] The reconstruction presented here is not incompatible with that proposed by M. Leuchter, *The Polemics of Exile in Jeremiah 26–45* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 120–26. In Leuchter's view, the influence of the Levitical Shaphanide family culminated in the transference of political and cultic authority to Gedaliah under the model expressed in Deut 31:9–13. In the text of Jeremiah 40:7–10, this reads as an implementation of Deuteronomistic regulation, which places authority over the administration of the law in the hands of the Levites. Such a shift in the political paradigm would have provoked a response from the disempowered monarchic structure that remained in Judah, of which Ishmael may be seen as a key part. The Shaphanide northern lineage, which might be traced to those elites that migrated south during Hezekiah's reign (see Leuchter, *Polemics of Exile*, 123 n. 37), would have created further tension between the loyal southern monarchists and the (re-)emerging Levitical administration. Indeed, the placement of the conflict between Saulide and Davidic elements within the context of a Levitical-Deuteronomistic lead shift from sovereign state to administered province warrants a more detailed investigation than can be offered here.

[44] The first six chapters of Ezra are seen by most scholars as originally disconnected from the work of the Chronicler and the so-called 'memoirs' of both Ezra and Nehemiah. Williamson has suggested that these chapters constitute a later, perhaps early Hellenistic, addition to earlier Persian period materials contained in other limited sections of Ezra-Nehemiah, but that the essential historical value of the reported events in Ezra 3 should not necessarily be rejected as unhistorical. See H.G.M. Williamson, "The Composition of Ezra i–vi," *JTS* 34 (1983), 1–30; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxxiv–xxxv; and more recently H.G.M. Williamson, *Studies in*

text positions itself specifically to demonstrate the fulfilment of the words of Jeremiah. Throughout the opening chapter the temple is referred to as 'the house of Yahweh *in Jerusalem*.'[45] This can be contrasted with the repeated construction encountered in the Elephantine papyri, 'the house of Yahu which is in Yeb [Elephantine] .' The text of Ezra 1 emphasises that the legitimate temple is based in Jerusalem, not in one of the other competing sanctuaries.[46]

In Ezra 2–3, the resumption of appropriate ritual practices in Jerusalem begins in the seventh month with the building of an altar upon which burnt offerings are made.[47] A representative of the Davidic line is present in Zerubbabel, who is depicted as working in unison with the priesthood.[48] All the elements are present in the narrative of Ezra 1–6 that pertain to the proper restoration of the Jerusalem cult, in stark contrast to the unacceptable circumstances in the Neo-Babylonian period that provoked Ishmael's violent reaction. The re-establishment of Jerusalem and its cult centre in Ezra 1–6 is an idyllic depiction of the restoration that Ishmael had failed to achieve for Judah.

Gedaliah's establishment at Mizpah and the arrival of the 80 pilgrims reflects the underlying shift of the seat of power during the Neo-Babylonian period from Judah to Benjamin. This shift incorporated the apparatus not just of the state, but also of the cult. Ishmael b. Netaniah is a product of the schism between Davidic Judah and Saulide Benjamin. His actions suggest an underlying tension between the old power of the house of David on the one hand, with its foundation in Jerusalem's monarchy and cult, and the emerging Benjaminite administration on the other hand. Making use of an existing relationship between his ancestors and the Ammonites, Ishmael acted ruthlessly to prevent what he saw as a perversion of the anticipated restoration of Jerusalem's fortunes. He murdered Gedaliah, a Babylonian appointee who had deferred Ishmael's claim to the Judean throne and delivered political power

---

Persian Period History and Historiography (FAT, 38; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 269–70. For a convenient summary of the theorised sources that constitute Ezra 1–6, see H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 29–34.

[45] See Ezra 1:3, 5, and 7.

[46] Though not emphasising a possible contestation with competing cult centers, Williamson, "The Composition of Ezra i–vi," 4, already observed that 'it hardly needs saying that the theme of 'rebuilding the house of God on its original site' dominates Ezra 1–6 as a whole.'

[47] See Ezra 3:2, and cf. v 6. See J.M. Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (AB, 14; New York: Doubleday, 1965), 26, for the significance of this timing in relation to an established festival for temple dedications. See also L.L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (Old Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1998), 16–17; and J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1988), 96–97.

[48] See Ezra 3:2; 4:3; 5:2; and cf. Zech 6:13.

into the hands of the Benjaminites. His attack on the pilgrims may be interpreted as a political act in which Ishmael sought to undermine any restoration of cult practices that occurred outside the Jerusalem temple. Finally, Ezra 1–6 presents a view of a restored state from the perspective of the returnees of the middle Persian period.[49] The failures of the remnant described in Jeremiah 40–41 are superseded by the successes of the returnees. Jerusalem's enemies are subdued, the city and temple are rebuilt, and ritual practice is restored in the sanctuary. Most importantly, the expectation underlying the prophetic predictions of a restored Judean state based in Jerusalem could be realised, and the political and cultic excursus to Benjaminite Mizpah be once and for all relegated to the past.

---

[49] See Bedford, *Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah*, 83, and note 44 above.