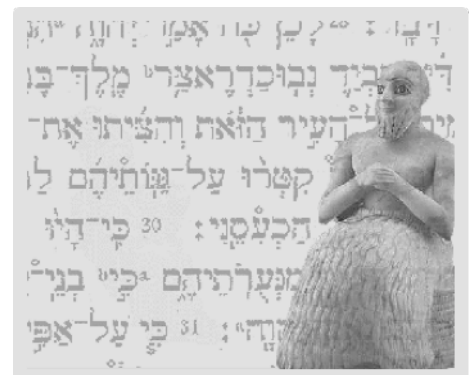


Isaiah 40:1-2: Reading Royal Commission as a Call for Return Migration in the Early Persian Period

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ISAIAH 40:1–2: READING ROYAL COMMISSION AS A CALL FOR RETURN MIGRATION IN THE EARLY PERSIAN PERIOD*

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INTRODUCTION

In the midst of Cyrus the Great's rise to power in the second half the 6th century BCE, a fervor began to stir among some members of Judean diaspora communities in Babylonia. Displaced following the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, their ancestors had been resettled in Mesopotamia some 50 years prior. In the years following the first waves of resettlement, two generations of Judeans had been born and raised in Babylonia, their only access to Jerusalem and its temple through the memories of their parents and grandparents. But Cyrus's ascent brought with it the opportunity for a potential 'return' to Judea,¹ or at least the

* This paper has its roots in the Hebrew Bible Colloquium at the University of Chicago Divinity School and I am indebted to the helpful feedback offered there by Simeon Chavel and Liane Feldman. Versions of this paper were also presented in the University of Chicago Hebrew Bible Workshop and in the "Formation of Isaiah" unit at the 2017 Society of Biblical Literature National Meeting in Boston, November 18–21. I am grateful for the productive conversations I was able to have in those settings.

¹ The term 'return' requires some explanation; how does one *return* to a place to which one has never been? There is a long tradition of those who undertake such journeys using this language of 'return.' As pointed out to me by Baruch Schwartz at the SBL National Meeting in Denver in 2018, Gen 24:5–8 already employs this kind of language. Here, using the root *š-w-b*, Abraham's servant asks if he should 'return' Isaac to Abraham's homeland should he have difficulty procuring a wife with the groom sight unseen (ההשב אשיב את בנך אל הארץ אשר) (יצאת משם, v. 5). Abraham, however, prohibits Isaac's 'return,' telling his servant "you shall not return him there" (רק את בני לא תשב שמה) (v. 8). Of course, Isaac had never actually been to Abraham's homeland in the narrative.

In his study of return migration among Indian-Americans, Sonali Jain has argued that language of 'return' still has hermeneutical value for understanding the mindsets of those who undertake such such journeys, despite its seeming imprecision ("For Love and Money: Second-

hope for one.² Judeans of the Babylonian diaspora were confronted with the question, “given who I am, where do I belong?”³ One Judean, the Author responsible for chs. 40–48 of the book of Isaiah,⁴ had a definitive answer to that question: Judeans belong in Judea.

Generation Indian-Americans ‘Return’ to India,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36 [2013]: 896–97). I will therefore continue to describe this phenomenon as a ‘return’ (using scare quotes) even if, in reality, those Judeans who were to undertake the journey to Judea had no first-hand experience of the place to which they were to (re)patriate.

² An identification of the exact circumstances that permitted the return migration of some number of Judeans early in the Persian period, either under Cyrus or somewhat later under Darius I, is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. However, there are a number of scholars who dispute a setting in the reign of Cyrus for some if not all of Isa 40–48, preferring to date the material to the reign Darius I or one of his successors. These conclusions are based on considerations of supposedly inaccurate prophecy contained within the composition or other perceived editorial factors. See the discussion in n. 24 below.

³ The phrasing of this question distills the hybrid identity of members of diaspora communities, particularly those who have the opportunity or means to choose their place of residence. I first encountered it in Sara Yael Hirschhorn’s study on the Israeli Settler Movement. Sara Yael Hirschhorn, *City on a Hilltop: American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 25. She in turn cites Avruch’s study on of that population as her source; Kevin Avruch, *American Immigrants in Israel: Social Identities and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 104–5.

⁴ I use the term “Author” here rather than “compiler,” “collector,” or even “prophet/prophetic group” because I understand these chapters to be a single composition and the work of a single individual who was active in Babylonia. In this regard I am persuaded by the work of Menahem Haran, who made a similar case for these chapters based on thematic unity (revolving around the issues of Yahweh’s **חדשות** and **ראשונות**), (Menahem Haran, “Literary Structure and Chronological Framework of the Prophecies in Is. xl–xlviii,” in *Congress Volume Bonn 1962* [ed. P.A.H. de Boer and G.W. Anderson; VTSup 9; Boston: Brill, 1963], 127–55) and more recently, Simeon Chavel (Simeon Chavel, “Prophetic Imagination in the Light of Narratology and Disability Studies in Isaiah 40–48,” *JHS* 14 [2014]: 1–47). The latter has convincingly argued that Isa 40–48, in its entirety, demonstrates “a plan that presupposes the [composition’s] end, encompasses the whole, and requires a holistic view” (18). Furthermore, regarding the textuality of the composition and its relevance for the title of “Author,” I am influenced by the work of Yehoshua Gitay. According to Gitay, because literature in the ancient world was meant to be experienced by its audience *aurally*, to ask whether this unit was first “orally composed” and later written down or *vice-versa*, is to somewhat miss the point (at least with regard to how its historical audience might have received it). Yehoshua Gitay, “Deutero-Isaiah: Oral or Written?,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 185–97. I therefore use “Author” in its broader sense of “creator,” the individual responsible for the work of art that is the composition.

In taking this position, I am arguing that Isa 40–48 is distinct in that it does not conform to how biblical prophecy is traditionally understood in critical biblical scholarship. For example, in his *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, Karl van der Toorn outlines how he

This paper presents a new reading of the opening verses of the Author's composition, Isa 40:1–2. Rather than an address to a divine council, these verses serve as a royal commissioning for the Author's Judeo-Babylonian community, addressed throughout chs. 40–48 by the traditional and geographically-rooted epithet, Jacob-Israel. This reading makes better sense of the passage in its immediate context, within the Author's theological claims of the deity more broadly, and perhaps most importantly, as part of the overall goal of the composition. As a piece of persuasive literature, Isa 40–48 is primarily concerned with inspiring the return migration⁵ of members of the Babylonian diaspora,⁶ the Author's fellow Judeo-Babylonians. Confronted with the reality of

understands the process by which prophetic materials were written, expanded, handed down, and ultimately collected under the name of a prophetic figure like Jeremiah. According to his reconstruction, prophetic books are anthologies of collected wisdom rather than the works of single individuals (Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007], 173–204). However, even van der Toorn concedes the written (and apparently singular) nature of Deutero-Isaiah's work: “[Deutero-Isaiah] wrote his message, instead of preaching it in the streets” (203). For further differences between Isa 40–48 (40–55) and the “typical” kinds of prophetic collections described by van der Toorn, see the comments of Katie M. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes: Lyric Cohesion and Conflict in Second Isaiah* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 26–28.

Still, many scholars prefer to see diachronic literary process behind Isa 40–48 (and 40–55). See, for example the argument of Rainer Albertz (and especially his thorough summary of previous scholarship that takes a redactional/compositional approach to these chapters, 382–91): Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century BCE* (SBL 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 382–433, esp. 392–99. However, for a critique of an overly atomizing analysis of the composition, see Richard J. Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading: An Interpretation of Second Isaiah* (Theological inquiries; New York: Paulist, 1984), 36.; cf. Benjamin Sommer's approach to prophetic texts as outlined in the introduction to his Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Contraversions; Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 4–5.

⁵By “return migration,” I mean the ‘return’ of the children and grandchildren of immigrants to the homeland of their ancestors. This phenomenon is also known as roots migration, ethnic migration, and counter-diasporic migration. Katherine Southwood borrows “roots migration” from Paul Basu's concept of ‘roots-tourism’ among later generations returning to the Scottish homeland of their ancestors. Katherine E. Southwood, “The Impact of Second and Third Generation Returnees as a Model for Understanding the Post-Exilic Context,” in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context* (eds. Jonathan Stökl and Caroline Waerzeggers; BZAW 478; Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), 330 n. 23. For “ethnic migration,” see Takeyuki Tsuda, “Introduction,” in *Diasporic Homecomings: Ethnic Return Migration in Comparative Perspective* (ed. Takeyuki Tsuda; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 1. For counter-diasporic migration, see Russell King and Anastasia Christou, “Cultural Geographies of Counter-Diasporic Migration: Perspectives from the Study of Second-Generation ‘Returnees’ to Greece,” *Population Space and Place* 16 (2010): 105–6.

⁶While the Author never explicitly states (or better, has the deity or

a culturally embedded community with weakened ties to Judea, the Author of Isa 40–48 developed a complex and aggressive rhetorical strategy meant to persuade his/her compatriots to ‘return’ to Jerusalem by hailing them as key members of the royal procession to Judea,⁷ running ahead of the party to announce the “new things” that were to come to pass.

The new interpretation of Isa 40:1–2 proposed in this paper gestures towards an important insight that lies just below the surface of Isa 40–48. Rather than a community ready and waiting to ‘return’ to their ancestral homeland, the message and rhetoric employed by the Author of Isa 40–48 suggests that he/she was addressing an audience with an ambiguous (at best) view of return migration and of their own attachments to Judea, an audience that needed to be persuaded to undertake the journey to the homeland of their parents and grandparents. The persuasive nature of the document disagreement, if not a struggle, over the constituent elements of Judean identity among members of the diaspora. While the Author of Isa 40–48 roots the community’s identity in Judea, the composition’s implied audience seems to have much looser ties, indicating that the traditional image of Judeans weeping for Zion on Babylonian canal banks is overly simplistic and imprecise; the Author’s composition a supra-local sense of social identity that did not assume a life in Judea to be an inherent part of being a Judean.

ISAIAH 40:1–2: THE ROYAL COMMISSION

The composition opens with the divine voice, filtered through the barely individuated prophetic character who serves as Yahweh’s mouthpiece,⁸ delivering a series of plural imperatives:

“Comfort. Comfort my people,” נחמו נחמו עמי

his prophetic representative state) this as the composition’s aim, its Jerusalem-ward focus and its clarion call for Jacob–Israel to flee from Babylon in its closing lines (48:20–21) strongly suggest this interpretation. The rhetorical agenda outlined in this paper further supports this conclusion. For a sustained and detailed argument in favor of this interpretation, see Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading*, 9–37. More recently Simeon Chavel has argued that the composition is meant to convince the Author’s Judeo-Babylonian audience that Yahweh has determined to repatriate the community through his agent, Cyrus. Chavel, “Prophetic Imagination,” 7–13.

⁷ I understand “rhetoric” to be the use of intentional and persuasive speech in service of a goal or end. As such, it may employ other modes of discourse to that end (eg. poetry) just as it can be utilized by a variety of genres (eg. prophecy). For a discussion of the relationship of rhetoric (or oratory), poetry, and prophecy as they relate to Second Isaiah, see the discussion in Heffelfinger, *I Am Large*, 22–33. While I disagree with Heffelfinger’s conclusions concerning the persuasive nature of Isa 40–48, her attention to the poetry of the composition is to be commended.

⁸ Chavel gives this character the title of herald. On the complicated relationship between deity, prophetic voice, author, and audience, see Chavel, “Prophetic Imagination,” 14–19, 25–35.

Says your God.
 “Console Jerusalem
 And call to her.” (Isa 40:1–2)

יאמר אלהיך
 דברו על לב ירושלם
 וקראו אליה

It is clear from these lines that Yahweh has good news for Jerusalem and its inhabitants;⁹ however, as the opening words of a new composition, the absence of a clearly marked addressee for these imperatives has produced an interpretive crux. Of course, the use of imperatives to start a composition is not, in itself, an issue;¹⁰ rather, it is the distance—cultural, geographic, and temporal—from the original context of their delivery that creates the issue for the reader. In the ancient oral/aural context in which the composition would have been received, the orator would have had recourse to a variety of devices—gesture, inflection, rhythm—to clearly indicate who was charged with this responsibility and to properly orient the historical audience to the message that was to follow. However, the strictly textual version of this composition that has been preserved in chs. 40–48 of the book of Isaiah has been stripped of these cues, creating a problem for the reader who is tasked with filling in the gaps. And the issue is not unique to modern interpreters; the ancient exegetes responsible for producing the Septuagint and the Targumim were also bothered by the lack of clarity in these verses. Both interpolated marked addressees in their translations of the passage.¹¹ As was the case for these ancient translators, the modern scholar who encounters these lines in their strictly textual form must work from context to identify the party charged with delivering words of comfort to Jerusalem.

The interpretive solution that has found the most traction in modern scholarship takes the addressees to be members of the divine council. First proposed by Frank Moore Cross, this reading understands the opening verses of ch. 40 to be a varia-

⁹ “[T]he message of redemption in the so called [*sic*] prologue [40.1–11] is not directed to the exiles in Babylonia or elsewhere but to Jerusalem/Zion herself.” Ulrich Berges, “Zion and the Kingship of Yhwh in Isaiah 40–55,” in *Enlarge the Site of your Tent: The City as Unifying Theme in Isaiah* (eds. Archibald L.H.M. van Wieringen, Annemarieke van der Woude, *OstSt* 58; Boston: Brill, 2011), 95–119 (97–98).

¹⁰ As one early reviewer of this paper pointed out, both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* begin with imperatives, a conventional call for the muses to embody the compositions’ speaker/rhapsode (G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary* [1; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985], 51).

¹¹ The translators of the LXX and the Targumim were troubled by this lack of clarity and so interpolated explicit addressees to remedy the problem. The LXX adds the vocative ἱερείς, “priests” to the beginning of v. 2 and the Targum adds נבייא to the beginning of v. 1 as the addressee of the imperative איתנבו. However, the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa), like the MT, lacks a named addressee. In the two other Qumran manuscripts that preserve these lines (1QIsa^b and 4QIsa^a), the beginning of v. 1 is damaged, although reconstructions follow the MT/1QIsaa.

tion on the divine council type-scene, paralleling the commissioning of Isaiah b. Amos in Isa 6.¹² According to this reading, vv. 1–2 are a re-presentation or a transcription of what has been voiced in the council; Yahweh’s commissioning of divine beings to comfort his people and to console Jerusalem. This reading, however, strains the contours of the type-scene and fails to take into account a consistent element of the composition’s message, one that is fundamentally opposed to the existence of such a council.

As Joseph Blenkinsopp has argued in his own critique of Cross’s proposal, ch. 40 lacks the deliberative element that defines the divine council type-scene’s parade examples (Isa 6:8, 1 Kgs 22:20–22, and Job 1–2): “Wherever such a scenario is clearly presented [a divine council type-scene], Yahweh engages in discussion and solicits opinions but does not give orders.”¹³ Instead, ch. 40’s opening verses are the *inverse* of the standard council scene: no deliberation takes place, and only orders are given. It should also be noted that in the hallmark examples of the type-scene, the members of the deity’s audience—the minor divine beings who make up the council¹⁴—are clearly identified and personified,¹⁵ an important detail that is noticeably absent from our opening.

Of course, deviation from some of the contours of a type-scene is not reason enough to reject the divine council interpretation out of hand, as variation is often what makes the type-scene compelling.¹⁶ If, however, such variation is inconsistent

¹² Frank M. Cross, “The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah,” *JNES* 12 (1953): 274–77 (276). Taking this interpretation to its extreme conclusion, Christopher Seitz actually argues that the *entirety* of chs. 40–48 takes place within the setting of the divine council, and only with 49:1 does the prophet take the stage. Christopher R. Seitz, “The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 229–47; for his summary of the poetics of 40:1–11, see p. 235.

¹³ Instead, Blenkinsopp posits (following the Targumist) that the first series of imperatives (vv. 1–2) is addressed “to prophets in general, or to a specific prophetic group.” It is the duty of this group to function collectively as Yahweh’s messenger by informing Jerusalem that the city “has fulfilled its service, its iniquity has been redeemed, and it has received from Yahweh double for its offenses” (40:2). Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 19a; New York: Doubleday, 2002), 179–80. While I agree that the deity is addressing a group of humans who is supposed to deliver this news, the term “prophet” misrepresents this group and is too closely tied to the עבדים of chs. 49ff.

¹⁴ In Isaiah’s throne vision, the prophet describes the *seraphim* who attend to the deity (6:2); Micaiah mentions the heavenly host, and the spirit (רוח) willing to come forward; and finally in Job, the divine beings (בני אלהים) take their places in the presence of Yahweh before he begins his discussion with the adversary, השטן.

¹⁵ Chavel, “Prophetic Imagination,” 26 n. 64.

¹⁶ According to Robert Alter’s analysis of biblical narrative, deviation from convention, from the type-scene, represents a medium by which an author is able to express his/her creativity and artistry. Robert

with or even diametrically opposed to the message and rhetoric running through the rest of the composition, then we are right to call it into question. The uniqueness of Yahweh is emphatically asserted throughout the discourse of chs. 40–48; Yahweh alone is in control of the universe, and, most importantly, no other god or divine being exists outside of him.¹⁷ The deity's singularity is a fundamental proposition of the composition. The presence of a divine council in 40:1–2 would therefore be antithetical to this message.¹⁸ But if not to these heavenly beings, then to whom are these imperatives directed?

The answer, I propose, is the stated audience of the composition, a community of Judeans in the Babylonian diaspora, addressed throughout the text by the epithet 'Jacob-Israel,'¹⁹ a geographically-rooted sobriquet that is employed to invoke the ancestral homeland of the Author's Judeo-Babylonian compatriots.²⁰ As such, these imperatives serve as a kind of royal commissioning. They are part of a broader rhetorical strategy meant

Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative: Revised and Updated* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 55–78.

¹⁷ Cf. 40:18–20; 41:21–29; 44:9–20; 46:1–7. Robert Wilson states the point well: "The idea that the group is the divine council, God's advisory committee made up of lesser deities who do God's will, is unlikely, since Second Isaiah devotes several oracles to arguing that these other deities are not deities at all and in any case are totally ineffective and unable to do anything in the cosmos." Robert R. Wilson, "The Community of the Second Isaiah," in *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah* (ed. Christopher R. Seitz; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 54. Shalom Paul, who accepts Cross' reading, nonetheless emphasizes the singularity of Yahweh in the Author's rhetoric. Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66: Translation and Commentary* (ECC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 20. Nathaniel Levtow includes these critiques in a prophetic genre he calls "Idol Parodies," a literary phenomenon he locates in the sixth century. For his discussion of Deutero-Isaiah, see his *Images of Others: Iconic Politics in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 57–71.

¹⁸ In their analysis of these verses, Goldingay and Payne approach this conclusion, but stop short, permitting the existence of the council but not their commission. "[Modern interpreters] have been inclined to see the comforters as Yhwh's supernatural agents but there is no background for that in the book so far, and what follows will tend to emphasize the way Yhwh stands and works alone. While the prophet may well be overhearing events in the heavenly court, this does not carry the implication that Yhwh is acting via its heavenly members." John Goldingay and David Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55: Volume I* (ICC; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 63.

¹⁹ On the identification of Jacob-Israel and the second person direct addresses with the composition's implied (and historical by means of oral delivery) audience, see the discussion in Heffelfinger, *I Am Large*, 92.

²⁰ Through the employment of this title, the Author indexes a number of elements in his audience's identity. First and foremost is an identification with the namesake and shared ancestor of the nation with his roots in the land of Canaan. But the title also calls to mind Jacob's labor in Aram under Laban, his complex relationship with morality, and even his divine election from the womb. For a full treatment of this topic,

to convince members of the audience that if they want to be counted as members of Jacob-Israel, it is incumbent upon them to return migrate to Judea and to announce the good news of Yahweh's determination to return and restore his once and future capital.

YAHWEH'S REIGN AND ANNOUNCING THE "NEW THINGS"

As Simeon Chavel has recently demonstrated, the Author of Isa 40–48 presents Yahweh in radically different terms than traditional ancient Near Eastern models of deity.²¹ In the absence of the conventional signifiers of divine efficacy—a king, a temple, and a priesthood to serve him—Yahweh is redefined in terms of transcendence; his power is not demonstrated through material symbols, but rather his ability to control the unfolding of history,²² a point illustrated through a series of **יב** or courtroom scenes.²³ In these vignettes, Yahweh asserts his dominance over other so-called deities. He mocks his would-be rivals by challenging them to predict the future, and establishes his own authority as the sole deity present at the creation of the universe. Yahweh's control extends beyond the acts of creation and into the realm of geopolitical events. He goes so far as to claim responsibility for Cyrus's rise to power and the Persian king's conquest of Babylon, anticipated or realized.²⁴ In fact, the

see Meira Polliack, "Deutero-Isaiah's Typological Use of Jacob in the Portrayal of Israel's National Renewal," in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (eds. H.G. Revetlow and Y. Hoffman; JSOTSup 319; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 81–99.

²¹ Chavel, "Prophetic Imagination," 1–6.

²² *Ibid.*, 18–25; Dynamic theological responses and reorientations can play a crucial role in maintaining group identity among displaced peoples. According to A.D. Smith, who focused on the question of ethnic identity in the ancient world: "From [the preceding discussion on religion and ethnicity] it may be deduced that what matters for ethnic persistence and survival is the ability of any religious tradition to (a) renew itself and adapt to different conditions and (b) to transmit and spread its message of holiness and salvation to the non-elite strata, particularly in the towns, and so to socialize the new generation of adherents." Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (New York: Blackwell, 1987), 120.

²³ 41:1–10; 44:6–8; 45:20–21.

²⁴ 41:1–2, 25; 43:3–4; 44:28; 45:1–7, 13. The issue of the Author's relationship to Babylon's fall, both temporally and geographically, remains a crux among scholars who study Isa 40–48 (or 40–55), particularly those who prefer to see an extended process of composition/collation/collection behind these chapters. A primary issue concerns the (apparent) imprecision of the composition's prediction of Cyrus' bloody conquest of Babylon (Isa 47), at least in as much as it differs from the royal Persian accounts and what has been preserved in Herodotus. For the source documents recording the conquest, see text nos. 3.21–3.25, 3.28 in Amélie Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Based on the evidence from these primary sources, Rainer Albertz asserts that Isa 47 actually represents an originally unfulfilled prophecy

with regard to Cyrus by the community responsible for Deutero-Isaiah (373), and that its fulfillment in the revolts against Darius in 522 prompted new oracles concerning the Persian king responsible for the delivery of exilic Judean communities (381). The three oracles referring to the anonymous redeemer of Jacob-Israel (42:5–7; 45:11–13*, and 48:12–16a) therefore refer to Darius, and not Cyrus. Rainer Albertz, “Darius in place of Cyrus: The First Edition of Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40.1–52.12) in 521 BCE,” *JSOT* 27 (2003): 371–83. Cf. Reinhard Kratz’s argument for the inclusion of Cyrus material into a preexisting collection of prophecies in the wake of Darius’ suppression of rebellion in Babylon in 522/21. According to Kratz, it was only with the fall of the city to Darius that the earlier hopes for Cyrus and the Persian empire were realized. Reinhard Gregor Kratz, *Kyros im Deuterjesaja-Buch: redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Entstehung und Theologie von Jes 40–55* (FAT 1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 183–91. Finally, Phillip R. Davies also prefers a later date for the collation/collection of the material, arguing that using the apparent imprecision of Isa 47 to defend a date (before Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon) and setting (Babylonian) for the composition is circular. Philip R. Davies, “God of Cyrus, God of Israel: Some Religio-Historical Reflections on Isaiah 40–55,” in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F.A. Sawyer* (eds. J.F.A. Sawyer, P.R. Davies et al., JSOTSup 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 214–15. According to Davies, “It requires its conclusion as a premise.” (215) The failed prediction makes better sense only at a temporal and geographic distance, and with an intervening (and bloody) fall of the city under Xerxes. Davies continues, noting an “inaccurate prediction may as well be an inaccurate record or memory. And if a record or memory, it may be either accidentally or deliberately inaccurate. Poets are allowed this sort of thing . . .” Davies then goes on to list a number of themes that occur in chs. 40–55 that, according to his interpretation, only make sense against a 5th century Judean background.

And it is here, with an appeal to the whims of the poet, that Davies exposes his argument to critique and specifically to what Ben Sommer has called the trap of pseudo-historicism. This approach assumes that all events (and responses there to) can only be understood in terms of part of a larger process. In this case, a poetic prediction (or, according to by Davies, an *ex post facto* description) of Cyrus’ conquest and reflections thereupon from Judea. Sommer critiques this kind of approach for its failure to account for any originality or creativity on behalf of an author. If everything is historically contingent and dependent, then there is no opportunity for genius, a point he finds very problematic. Instead, Sommer advocates for an approach that takes into account historical processes in the evaluation of a piece, but leaves room for authorial originality (Benjamin D. Sommer, “Dating Pentateuchal Texts and the Perils of Pseudo-Historicism,” in *Pentateuch as Torah: International Perspectives on Current Research* [eds. Thomas Dozeman, B. Konrad Schmid et al.; FAT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011], 101–8). In this case, Davies does not consider whether or not it might serve a poet/prophet/author’s message to embellish the details of a Persian victory for the sake of a Judeo-Babylonian audience, or whether he/she might have borrowed details from the bloody battle at Opis that preceded Babylon’s conquest. Furthermore, and perhaps more problematically, the approach is skeptical of Judean claims about how Cyrus conquered the city while taking at face value the clearly propagandistic accounts of the Persian imperial apparatus and the Babylonian priesthood (whom that apparatus actively supported). It seems to me that

triumphs of men like Cyrus are nothing in Yahweh's view of history. It is only his actions that have important and lasting effects:

All flesh is grass,	כל הבשר חציר
Its accomplishments like a flower of the field.	וכל חסדו כציץ השדה
The grass fades and the flower wilts	יבש חציר נבל ציץ
when Yahweh's breath blows. (Isa 40:6–7)	כי רוח יהוה נשבה

In this re-imagining of deity, the traditional markers of divine authority are unimportant; it is only Yahweh's control over history (and his demonstration of that control) that matters.

And yet, despite this radical theological recasting of Yahweh as a transcendent deity, the Author's ability to describe such a being was nonetheless circumscribed by a conceptual framework rooted in the realm of the mundane.²⁵ To depict the deity's cosmic might, the Author appealed to the most powerful human figures of the day; Yahweh is painted in the image of the ultimate warrior king, a monarch without rival in complete control of his kingdom.²⁶ However, through the Author's recasting, Yahweh's

these sources are not inherently more "objective" than the contemporary material preserved in the Hebrew Bible. See, for example, the suspicions of Pierre Briant regarding the degree to which the Cuneiform and Greek accounts are in agreement, suggesting that both reflect a Persian propagandistic account of the events. Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002).

²⁵ For a thorough discussion of the royal metaphor applied to Yahweh in the context of divine visitation, see Simeon Chavel's study, "The Face of God and the Etiquette of Eye-Contact," wherein he argues that the concern for seeing the divine visage often expressed in biblical literature, "derives from the social sphere of human hierarchical interrelations, perhaps best illustrated by the royal court and its etiquette of manners." Simeon Chavel, "The Face of God and the Etiquette of Eye-Contact: Visitation, Pilgrimage, and Prophetic Vision in Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish Imagination," *JSQ* 19 (2012): 1–55, esp. 7–23, here 23. For a theoretical approach to the study of metaphor within the Hebrew Bible, see ch. 2 of Job Y. Jindo, *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered: A Cognitive Approach to Poetic Metaphor in Biblical Prophecy* (HSM; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 25–54.

²⁶ Although Yahweh's kingship and its association with Jerusalem/Zion in particular are a far more frequent theme in chs. 1–39 of the book of Isaiah (eg. chs. 1–2, 6, 36–39), the association is nonetheless strong in Isa 40–48 (as well as in 49ff.). For example, Ulrich Berges has argued that in chs. 40–48 (as well as in 51), Yahweh's return to and restoration of Zion as the seat of his reign crucial elements of the composition's cosmic outlook; represent a re-ordering or re-establishing of Israel's religious 'map' in the aftermath of the Judah's fall. Berges, "Zion and the Kingship of Yhwh," 102–5. Similarly, on the elevation of Yahweh's otherwise traditional reign in Zion to the realm of the cosmic realm Deut Isa, see Klaus Seybold, "מֶלֶךְ, *melek*," *TDOT* 8:369–370. For a recent treatment of the development of the theme of Yahweh's divine kingship in Israelite thought, see Shawn W. Flynn, *YHWH*

kingdom has been expanded from the former territory of Judah to include all of creation. This image of Yahweh as an omnipotent and transcendent monarch recurs throughout the discourse of chs. 40–48. He is given explicitly royal titles (“king of Jacob” in 41:21, “your king” in 43:15, and the “king of Israel” in 44:6) and his military might—a domain of kings—is the subject of song (42:10–14). The author even appeals to Yahweh’s triumph over Egypt and the forces of chaos in Jacob-Israel’s mythic past (43:16–17).²⁷ Without rival in battle or rule, Yahweh is presented as the ultimate and singular royal authority in the universe.

But what good is transcendental power if no one knows you have it? the ability to control history if people misunderstand or misattribute its causes and effects? It is not enough for the Author to proclaim Yahweh’s authority; that message must be spread in order to set the record straight and to instill awe and comfort in those who would believe in Yahweh, those who might think that he had abandoned them.²⁸ And so just as a human king might appoint messengers to proclaim his magnificent feats throughout his kingdom, so too must Yahweh commission

is King: The Development of Divine Kingship in Ancient Israel (VTSup 159; Boston: Brill, 2014). Flynn argues that the prophet behind oracles like Isa 10 and 11 had already begun the process of universalizing Yahweh in response to Assyrian dominance. This new configuration is not quite the same as the transcendent deity in charge of history that Chavel has identified in the imagery of Isa 40–48, but these 8th century oracles do envision a deity who is in control of/can manipulate the actions of other nations (like Assyria). Cf. a similar observation in my discussion of Nahum 2, below.

²⁷ On the influence of the Song of the Sea on this passage, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 227–28. See also Trygve N.D. Mettinger, “In Search of the Hidden Structure: YHWH as King in Isaiah 40–55” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah V. 1* (eds. C.C. Broyles and C.A. Evans; New York: Brill, 1997), 143–52. Mettinger makes a strong case for the “tripartite mythopoetic pattern comprised of battle-kingship-palace (Temple)” that is common in ancient Mesopotamian and Levantine literature serving as the backbone of Isa 40–55, albeit it in a distinctly historicized Israelite form (144). In his discussion of Isa 52:11–12 (insights of which could just as easily be applied to the hymn in 43:16–17), he states that “here we are confronted with a development that seems to be uniquely Israelite: the historicization of the battle motif. The first Exodus and the liberation from Babylon are new acts by which the divine monarch demonstrates his kingship” (149).

²⁸ Based on the embedded speech in Isa 40:27–28, it seems that fear of or concern for divine abandonment was a significant issue with which the Author felt he/she had to deal. Heffelfinger, who argues that this is the primary issue with which the Author of Second Isaiah contends, understands the composition to be in conversation with the book of Lamentations and that work’s claims to divine abandonment and the absence of one (Yahweh) to comfort (נחם) it (cf. Lam 1:9). Heffelfinger, *I Am Large*, 96–100.; cf. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 127–30. Heffelfinger’s suggestion has the potential to offer context for how we should understand the nature of the “comfort” that the deity compels in Isa 40:1.

heralds to announce his own mighty deeds and **חדשות** —the “new things”—he has in store for the universe.²⁹

As Menahem Haran has demonstrated, the focal point of Yahweh’s **חדשות** was the restoration of his people and his return to / restoration of Jerusalem and Judea, the traditional seat of the deity’s power.³⁰ The catastrophic defeat that the kingdom of Judah had suffered at the hands of the Nebuchadnezzar’s army left Yahweh’s efficacy and loyalty to Jacob-Israel in question.³¹ Through the composition’s theological recasting of Yahweh as a cosmic deity, the Author determined to remove any doubt in the deity’s might or his presence. The composition makes the claim that it was not Yahweh’s inefficacy that allowed Jerusalem to fall; rather the city’s destruction was part of a broader divine plan that was beyond the comprehension of anyone who might seek to understand it. This means that just as Yahweh had the power to permit (or perhaps cause) its destruction, so too could he effect its restoration.

Both Yahweh’s reign as transcendent monarch and his plans to restore Jerusalem are announced straightaway in the composition’s prologue, 40:1–11.³² This section, which makes use of ancient Judean and Babylonian motifs drawn from royal processions and deities returning from exile, presents Yahweh as a conquering hero on the march back to his capital city.³³ In the

²⁹ On Yahweh’s **חדשות**, see Isa 42:9; 43:19; 48:6.

³⁰ Haran, “Literary Structure,” 140–41.

³¹ “Many of the survivors of the disaster [of the sack of Jerusalem] must have concluded that the God of Israel had been discredited along with his prophets, and for the deportees the spectacle of ceremonies and processions in honor of Marduk, city god of Babylon, would have been a constant reminder of Yahweh’s defeat.” Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel: Revised and Enlarged* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 187; cf. Ralph W. Klein, “Theology for Exiles: The Kingship of Yahweh,” *Dialogue* 17 (1978): 128–34 (128).

³² This section functions as a crucial component of the Author’s broader rhetorical project by introducing many the composition’s core concepts; it thus plays a vital role to establishing how an audience might understand its message. In support of this conclusion, see the comments of Blenkinsopp: “This introductory apostrophe amounts to an *apologia* for the message that is to follow in chs. 40–48 and therefore makes a fitting prologue to these chapters.” Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 178–87, here 179.

³³ Christina Ehringer has argued persuasively that the imagery in Isa 40:1–11* (she treats vv. 6–8 as secondary) is modeled after royal processions in the ancient Near East as well as the literary depiction of the return of deities who have abandoned their cities only to return with a new ruler. She has productively compared Isa 40:1–11* (and what she sees as its opposite bookend in 52:7–10) with a text concerning the return of the statue of Marduk from Elam during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I. Nabonidus—a contemporary of the Author—in turn, used that tradition in the production of his own inscriptions. Christina Ehringer, “YHWH’s Return in Isaiah 40:1–11* and 52:7–10: Pre-exilic Traditions of Jerusalem and Babylonian Influence,” in *Remembering and Forgetting in Early Second Temple Judah* (eds. E. Ben Zvi and C. Levin; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 91–104. Cf. Mettinger on the prologue: “What we witness in [Isa] 40:1–11 are the preparations for the

closing verses of the section (vv. 9–11), he orders his heralds to deliver a message of restoration and to announce his **חדשות**:

Ascend a tall mountain,	על הר גבה עלי לך
herald to Zion, ³⁴	מבשרת ציון
Raise your voice with might,	הרימי בכח קולך מבשרת
herald to Jerusalem	ירושלם
Cry out, do not fear.	הרימי אל תיראי
Say to the cities of Judah	אמרי לערי יהודה
“Here is your God!” (v. 9)	הנה אלהיכם

From the peak of a mountain, a female herald is called to announce Yahweh’s triumphal return to Jerusalem and his intent to reign (v. 10). Associating the deity with the traditional Near Eastern motif of king-as-shepherd,³⁵ the passage concludes with an image of Yahweh gathering the members of his scattered flock and restoring them to their proper pasturage.

The use of the term “herald” in these verses, a *piel* participle of the root *b-š-r*, is an illustrative example of the Author’s appeal to royal imagery even as he/she recast Yahweh as a transcendent being. In prose narrative, the **מבשר** (or fem. **מבשרת**) is strongly associated with kingship in times of war. In three occurrences in the books of Samuel,³⁶ a **מבשר** is charged with running ahead of an army to deliver information—positive³⁷ or negative³⁸—concerning events on the front lines. In each case, the **מבשר** serves as a messenger for a human king.

triumphal return of the Divine Warrior, whose kingship is finally proclaimed in 52:7.” Mettinger, “In Search,” 150.

³⁴ The two titles, “herald to Zion/Jerusalem” should be understood as objective genitives. It is possible to read “herald” and “Zion/Jerusalem” in apposition (cf. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 184 n. a. and GKC §122s), but reading them as objective genitives better fits the context of vv. 1–11. “It makes for a more coherent reading of vv. 1–11 as a whole and makes vv. 9–11 correspond at this point to the ‘twin’ passage 52:7–10. It avoids making Zion–Jerusalem a herald rather than one receiving a message as it is elsewhere: cf. 41:27; 52:7 (though in these two passages *mōbaššēr* is masculine); 61:1–3; 62:11. It also avoids the necessity to envisage Jerusalem being told to climb a mountain.” Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55: Vol. I*, 86.

³⁵ On the use of this title for ancient Near Eastern rulers, see the entry in *CAD* R, 309b–312a, *re’š* §2 and the sources cited in Ehringer, “YHWH’s Return,” 92–93 n. 5.

³⁶ 1 Sam 4:17; 2 Sam 4:10; 18:26.

³⁷ In 2 Sam 4:10 and 18:26, a **מבשר** returns from the battlefield to deliver to David what is seemingly good news. In the first case, the herald brings a report of Saul’s death, and in the second, the Cushite reports on the decisive defeat of Absalom. Although David is actually distressed by the information provided by his **מבשרים** in these examples, each fulfills his role by running ahead of the victorious army to deliver news about a battle’s outcome.

³⁸ In 1 Sam 4:17, the **מבשר** also runs ahead of the army to bring news, but instead of victory for the Israelites, he pronounces their defeat and the loss of the ark to the Philistines in the process.

In two more examples from poetic texts, the role of **מבשר** is elevated from the earthly battlefield to the realm of the divine. In the first verse of Nah 2, the text's prophetic voice announces the appearance of a herald on a high mountain:

Look, on the mountains, The feet of the herald who declares good will!	הנה על ההרים רגלי מבשר משמיע שלום
“Celebrate your festivals, oh Judah Fulfill your vows! For never again Will the villain come against you!	חגי יהודה חגיך שלמי נדריך כי לא יוסיף עוד לעבור בך בליעל
[Aššur] ³⁹ is entirely cut-off!”	כלה נכרת

As was the case with the **מבשרים** in the book of Samuel, the herald (**מבשר**) in Nah 2:1 announces to his audience the results of a battle, in this case Yahweh's battle with and victory over Assyria.⁴⁰ The book of Nahum, which should be dated to the events surrounding the fall of Nineveh to the Babylonian-Median coalition in 612 BCE, is a refutation of Yahweh's impotence in the face of Assyrian domination of the Levant during the 8th and 7th centuries BCE.⁴¹ Instead, it asserts that Yahweh is ultimately the cause of Nineveh's fall. The book does not quite conceive of the deity in the same cosmic and omnipotent terms as Isa 40–48,⁴² but it does make a similar claim for Yahweh, albeit on a less grandiose scale: despite outward appearances, Yahweh is actually in control of historical events, and punishes those who oppress his people. In the context of the book's overall message, the **מבשר** announces the end of Nineveh's reign over Judah. From the top of the mountain, he proclaims Yahweh's institution of a new era, free from foreign domination.

³⁹ The verb **נכרת** lacks a clear antecedent, but context strongly suggests identifying the one “cut off” with Aššur. See, for example, the reference to Nineveh in v. 9.

⁴⁰ On the influence of the book of Nahum on Isa 40–66, see Klaas Spronk, *Nabum* (HCOT; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1997), 80; cf. Duane L. Christensen, *Nabum: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24F; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 259–60. For a broader discussion of the use of literature that has been preserved in the Hebrew Bible by the author(s) of Isa 40–66, see Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*. Sommer highlights the relationship between Nah 2 and Isa 49 and 52, but does not discuss our passage (82, 92, and 163).

⁴¹ “Nah[um] 1:2–3:19 is formulated as a refutation to those who maintain Yhwh is powerless, and it makes its argument by asserting that Yhwh is responsible for the downfall of Nineveh.” Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets* (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry 2; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 425.

⁴² For a similar development in the Psalms and 8th century Isaianic material, see the argument in Flynn, *YHWH is King*, and the discussion in n. 26 above.

The herald appears again in Ps 68:12. Here, as in Isa 40:9, the participle is feminine, but in this case plural, **מבשרות**. In this psalm, Yahweh commissions the **מבשרות** to go before his war party in order to announce his victorious campaign:

My Lord gives the announce-	אדני יתן אמר
ment;	
The heralds are a mighty	המבשרות צבא רב
force: ⁴³	
“The kings of the armies flee,	מלכי צבאות ידדון ידדון
they flee!” (12–13a)	

Once again these **מבשרות** are meant to precede Yahweh’s march and announce the results of a battle that has been projected into the realm of the gods. Like Nahum’s **מבשר**, these female heralds sing of the divine victory and its spoils (13b–16). The psalm continues with a group of female musicians playing **תופפות**, “hand-drums,” in v. 26, leading the procession into the sanctuary (**הקדש**). In this case the procession is not described within an explicitly military context, but the preceding strophe (vv. 20–24) does use martial imagery,⁴⁴ associating Yahweh’s return to his temple with a victorious march from the battlefield.

The role of the female heralds and musicians in Psalm 68 is consistent with literary depictions of women in the context of war found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. In the wake of Yahweh’s miraculous triumph over the Egyptians in the book of Exodus, Miriam leads the women of the Israelite war camp in a song, proclaiming Yahweh’s victory with dancing and the playing of hand-drums (Exod 15:20–21). When David and Saul return from their victory over the Philistines, a group of women greet them with singing, dancing, and drum-playing to announce their victory (1 Sam 18:16–17).⁴⁵ Apart from these biblical references

⁴³ The versification of vv. 12–13a is unclear. The translation above follows the lineation in the BHS, which separates **אמר** from **המבשרות** and treats the latter as a separate line and the first word of a nominal clause. This is the interpretation given by Goldingay. However, he recognizes—following later translations (eg. the LXX’s **τοῖς εὐαγγελιζομένοις**)—that giving the message *to* the female heralds makes good sense (cf. the interpretation of Knohl on this verse: Israel Knohl, “Psalm 68: Structure, Composition and Geography,” *JHS* 12 [2012]: 1–21 [7]). This reading would take **אמר מבשרות** as a bound phrase with **מבשרות** functioning as a strange kind of objective genitive. However, this reading leaves the relationship between the announcement given to the women and the “mighty force” (**צבא רב**) unclear. See John Goldingay, *Psalms 2: Psalms 42–89* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 306 n. 15.

⁴⁴ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* (Hermeneia—a critical and historical commentary on the Bible; Translated by Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 166.

⁴⁵ Cf. Judg 5; 11:34; 18:26; 21:12; 29:5; 2 Sam 1:20; Jer 31:4; Jdt 15:12–13. “Songs, especially victory songs, were a special female province.” William H. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 2a; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 547.

to female musicians, small terra-cotta figurines of women playing the hand-drum have been discovered in almost every Iron Age archaeological site in Israel Palestine.⁴⁶ This textual evidence, supported by the material record, highlights the salience of women announcing victory (be it human or divine) by singing, dancing, and playing instruments during wartime as a literary motif.⁴⁷

The role of **מבשר** or **מבשרת** in each of these examples informs the use of the image in Isa 40:9–11. In these verses, the female herald to Jerusalem/Zion takes on a traditional role as she delivers her message to the cities of Judea. She declares that their divine king, Yahweh, has been victorious. He is returning from his campaign, spoils of his victory in tow, in order to rule over Zion once again. The message of the **מבשרת** in 40:9–11 is thus the final phase of Yahweh's victory procession as the people of Judea's warrior king, the heralds announcing his victorious return to his capital city.

YAHWEH'S **עבד** AS WITNESS TO HIS **חדשות**

As the forerunner of Yahweh's victory procession, the **מבשרת** has the great honor of announcing to Jerusalem Yahweh's plans to return to the city to reinstitute his reign from within its walls. As those called on and commissioned to announce Yahweh's **חדשות**, the heralds of Isa 40:9–11 were to play an identical role to another prominent figure in the composition: Yahweh's **עבד**, his servant.⁴⁸ With the exception of

⁴⁶ Carol L. Meyers, "Of Drums and Damsels: Women's Performance in Ancient Israel," *BA* 54 (1991): 19.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁸ The literature on the identity of the figure(s) identified with **עבד** in Isa 40–66 is vast; as noted by Blenkinsopp, the interpretation of this figure was already underway in the process of composing these chapters (Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Servant and the Servants in Isaiah and the Formation of the Book," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah* V. 1 [eds. C.C. Broyles and C.A. Evans; New York: Brill, 1997], 160); cf. the early interpretive history of the so-called 'Suffering Servant' of Isa 52:13–53:12 in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the New Testament (Marc Brettler and Amy-Jill Levine, "Isaiah's Suffering Servant: Before and After Christianity," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 73 [2019]: 158–73 [163–68]; Harold L. Ginsberg, "The Oldest Interpretation of the Suffering Servant," *VT* 3 [1953]: 400–404.). In critical scholarship, a discussion of the servant in Isa 40–66 might begin with Bernhard Duhm and his identification of four so-called "Servant Songs," (42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12), a collection of poems that had existed as an independent document before being worked into an Isaiah scroll where space permitted (*Das Buch Jesaja* [HKAT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902], 227ff.). While Duhm's suggestion has been strongly critiqued, (see especially Trygve N.D. Mettinger, "A Farewell to the Servant Songs: A Critical Examination of an Exegetical Axiom," in *Reports from a Scholar's Life: Select Papers on the Hebrew Bible* [Lund: Gleerup, 1983; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015], 257–301, and Hans M. Barstad, "The Future of the 'Servant Songs': Some Reflections on the Relationship of Biblical Scholarship to its own

42:1,⁴⁹ Yahweh consistently and exclusively applies the title of עבד to Jacob-Israel throughout the composition.⁵⁰ The term can be used to signify Yahweh's steadfast loyalty to his people, as it does in 41:8–14. More commonly, however, Jacob-Israel's role as עבד is defined by his call to witness to Yahweh's חַדְשׁוֹת:⁵¹

Tradition," in *Language, Theology, and the Bible: Essays in Honour of James Barr* [eds. S.E. Balentine, John Barton et al.; New York: Clarendon, 1994], 261–70, as well as the helpful bibliography in Brettler and Levine, "Isaiah's Suffering Servant," 159–60). For an introduction to the issues and the range of individuals associated with the figure of the servant, see Horacio Simian-Yofree, "עבד, *ʿēbad*," s.v. no. 10 *ʿēbed* in Deutero-Isaiah, *TDOT* 10:396–402; Richard J. Clifford, "Isaiah: The Book of," s.v. Second Isaiah, *ABD* 3:3982–83. For a discussion of the role of the servant in understanding the diachronic development of Isa 40–66, see Blenkinsopp, "The Servant and the Servants," 155–75.

⁴⁹ The single exception to Jacob-Israel's equation with Yahweh's עבד occurs in 42:1. In this one case in Isa 40–48, it is Cyrus who is given the title of Yahweh's servant. For Cyrus, the role of the עבד has less to do with bearing witness to Yahweh's power than being the medium through which the deity exacts order in the world. In this way the Persian king functions much more like the tool, Nebuchadnezzar (Yahweh's עבד in Jer 27:6) than the witness, Jacob-Israel, even as the Author uses startlingly positive language (the Persian is called Yahweh's מִשִּׁיחַ in 45.1) to describe Cyrus. Thus Isaiah 42:1–9 appears to be Yahweh's endorsement of Cyrus as presented to the composition's audience (אתכם in v. 9). Verses 1–3 narrate the Persian king's "peaceful" conquest of the city; they are followed by a description Cyrus' fitness for the role of conqueror and his part in magnifying Yahweh's name throughout the world. On the identification of Cyrus with the עבד of 42:1, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 208–12.

⁵⁰ עבד is applied to Jacob-Israel twelve times in Isa 40–48. In addition to 42:19 (2x) and 44:26, the עבד is explicitly identified with Jacob-Israel in 41:8, 9; 43:10; 44:1–2, 21; 45:4; and 48:20. In his commentary on Isa 40–66, Paul asserts that aside from Duhm's "Servant Songs," "In the rest of Deutero-Isaiah's early prophecies (41:8, 9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1–2, 21, 26; 45:4; 48:20; 50:10; 54:17), there is unanimity [in scholarship] regarding the identification of the servants as the nation in its entirety," (Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 18) cf. 118; Mettinger, "A Farewell to the Servant Song," 257–301. For a dissenting identification of the servant in 42:19, see n. 63 below.

⁵¹ In his role as witness, Jacob-Israel the servant also serves as Yahweh's messenger, his מְלַאֲךְ. Within the composition, Yahweh's מְלַאֲךְ and his עבד are identified with each other on two occasions. The first, 42:18–25, is discussed in detail below. In the second, 44:26–28, Yahweh describes himself as a deity who "upholds the word of his servant (עבדו) and fulfills the planning (announced by) his messengers (מְלַאֲכָיו)." It is clear that in both cases, the servant and the messenger are understood to relay Yahweh's words to an audience. As such, they play the same role as the prophet during the monarchic period, Yahweh's נְבִיא, figures frequently identified as Yahweh's servants in the Deuteronomistic literature (eg. 2 Kgs 17). However, after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, נְבִיא became less commonly used and מְלַאֲךְ becomes the standard term used to identify one of Yahweh's messengers (eg. Ezek 30:9; Hag 1:3, 13; 2 Chr 36:15ff). In this regard, the Author's use of מְלַאֲךְ for this role marks the beginning of a shift in language use that we can see play out in later biblical material.

You are my witness —utterance of Yah- weh—	אתם עדי נאם יהוה
And my servant, whom I have chosen,	ועבדי אשר בחרתי
So that you might know and have faith in me,	למען תדעו ותאמינו לי
And that you might under- stand that I am he.	ותבינו כי אני הוא
Before me no god was formed,	לפני לא נוצר אל
Nor after me shall there be another. (43:10)	ואחרי לא יהיה

Whether identified directly by title or indirectly through the use of 2nd person pronouns and direct address, Jacob-Israel is charged with the task of bearing witness to Yahweh's *חדשות*, including his plans to restore Jerusalem.⁵²

In his role as Yahweh's *עבד*, Jacob-Israel is therefore called on to serve the same role as both the herald to Zion in 40:9–11 and as those called to offer comfort to Jerusalem and Judea in the composition's opening verses. The coordination of the tasks assigned to each of these characters points to their identification as a single figure. As Ulrich Berges has argued, "The ones who are called to the task of comforting Jerusalem (40:1–11) are the heralds of good tidings and thus constitute the Servant."⁵³ It was thus to this role that the Author sought to commission his audience, to inspire its members to leave Babylonia for Jerusalem, serving as Yahweh's appointed heralds dancing and singing at the head of the deity's victory parade (48:20).

Within the composition's rhetorical approach, both titles as well as their association with the task of announcing Yahweh's decrees further reinforce the metaphor of Yahweh as transcendent king that the Author has crafted. As John Holladay has argued, the position of messenger/servant/prophet as depicted in the literature of the Hebrew Bible is rooted firmly in the human royal sphere, developing within the context of the Neo-Assyrian empire in 9th–7th centuries BCE. He sees the identification of the prophetic office with "secular"/political role of *מלאך* as the result of process that culminates with identification of the prophet of last book of the Scroll of the Twelve as *מלאכי*, "my messenger." John S. Holladay, "Assyrian Statecraft and the Prophets of Israel," *HTR* 63 (1970): 29–51 (30–31). On the association of the terms *עבדי* and *מלאכיו* in Isa 44, see D.N. Freedman and B.E. Willoughby, *מלאך*, *TDOT* 8:316. Finally, for a discussion of Yahweh's prophets/messengers as his servants in the Deuteronomistic history and the development of that position in Isa 40–66, see Blenkinsopp, "The Servant and the Servants," 155–75, esp. 158–66.

⁵² Jacob-Israel is also called on to deliver Yahweh's message in 44:5, 8; 48:20. Chavel, "Prophetic Imagination," 36 n. 89.

⁵³ Ulrich Berges, "You are My Witness and My Servant," in *The Prophets Speak on Forced Migration* (eds. M.J. Boda, F. Ritzel et al.; AIL 21; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 38–39; Cf. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 404.

THE INTERPELLATION OF YAHWEH'S עַם

Building on the preceding analysis, it follows that the imperatives that open Isa 40–48 should have been understood by the composition's audience to be addressed to them. As I mentioned earlier, the orator who would have performed the composition for a Judeo-Babylonian audience would have had recourse to a number of devices to make this point clear. And while it may be that most of those cues have evaded the process of textualization, it is possible that (at least) one has survived.

Although a scholarly consensus has developed concerning how to interpret עַם in Isa 40:1, the syntactical function of the expression is nonetheless ambiguous. Commentators have traditionally interpreted עַם as an accusative and the direct object of נַחֲמוּ,⁵⁴ a verb that is transitive in the *pi'el* and should therefore take an object.⁵⁵ According to this reading, the noun עַם stands in parallel with יְרוּשָׁלַם in v. 2 as the recipients of Yahweh's comfort, with the latter term standing as a metonymy for the former.⁵⁶ While the addressees of the imperatives remain hidden from the reader in this interpretation, the verb נַחֲמוּ receives its anticipated direct object and its repetition is understood as a kind of emphasis or heightening, a common feature of the Author's poetry.⁵⁷

An alternative approach is to read עַם as a vocative—"O my people"—rather than the object of נַחֲמוּ. In this case עַם, a title the deity applies to Jacob-Israel elsewhere in the composition (43:20; 47:6), would serve as the addressee of the repeated imperative while the object of נַחֲמוּ—יְרוּשָׁלַם (or an equivalent term)—is elided, only to be introduced by the parallel verbal expression דַּבְּרוּ עַל לֵב in the subsequent line.⁵⁸ Through this elision or gapping of the anticipated object following the first נַחֲמוּ,⁵⁹ the Author builds suspense by withholding vital information; who is to be comforted? A direct address to the audience

⁵⁴ Cf. the LXX: (τὸν λαόν μου).

⁵⁵ This is, for example, how Cross reads the passage, as evidenced by his translation, "comfort ye, comfort ye my people." Cross, "The Council of Yahweh," 275. For a thorough summary of scholarship that takes this position, see Chavel, "Prophetic Imagination," 26–7 n. 66.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Paul, who argues "Anthropomorphosized Jerusalem represents here the people of Israel" with a cross reference to Isa 52:9. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 128–29, here 129.

⁵⁷ For example, according to Westermann: "The duplication of the cry at the beginning, 'Comfort, comfort my people', is an example of an important stylistic feature in Deutero-Isaiah's preaching, duplication as the expression of urgency." Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary* (OTL; Translated by M.G. Stalker; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 34. However, this phenomenon occurs far more frequently in chs. 49ff.; eg. Isa 51:9, 17; 52:1, 11.

⁵⁸ For other examples of the expression דַּבְּרוּ עַל לֵב, see Gen 34:3; 50:21; Judg 19:3; 1 Sam 1:13; 2 Sam 19:8; Hos 2:16; and Ruth 2:13. The last example is especially telling, as the expression occurs in parallel with נַחֵם.

⁵⁹ This structure was already recognized by Chavel: "the people are the addressee of the imperative; this vocative replaces the anticipated

prolongs the suspense—(“אמר אלהיכם”)—before the tension is ultimately relieved in the same breath that the divine voice announces the relief of Jerusalem’s suffering.

Reading עמי as a vocative and interpreting it as a reference to the composition’s literary audience (Jacob-Israel) resolves a major crux within these verses and does so without appealing to a concept—the heavenly council—that is antithetical to one of the composition’s fundamental theological messages—the singularity of Yahweh. However, even if one prefers to read עמי in the accusative and as the direct object of נחמו, treating Jacob-Israel as the addressee of these imperatives still makes the best sense of the sequence within its local context and the broader rhetorical strategy of the composition. At the core of the Author’s message is the return migration of his fellow Judeo-Babylonians. Rather than a simple invitation to ‘return’ to Judea, the Author attempts to inspire this action by commissioning members of this community into the role of royal herald, charged with announcing the deity’s חדשות and leading the royal procession back to Jerusalem. Understood in this way, 40:1–2’s call to comfort invites members of the historical audience to take up the mantle of messenger, to identify with the mission of Yahweh’s servant and pronounce the good news of Yahweh’s triumphal return.

JACOB-ISRAEL AS RESISTANT MESSENGER

To make a case for this identification, however, is only one part of understanding the function of the composition’s opening imperatives. This opening call and subsequent molding of Jacob-Israel into a messenger over the course of the composition goes far beyond a simple invitation to the members of the Author’s historical audience to ‘return.’ Instead, the Author has gone to great rhetorical lengths to motivate and inspire movement in this population: a royal appointment and the opportunity to pronounce a new beginning in Judea. And yet he/she meets resistance (or at least perceives this to be the case) and anticipates that the message will fall on deaf ears.

object of the verb נחמו, which appears in the parallel line v. 2a (ירושלם); and because the opening verb already occurs in the repeated form נחמו נחמו in v. 1a the parallel line opens with a synonymous expression (דברו על לב) in v. 2a.” Chavel, “Prophetic Imagination,” 27. Although not a parade example of what has traditionally been called “climactic” or “staircase” parallelism (eg. Pss 24:9; 93:1–2; etc.), these verses nonetheless make use of gapping in order to “require the listener to suspend analysis of the first line until he has heard the second line,” or in this case, the third line. For a discussion of this poetic device, see Edward L. Greenstein, “Two Variations of Grammatical Parallelism in Canaanite Poetry and their Psycholinguistic Background,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 6 (1974), 22–39; Idem, “One More Step on the Staircase,” *UF* 9 (1977), 77–86 and Samuel E. Loewenstamm, “The Expanded Colon in Ugaritic and Biblical Verse,” *JSS* 14 (1969), 176–96.

Robert Wilson has characterized the Author's approach throughout the composition as a "rhetoric of persuasion,"⁶⁰ an argument made to convince a potentially resistant audience of his call for return migration. Their resistance (real or perceived) is perhaps most apparent in the search for a willing and able messenger outlined in 42:18–25. In this pericope, Yahweh expresses sincere frustration with the lack of a messenger fit to deliver to Jerusalem the news of his success and his singularity. A series of rhetorical questions highlights the would-be messenger's perceptual shortcomings:

Who is as blind as my servant,	מי עור כי אם עבדי
As deaf as my messenger whom I would send?	וחרש כמלאכי אשלח
Who is as blind as the one (whose message) would be fulfilled, ⁶¹	מי עור כמשלם
As blind as Yahweh's servant? (42:19)	ועור כעבד יהוה

Once again, the Author has failed to provide the identity of the primary players in the deity's message, leaving a clear referent for Yahweh's would-be-messenger—his עבד—unstated.⁶² Despite the absence of a clear or explicit referent for this figure,⁶³ the use

⁶⁰ Wilson, "The Community of the Second Isaiah," 62.

⁶¹ For a helpful summary of scholarly attempts to translate this term, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 218–19. The editor of BHS suggests amending משלם to משלח, a *pu'al* participle with the sense of "my sent one." However, the MT may be understood as it stands, as a participle with the sense of "the one who(se message) is fulfilled." See the finite use of *s-l-m* in the *hiphil* with the meaning of "fulfilling" applied to Yahweh at Isaiah 44:26. "שלם," HALOT, 4:1532. See also the discussion in Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 199–200.

⁶² And once again, the ancient translators were uncomfortable with the ambiguity; they resolved the lack of clarity through addition (e.g., Ὁ λαός in 19a of the Old Greek) and circumlocution (e.g., וחיביא דנביי in the Targum). Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55*, 218; Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55 v. 1*, 258.

⁶³ Although a consensus has developed concerning the identification of this עבד with the character of Jacob-Israel in modern scholarship (see Paul's comments in n. 50 above), Chavel has recently suggested a new interpretation of Yahweh's impaired עבד. He has identified this figure with the barely personified prophetic voice that delivers the message throughout the composition whom he calls 'the herald.' According to Chavel, the herald, who is depicted as impaired, stands in contrast to the otherwise able-bodied audience (accused of being blind/deaf in v. 18) who is unwilling/unable to understand Yahweh's intervention in history and his role as the sole mover behind events that occur on earth. He would also stand in a long tradition of impaired prophets (Eg. Moses, Elisha, Ezekiel; cf. Sommer's conclusions concerning the motivation for allusion in Deutero-Isaiah's work [*A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 168ff]). Chavel, "Prophetic Imagination," 36–42. While not impossible, Chavel's reading shines a spotlight on a figure—the herald—who otherwise only exists in the shadows throughout 40–48;

of direct address in vv. 18 and 20a (תשמר)⁶⁴ along with the deity's frequent application of this title to Jacob-Israel noted above strongly suggests that it is the composition's audience who is being accused of failing to recognize Yahweh's commission.⁶⁵

The identification of Jacob-Israel as an impaired messenger in 42:18–25 is part of a broader motif that recurs throughout the composition: the failure of Yahweh's chosen people to recognize his divine agency.⁶⁶ The use of the motif is particularly dense

the herald is more conduit than character, as Chavel himself argues.

⁶⁴ The first half of v. 20 may also address Jacob-Israel directly in the second person, but the MT's ראיִת is ambiguous. The bicolon is better balanced poetically by the *qere*, which offers the infinitive absolute ראוֹת. This reading provides better balance with the verbal sequence of the next line (infinitive absolute/finite verb). The *ketib*, ראיִת, however, is supported by 1QIsa^a and perhaps also in the versions. In support of both the *ketib* and 1QIsa^a, the LXX (εἰδέτε) and the Tg (רואיתון) have rendered a 2nd masculine plural perfect (רואיתם). In either case, Jacob-Israel is directly addressed by the 2nd person masculine singular form, תשמר, in the second half of 20a. Goldingay and Payne make the helpful connection between vv. 19 and 20: "The harsh statements of v. 19 relate to the very entity that is being addressed." *Isaiah 40–55: Vol. I*, 261.

⁶⁵ For a list of medieval commentators with this view, see Chavel, "Prophetic Imagination," 36 n. 89. Some modern commentators with this view include Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*, 109–111; Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55: Vol. I*, 258ff; and Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 198–203. In addition, the verbal links between this figure and the human messengers (prophets) identified in 44:26—the word pair עבד // מלאך coupled with the root *ʿ-l-m*—strongly suggest that in the case of the latter, the servant whom Yahweh would send should be a human representative of the divine will, a human agent who is addressed directly in v. 20a (as noted in Paul, *Isaiah 40–66*, 199–200).

⁶⁶ The expression of this motif through Israel's blindness/deafness has been a point of focus for scholars interested in the compositional history of the book of Isaiah, and especially the relationship between the prophet(s) responsible for Isa 40ff to the material contained in so-called First Isaiah (Isa 1–39), with particular attention paid to the divine throne scene in Isa 6. Ronald Clements, for example, argued that with regard to the blindness motif in Isa 6:9–10, "Not only do we have here language so strikingly related to the otherwise unanticipated references to blindness and deafness in chs. 42 and 43 that we should not doubt that the later instances are dependent on the earlier, but the central importance of the original occurrence in the call narrative must further confirm this conclusion." Ronald E. Clements, "Beyond Tradition History: Deutero-Isaianic Development of First Isaiah's Themes," *JOT* 31 (1985): 101–5, here 103. Hugh Williamson agreed in principle with Clements' conclusions concerning the influence of Isa 6 (and vv. 9–10, in particular) on the blind/deaf motif in Isa 40ff, and especially its combination with failure to perceive/understand. However, he argued for evidence of Isa 6's influence elsewhere in Isa 1–39 (eg. 32:3 and 1:2–3) and a "broader pattern of reaffirmation or reversal on other parts of the book [of Isaiah] as well." H.G.M Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 46–51, 55. Finally, Sommer does see an allusion to earlier Isaianic material in Isa 42:18–25, but to Isa 30:9–14 rather than Isa 6. He sees the influence of the heavenly throne room scene elsewhere in

surrounding the pericope in 42:18–25.⁶⁷ Twice in the first 17 verses of ch. 42 Jacob-Israel is called blind.⁶⁸ Yahweh, the victorious warrior of 42:10–13, vows to lead the sightless through uncharted territory and to illuminate their path (42:16). In 42:7, Yahweh commissions Cyrus, the foreign king who is to deliver Jacob-Israel according to 45:4, to “open blind eyes” and “release the imprisoned.” Finally, in 43:8, though called in Yahweh’s name (v. 7), Jacob-Israel remains a people “blind though it has eyes, deaf though it has ears.”

This motif of Jacob-Israel’s perpetual physical and spiritual blindness serves a dual purpose within the composition. First, and perhaps most explicitly, it magnifies Yahweh’s loyalty to his chosen people by emphasizing his determination to redeem Jacob-Israel in spite of their blunted senses.⁶⁹ Secondly, it serves to critique and to motivate the composition’s audience. Beyond the composition’s dramatic theological reconceptualization of the deity as a being who transcends the traditional symbols of divine efficacy,⁷⁰ it should be remembered that the Author’s message is addressed to a community two generations removed from the ancestral homeland to which the Author believes they should ‘return.’ Jacob-Israel’s “disabilities” may therefore reflect a different kind of resistance perceived by the composition’s Author, a resistance that was rooted in the complex questions of identity faced by Judean communities long-settled in Babylonia.

JACOB-ISRAEL / JUDEO-BABYLONIANS

Despite the Author’s assertions that Babylonia was a prison (Isa 42:7, 22), and that Judeans were being held there against their will (43:6; 47:6), the recently published material from Āl-Yāhūdu, or “Town of the Judeans,”⁷¹ in rural Nippur shows a

the Author’s work, but less so in the case of the blind/deaf servant. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 73–107, esp. 97–99.

⁶⁷ As Philip Stern has argued, the frequency of usage of the root ‘*w-r*’ in chs. 42–43 (of 22 occurrences of the root in nominal/adjectival form in the Hebrew Bible, seven appear between Isa 42:7–43:8) strongly suggest that “the prophet was seeking to express *something*” through the density of blindness language in these chapters. Stern also highlights the image of the blind worm (תולעת) to describe Jacob Israel in 41:14ff. Philip Stern, “The ‘Blind Servant’ Imagery of Deutero-Isaiah and its Implications,” *Bib* 75 (1994): 224–32, here 225, *emphasis* mine; for Jacob-Israel’s imperceptiveness more broadly, see the community’s quoted speech in 40:27 as well as its characterization in 48:1–11.

⁶⁸ John Goldingay, “Isaiah 42.18–25,” *JOT* 67 (1995): 46.

⁶⁹ Clements, “Beyond Tradition History,” 102.

⁷⁰ Chavel, “Prophetic Imagination,” 19–42.

⁷¹ The editors of CUSAS 28 translate the toponym as “Judahtown,” although the longer name “Town of the Judeans” may better reflect its essence. Āl-Yāhūdu seems to be a shortened form of Āl-Yāhūdāya, which appears in two of the earliest documents to mention the town (CUSAS 28:1 and BaAr 6:1). The explicit use of the gentilic points to its association with the deportees from the former kingdom of Judah, at least at the time of its founding. Cornelia Wunsch, “Glimpses of Lives of Deportees in Rural Babylonia,” in *Arameans, Chaldeans, and Arabs in Babylonia and Palestine in the First Millennium B.C.*

community of Judeans socially, economically, and culturally embedded in its Babylonian context.⁷² In fact, this cuneiform evidence demonstrates that some Judeans actually thrived in Mesopotamia. This is perhaps best illustrated by one prominent family in Āl-Yāhūdu, that of Aḥīqam son of Rapā-Yāma, whose economic activities in Babylonia spanned some 70 years, from the reign of Amēl-Marduk to that of Darius I.⁷³ Over the course of these decades, this family—along with the rest of the Judeans of Āl-Yāhūdu—“were wholly integrated into Babylonian state structure and practices.”⁷⁴ And while Caroline Waerzeggers has cautioned against overlooking the imperial perspective of the documents that demonstrate to the “assimilation” of Judeans into the state apparatus,⁷⁵ it is clear that at least Aḥīqam and his

(eds. Angelika Berlejung and Michael P. Streck; Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013), 251.

⁷² The primary resources for this new material is the recently published volume by Laurie E. Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites in Babylonia in the Collection of David Sofer* (CUSAS 28; Bethesda: CDL Press, 2014, 28) and Wunsch’s forthcoming BaAr 6. In addition to CUSAS 28 and BaAr 6, tablets related to the communities in question have also been published in the following places: Francis Joannès and André Lemaire, “Contrats babyloniens d’époque achéménide du Bit-Abî Râm avec une épigraphe araméenne,” *RA* 90 (1996): 41–60; Idem, “Trois tablettes cunéiformes à onomastique ouest-sémitique (collection Sh. Moussaïeff) (Pls. I-II),” *Transen* 17 (1999): 17–34; Kathleen Abraham, “West Semitic and Judean Brides in Cuneiform Sources from Sixth Century BCE: New Evidence from a Marriage Contract from Āl-Yahudu,” *AfO* 51 (2005): 198–219; and Idem, “An Inheritance Division among Judeans in Babylonia from the Early Persian Period,” in *New Seals and Inscriptions, Hebrew, Idumean, and Cuneiform* (ed. M. Lubetski; HBM 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2007), 206–211.

⁷³ The earliest attestation of Rapā-Yāma, Aḥīqam’s father, comes from the reign of Amēl-Marduk (CUSAS 28.6) and Aḥīqam’s sons are active in the family business in the year following his death in roughly 504 BCE. Aḥīqar son of Rimūt, who features heavily in materials from Bit-Našar, would be another strong example of a successful Judean.

⁷⁴ Laurie E. Pearce, “Judean?: A Special Status,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (eds. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 271.

⁷⁵ In her review of CUSAS 28, Waerzeggers has highlighted the fact that all of the documents which pertain to life in Āl-Yāhūdu were written by Babylonian scribes. And while a recent study by Johannes Hackl demonstrates that these rural scribes were of lesser quality than scribes in the large urban centers (Johannes Hackl, “Babylonian Scribal Practice in Rural Contexts: A Linguistic Survey of the Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites in Babylonia [CUSAS 28 and BaAr 6] in *Wandering Arameans: Arameans Outside Syria: Textual and Archaeological Perspectives* [eds. Angelika Berlejung, Aren M. Maeir et al.; Leipziger altorientalistische Studien 5; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017], 125–40), they still represent an imperial—and thus outsider—perspective on the community. Caroline Waerzeggers, “Review: Laurie E. Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites in Babylonia in the Collection of David Sofer* Cornell University Studies in

descendants followed the advice prescribed in the book of Jeremiah: “build houses and dwell (in them), plant gardens and eat their fruit” (Jer 29:5).⁷⁶

For example, at some point during the reign of Nabonidus, Aḥīqam and the residents of Āl-Yāhūdu shifted to date production on the land granted to them through the land-for-service system.⁷⁷ According to the calculations of Michael Jursa et al., while more labor-intensive than growing cereals, requiring roughly twice as much labor per harvested crop,⁷⁸ date production had the benefit of needing significantly less space to produce a far greater yield, giving it the dual benefit of increased efficiency and a greater return on investment. There was a significant shift towards date farming throughout Mesopotamia under the Neo-Babylonian regime, although the massive tracts of land available for cereal production and a lack of infrastructure following the wars against Assyria somewhat tempered its spread in and around Nippur.⁷⁹

While the shift to date production had demonstrable value for Judean farmers, it did pose one significant drawback. Whereas a new cereal harvest could be sown and reaped each

Assyriology and Sumerology (CUSAS) 28,” *STRATA: Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 33 (2015): 179–94. For an extended discussion for the effects of the Babylonian and Persian administrative systems on the (re)production of Judean identity, see my forthcoming dissertation, “Judean Identity in the 6th and 5th Centuries.”

⁷⁶ Jeremiah 29 presents an interesting paradox because while the prophet advises his audience to settle in, he does so with an eye to the future and an *eventual* return. In this regard, as Knoppers has noted, he is not that different from the false prophets he was condemning. He just had a different view of the timeline. Gary N. Knoppers, “Exile, Return and Diaspora: Expatriate and Repatriates in Late Biblical Literature,” in *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature: Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Hebrew Bible and Related Texts* (ed. Louis Jonker; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 43–44 n. 54.

⁷⁷ This was the system by which groups new to Babylonia were granted plots of land to farm in exchange for military service or labor along with annual taxes. For a discussion of this practice during the Neo-Babylonian and early Persian periods, see G. Van Driel, *Elusive Silver: In Search of a Role for a Market in an Agrarian Environment; Aspects of Mesopotamia’s Society* (Publications de l’Institut historique-archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul 94; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2002), 227ff.; Michael Jursa, Johannes Hackl et al., *Aspects of the Economic History of Babylonia in the First Millennium BC: Economic Geography, Economic Mentalities, Agriculture, the Use of Money and the Problem of Economic Growth* (AOAT 377; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010), 198–203.

⁷⁸ According to the calculations in Jursa et al., a cereal harvest required 60–75 mandays per hectare, while dates required 130 mandays for an established garden, and 160 for a new one. Jursa, Hackl et al., *Aspects of the Economic History*, 49–51.

⁷⁹ According to Jursa, “The city had shrunk after the end of Assyrian domination, and was isolated and of little account within the network of inner-Babylonian communications in the sixth and early fifth centuries.” *Ibid.*, 405–418, here 414.

year, it takes a date palm five to six years from the time of planting before it begins to bear fruit, and between 15 and 20 years for that tree to reach its full maturity and profitability.⁸⁰ This means that when Aḥīqam and his compatriots made the decision to dedicate portions of their bowfiefs⁸¹ to date production, they were committing to an extended stay on Babylonian farmland.

In addition to committing to longer-term agricultural projects, these Judeans also began to develop social networks with their non-Judean neighbors. Angelika Berlejung has highlighted the importance of support from local Babylonians for the successful adjustment of recently resettled communities, and the critical role that cooperation between the two groups would have played for the success of those new to the Babylonian countryside.⁸² In addition to executing basic commercial transactions like loans,⁸³ rental contracts, and sales with their neighbors, Judeans also entered into *ḥarrānu* business ventures with non-Judeans.⁸⁴ The cuneiform record attests to a long-distance relationship between Aḥīqam and a partner living in Babylon proper,⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Angelika Berlejung, “New Life, New Skills, and New Friends in Exile: The Loss and Rise of Capitals of the Judeans in Babylonia,” in *Alphabets, Texts and Artifacts in the Ancient Near East: Studies Presented to Benjamin Sass* (eds. Israel Finkelstein, Christian Robin et al.; Paris: Van Dieren, 2016), 28.

⁸¹ Judeans are associated with bow fiefs (*bit qašiti*) in a number of documents in the Āl-Yāhūdu materials (CUSAS 28 nos. 14; 27; 39; 47; 49; 51, and the less common *bit azzani* [quiver fief] in no. 2). These fiefs were allotted to Judeans and other groups that had been resettled in Babylonia by the imperial administrations.

⁸² Berlejung, “New Life, New Skills, and New Friends,” 12–45.

⁸³ For non-Judeans loaning money to Judeans, see, CUSAS 28 nos. 6–7, 9–10, 13, 21, 44, 84, 101. In nos. 35 and 43 Aḥīqam offers a short-term no-interest loan to a certain Bēl-zēr-ibni son of Bēl-aḥḥē-erība. Berlejung also notes that Aḥīqam’s son, Nīr-Yāma, leases land to an apparent Babylonian in no. 26. Text no. 2 in Joannès and Lemaire, “Trois tablettes,” features Aḥīqar son of Rīmut offering a loan to a non-Judean. Aḥīqar’s Judean identity is confirmed by the name of his son, Nīr-Yāma. Both individuals occur together in BaAr 6.27 (Pearce and Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles*, 8–9). Aḥīqar seems to have been quite active with non-Judeans, and it is likely that Judeans lending to non-Judeans was more far more frequent occurrence than the record shows, as debtors typically held on to old closed promissory notes, while creditors only maintained documentation for open debts. For a discussion of this archival procedure, see Cornelia Wunsch, “Debt, Interest, Pledge and Forfeiture in the Neo-Babylonian and Early Achaemenid Period: The Evidence from Private Archives,” in *Debt and Economic Renewal in the Ancient Near East* (eds. Michael Hudson and Marc van de Mieroop; International Scholars Conference on Ancient Near Eastern Economics III; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2002), 222.

⁸⁴ The *ḥarrānu*, a common type of joint business venture in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods, typically featured a senior partner responsible for providing the capital (normally silver) and a junior partner who would actually run the business. For further discussion, see Jursa, Hackl et al., *Aspects of the Economic History of Babylonia*, 206–214.

⁸⁵ CUSAS 28.45 and Abraham, “An Inheritance Division,” record the division of Aḥīqam’s inheritance among his sons. The discrepancy

and an agreement between his son Nīr–Yāma, and a certain Nīnūrta–ēṭir son of Kinā⁸⁶ over livestock. There is also the ambiguous case of a *ḥarrānu* between Aḥīqam and certain Iššūa son of Nabû–ēṭir.⁸⁷

What is perhaps most remarkable in these examples is that in the midst of all of these intercultural interactions and clear signs of adaptation to their Babylonian context,⁸⁸ we are still able to identify Aḥīqam as a Judean. First, Aḥīqam acted as a representative for a group of state dependents who are identified as Judeans (*Yahūdāya*).⁸⁹ Secondly, Aḥīqam made an effort to maintain at least some elements of Judean identity, a point demonstrated most clearly by the names given to his sons:⁹⁰ Nīr–Yāma, Ḥaggâ, Yāḥû–izri, Yāḥû–azza, and Yāḥûšu.⁹¹ In addition to the high density of Yahwistic theophoric elements, one name—

between Aḥīqam’s apparent success according to the archival material from Āl–Yāḥûdu and relative meagerness of the inheritance has suggested to the editors of CUSAS 28 that the will is only dealing with the dissolution of a single *ḥarrānu* venture between Aḥīqam and a Babylonian partner, and not representative of his total assets at the time of his death. Pearce and Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles*, 173.

⁸⁶ CUSAS 28.32.

⁸⁷ CUSAS 28.40. For a discussion of the name “Iššūa” and the figure’s ethnic identity, see comments by the editors.

⁸⁸ See, for example, the description and discussion of Aḥīqam’s thoroughly Babylonian seal (awaiting publication as BaAr 6.9) in Angelika Berlejung, “Social Climbing in the Babylonian Exile,” in *Wandering Arameans: Arameans Outside Syria: Textual and Archaeological Perspectives* (eds. Angelika Berlejung, Aren M. Maeir et al.; Leipziger altorientalistische Studien 5; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017), 113–15.

⁸⁹ E.g. CUSAS 28.18.2–3, in which Aḥīqam takes on a significant debt from representatives of the Persian central government against the A.Š.Ā^{meš} šá lú šu-šá-ni-e lú ia-a-ḥu-du-a-a, “the fields of the Judean šušānus.” On the translation of this expression and a broader discussion of šušānus as a class of dependent workers, see Yigal Bloch, “From Horse Trainers to Dependent Workers: The Šušānu Class in the Late Babylonian Period, with a Special Focus on Āl–Yāḥûdu Tablets,” *KASAL: Rivista di storia, ambienti e culture del Vicino Oriente Antico* 14 (2017): 91–118.

⁹⁰ According to Pearce, the transmission of Judean names over multiple generations in Aḥīqam’s family “established mechanisms for preserving strong Judean identification within this family.” Laurie E. Pearce, “Identifying Judeans and Judean Identity in the Babylonian Evidence,” in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context* (eds. Jonathan Stökl and Caroline Waerzeggers; BZAW 478; Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), 28–29. However, using prosopography to define ethnic or social identity is, of course, notoriously difficult. For a recent treatment that directly addresses Judean communities in Babylonia during the period in question, and the complicated role of Yahwism in the formation of that identity, see Paul-Alain Beaulieu, “Yahwistic Names in Light of Late Babylonian Onomastics,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period* (eds. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 247, 258–59.

⁹¹ All five brothers are mentioned together in an inheritance document (CUSAS 28.45; cf. Abraham, “An Inheritance Division”).

Yāhû–izri—preserves a Hebrew isogloss in Aḥīqam’s overwhelmingly Aramaic context, suggesting an intentional effort to preserve the Hebrew language in some form.⁹² And yet, as the Author responsible for Isa 40–48 sought to inspire the return migration of his fellow Judeans, Aḥīqam and his descendants stayed put in Babylonia, their archival record extending into the 5th century.⁹³ What is particularly notable about Aḥīqam’s continued presence in Babylonia is that evidence from a contemporary diaspora community suggests that he *chose* to remain in the environs of Nippur rather than make the trip to Judea.

What we see in the example of Aḥīqam and his family is what might be called a decentralized model of diasporic identity. According to proponents of this model, identity is not primordial or rooted in an ancestral homeland, but constantly constructed and reconstructed through the experiences of the community, even if it might be presented as “fixed” in a given moment.⁹⁴ To quote one famous iteration of this view, it privileges *routes* over *roots*, current context over (or at least in addition to) communal history.⁹⁵ According Daniel Boyarin’s formulation, diaspora identity (and its formation) should be

⁹² Although Ḥaggâ is not unambiguously Hebrew (חגג), the spelling of *-izri* strongly suggests Hebrew rather than Aramaic as the source language. The verbal element, always spelled with a *z* rather than a *d*, indicates the Hebrew root *‘z-r* rather than the Aramaic equivalent *‘d-r*. For the latter, see the discussion of the name Yāhû–e-Dir (no. 12.6) in CUSAS 28, p. 89. Cf. the preservation of Assyrian forms in personal names (Pāni–Aššur–lamur and Pāni–Bēl–lamur) in a tablet associated with the 6th century temple to Aššur in Uruk (UCP 9/2, 57). Karen Radner, “Aššur’s ‘Second Temple Period’: The Restoration of the Cult of Aššur, C. 538 BCE,” in *Herrschaftslegitimation in vorderorientalischen Reichen der Eisenzeit* (eds. Christoph Levin and Reinhard Müller; *Orientalische Religionen in der Antike*, 21; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 89; Paul-Alain Beaulieu, “Official and Vernacular Languages: the Shifting Sands of Imperial and Cultural Identities in First-Millennium BC Mesopotamia,” in *Margins of Writing, Origins of Culture* (ed. Seth Sanders; Oriental Institute Seminars 2; 2006).

⁹³ Nīr–Yāma, Aḥīqam’s son, is last attested in a document from Darius’ 25th year, 497 BCE (CUSAS 28.26).

⁹⁴ Cf. James Clifford, “Diasporas,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (1994): 302–338.; Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (Gender, Racism, Ethnicity; New York: Routledge, 1996), 1–16; 175–207, esp. 192–94; For further bibliography and discussion of this trend, see Stephane Dufoix, *The Dispersion: A History of the Word Diaspora* (Brill’s Specials in Modern History 1; Boston: Brill, 2017), 356–68.

⁹⁵ This is a distillation of Paul Gilroy’s famous work on the African diaspora, Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993). Gilroy’s work has been criticized for presenting an overstated absence of reference to Africa in his reconstructions and for too strongly erasing it from the data he presents. Brah, writing a few years later, does a better job of complicating the picture while maintaining the basic tenets of Gilroy’s argument. She allows members of diaspora communities to hold feelings in tension: “It bears repeating that the double, triple, or multi-placedness of ‘home’ in the imaginary of the people in the diaspora does not mean

understood as a synchronic cultural situation applicable to people who participate in a double cultural (and frequently linguistic) location, in which they share a culture with the place in which they dwell but also with another group of people who live elsewhere, in which they have a local and a trans-local cultural identity at the same time. None of this needs [*sic*] imply trauma, an original sense of forced dispersion, a longing for homeland, or even the existence of a myth of one homeland.⁹⁶

Thus for Aḥīqam, his Babylonian context does not appear to have been at odds with his continued identification as Judean, at least as observable in the cuneiform materials. Rather, it was a fundamental element of how he constructed his identity as the child of resettled deportees raised in a Babylonian environment.

Of course, his was only one such possible construction. We have seen through his call for return migration that the Author of Isa 40–48 had a very different view of his community's relationship to Judea; it was only there that Jacob-Israel could fulfill Yahweh's plan of restoration. Another archive from a contemporary community of resettled deportees and their descendants reflects a similar construction. The inhabitants of Āl-Nērib were also relocated from their Levantine homeland and resettled in the Nippur countryside.⁹⁷ Like the Judeans of Āl-Yāḥūdu, the Neirabians were most likely resettled as a result of Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns in the West during the first quarter of the 6th century BCE.⁹⁸ In fact, their situation mirrors that of the Judeans of Āl-Yāḥūdu in a number of ways, including their initial resettlement in a town named after their previous homeland,⁹⁹ their

that such groups do not feel anchored in the place of settlement . . . identity is always plural and in process, even when it might be construed or represented as fixed." Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, 188–204, here 191.

⁹⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *A Traveling Homeland: The Babylonian Talmud as Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 19.

⁹⁷ The community is known from a collection of tablets discovered in a grave site in Syria outside Aleppo. The 27 tablet collection was published by P. Dhorme, "Les tablettes babyloniennes de Neirab," *RA* 25 (1928): 53–82. More recently, Gauthier Tolini has published a masterful analysis of the archive and the community it represented: Gauthier Tolini, "From Syria to Babylon and Back: The Neirab Archive," in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context* (eds. Jonathan Stökl and Caroline Waerzeggers; BZAW 478; Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), 94–156. In that article, Tolini claims to be in the process of producing (much needed) new editions.

⁹⁸ The city of Neirab in Syria is known from a pair of Aramaic funerary inscriptions for priests to the lunar deity Sîn/Šahr (KAI 225–226) and from a letter that one of those priests, Sī²-gabbar, sent to Sargon II (SAA 1, 189.8–9). On the identification of two priests, see Dagmar Kühn, "Society, Institutions, Law, and Economy," in *The Aramaeans in Ancient Syria* (ed. Herbert Niehr; Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 1, 106; 2014), 56.

⁹⁹ The town name is attested in three tables as Āl-Nērib (Dhorme nos. 19, 23, 26 [3x]). However, in Dhorme no. 17, the town is referred to as the URU šá^{lu}Ni-ri-ba-a-a (town of the Neirabeans), indicating that,

incorporation into the land-for-service system,¹⁰⁰ and their conservative naming practices.¹⁰¹ However, their archive points to one significant difference: as Aḥīqam and his family began to expand their social network in the second and third generations, Gauthier Tolini has shown that the Neirabeans remained a relatively insulated community.¹⁰² This apparent resistance to interaction with outsiders may explain why some members of the community decided to return migrate to their ancestral homeland early in the reign of Darius I. That there was such a return is indicated by the discovery of their archive in northern Syria in the early 20th century.¹⁰³ Aḥīqam and his sons, on the other hand, continued on in Babylonia for at least another twenty years after the last dated tablet from Āl-Nērib, including a 16 year lease agreement between Nīr-Yāma, Aḥīqam's son, and a man with a good Babylonian name in 507.¹⁰⁴

CONCLUSION: JUDEO-BABYLONIAN IDENTITY IN THE 6TH CENTURY

In Tolini's final analysis of the Āl-Nērib archive, he offers the following as an explanation for why a group of Neirabians made the long trip back to their ancestral homeland in northern Syria. He states, "Nevertheless, the return to Neirab of at least some

like Āl-Yāḥūdu, the town was likely (at least originally) defined by the geo-political origins of its first inhabitants. For more examples of this phenomenon, albeit from a later period, see Israel Eph'al, "The Western Minorities in Babylonia in the 6th-5th Centuries B.C.: Maintenance and Cohesion," *Or* 47 (1978): 74–90 (80–81).

¹⁰⁰ While their archival materials never actually mention *bit qašti* land (or *bit narkabti/sisē* land, for that matter), Tolini highlights the use of *palah šarri* in texts 8–9, an expression commonly used with regard to the service rendered for bow fiefs in the Murašū archive from Nippur. This suggests to Tolini that the Neirabian ex-patriates were also settled on crown land, and perhaps *bit qašti* land in particular. Gauthier Tolini, "From Syria to Babylon and Back," 86–87. For a discussion of the *palah šarri* in the context of the later Murašū archive, see Matthew W. Stolper, *Entrepreneurs and Empire: The Murašū Archive, the Murašū Firm, and Persian Rule in Babylonia* (Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul = Publications de l'Institut historique et archéologique néerlandais de Stamboul 54; Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1985), 61–62.

¹⁰¹ More than 60% of the roughly 150 individuals recorded in the archive from Āl-Nērib should be identified as being of West Semitic (and most likely Neirabian) descent. According to Tolini's analysis, the primary indicators of West Semitic descent are Aramaic names, Babylonian names which feature adaptations from Aramaic (e.g. Aramaic pronunciations of deities), and an emphasis on the lunar cult and its deities (Nusku Nuḥsāya, and Sīn). For a full discussion of his method, see "From Syria to Babylon and Back," 70–74.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 73–74.

¹⁰³ T.E. Alstola, "Judeans in Babylonia: A Study of Deportees in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BCE" (PhD Diss.; Leiden University, 2017), 209–212.

¹⁰⁴ Kidinnu, son of Aplā. BaAr 6.8; Berlejung, "Social Climbing," 117–18.

of their descendants reveals that in spite of their eventual integration [into the Babylonian environment], *some deportees always felt the desire to end their exile, and go back to their hometown.*¹⁰⁵ Implicit in Tolini's explanation is a traditional view of the diaspora experience, one that emphasizes the displaced community's longing to 'return.'¹⁰⁶ Scholarship on the Judean experience of the 6th century and on diaspora more broadly has tended to emphasize this element of diaspora identity. It was a key component of the rubric William Safran presented in his landmark article "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," published in the first volume of the journal *Diaspora*,¹⁰⁷ a rubric that has been accepted to greater and lesser degrees in subsequent scholarship.¹⁰⁸ For biblical studies—which has had significant influence on the broader study of diaspora—the views found in Ps 137's melancholic lament over separation from Jerusalem¹⁰⁹ and the optimistic hopes for a restoration in the books Jeremiah and Ezekiel¹¹⁰ have been taken as orthodox, evidence of a persistent drive to return migrate among displaced Judeans living in Babylonia. For example, Rainer Albertz has attributed the partial return of Judeans from Babylonia, at least as it has been recorded in the biblical material, to the inability of Israel to restore itself following the dissolution of the state and the dispersion of its people.¹¹¹ The distance between Judah and Babylonia—both geographical and cultural—was too much to overcome for most displaced Judeans, "even though they were theoretically in favor of the return."¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Tolini, "From Syria to Babylon and Back," 93, *emphasis mine*.

¹⁰⁶ This is a consistent element of early systematic definitions of diaspora. See for example William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1 (1991): 83–99; Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁰⁷ See number 4 in his list of defining criteria: "they regard their ancestral home-land as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate." *Ibid.*, 84–85.

¹⁰⁸ As Brigitte Waldorf has noted, "Most migration research is based on the implicit assumptions that observed behavior is preceded by a desire to migrate (migration intention) and that the factors influencing actual behavior affect migration intentions in a similar fashion." Brigitte Waldorf, "Determinants of International Return Migration Intentions," *Professional Geographer* 47 (1995): 125–36 (125). For continuity with Safran's model, see for example, see Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 26, who essentially accepts and expands Safran's original list, including the continued desire to return home.

¹⁰⁹ For a summary of these positions and a productive critique that argues for the psalm as a post-exilic piece of "political poetry," see Berlejung, "New Life, New Skills, and New Friends," 12–18.

¹¹⁰ See the discussion in Knoppers, "Exile, Return and Diaspora," 43–47.

¹¹¹ Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period: Vol. II From the Exile to the Maccabees* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 443–46.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 445.

According to this model, the Judeans that comprised the audience of Isa 40–48’s *should* have been eager to return migrate, and the Author’s goal of inspiring them to do so should have been simple. However, as the preceding analysis of Isa 40–48 demonstrates, this was not the case. The Author employed an array of rhetorical tools in an effort to enlist his fellow Judeo-Babylonians in his cause of return migration. Beyond the theological recasting of their patron deity, the Author went so far as to interpellate the community he/she identified as Jacob-Israel into Yahweh’s divine plan,¹¹³ to rhetorically and ideologically hail them as members of Jacob-Israel and the bearers of Yahweh’s message. According to the Author, it was the divine will for Jacob-Israel to run at the head of Yahweh’s victory parade in order to prepare Jerusalem for his return. As part of this group, the historical audience member was thereby commissioned to make the journey and execute this task. The use of the 2nd masculine suffix on אלהיכם in 40:1 drives home this point: Yahweh is *your* god, and if *you* are his people, then Judea is *your* home.¹¹⁴

This reading gestures towards the larger issue of how Judean identity is to be understood after the fall of Judah. It is clear from the message in Isa 40–48 that Judean identity was not defined by a single trait like a yearning for a return to the homeland. Rather, the rhetoric employed by the composition’s Author and the cuneiform evidence from Āl–Yāḥūdu suggest that the experiences of at least some Judeans is better understood through a decentralized model of the diaspora experience. Judeans like Aḥīqam and his family seem to have developed a supralocal concept of Judean identity that allowed them to identify with and reproduce particular markers of Judean identity—veneration of Yahweh, the continued use of Hebrew (in some fashion), maintaining relationships with other Judeans—while simultaneously feeling ‘at home’ in their geographical and cultural context. This insight opens up further opportunities to explore the relationships between Judeans over time and space and also cautions

¹¹³ I mean interpellation in the Althusserian sense of creating subjects, subjects constituted by ideology. The author of our passage attempts to motivate the members of his audience to collective action by casting it in terms of the divine plan. Yahweh’s people in Babylonia are to “return home” to prepare for his return. As a member of this group, *you*, the audience member, are hereby commissioned to make the journey and accomplish this task. Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards and Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays with a New Introduction by Frederic Jameson* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 115–23.

¹¹⁴ In his analysis of the Hellenistic *Letter of Aristeas*, Stewart Moore convincingly argues that the document’s author was attempting to convince his Judeo-Egyptian co-ethnics in Alexandria that Jerusalem (and Judea) still played an important role in their identity as Ἰουδαῖοί despite their embeddedness and comfort in their Hellenistic Egyptian context. The document’s long and detailed description of Judea, Jerusalem, and the temple served to root these Judeo-Egyptians in their ancestral homeland Stewart Alden Moore, *Jewish Ethnic Identity and Relations in Hellenistic Egypt: With Walls of Iron* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 171; 2015), 231–35.

against too quick or too neat of an answer to the question of what it meant to be 'Judean' in a given historical moment.