

# Chapter 14

## Scattered

(580 – 540 BCE)

*Let the Son, Majesty of the gods, be his name!  
May the people he created, the form of life that breathes,  
Walk in his bright light forever more.  
He imposed the work of gods on them so that the gods might rest  
Creation and abolition, forgiveness and punishment –  
Such are at his disposal, so let them look to him.*

From 'Enuma Elish', concerning Marduk the god of Babylon<sup>1</sup>

### The Scattered People (ca. 580)

In the years immediately following 580 BCE, Jerusalem was one place where worshippers of Yahweh were not to be found – at least not in any numbers. They were scattered throughout the Ancient Near East as a result of a history of migrations and exiles.

It will be recalled that around 1400 BCE, Egyptian Pharaohs deported large numbers of people from the coastal Levant to the deep South, probably to today's Sudan or Ethiopia. Although some scholars argue that belief in Yahweh had not developed by 1400, others point to Egyptian texts referring to a place called Bet-Yahweh ('*Yahweh's Temple*') in the land of Shasu that date from this period. There was a community in Ethiopia that practised Yahwism from early times in a manner that shows no awareness of the reforms of Josiah. Zephaniah, writing around 625 BCE, refers to them when he says, "*from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, my suppliants, my scattered ones, shall bring my offering*".<sup>2</sup> The Ethiopians themselves have a tradition that their kings formed a single dynasty starting with Solomon's oldest son and ending with Haile Selassie.

5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE correspondence in Aramaic between Judean expatriates on Elephantine Island, near Aswan in Upper Egypt, and the Judean homeland confirms the existence of a Jewish settlement there from at least 525 BCE and probably earlier<sup>3</sup>. They appear to have lived by offering themselves as mercenaries in the service of various Pharaohs – an activity for which there was a long tradition. Some scholars infer from the evidence of sacrifice at the Egyptian shrines that these communities also predated the reforms of Josiah: assuming that these reforms stuck. There is, however, evidence that even in Jerusalem the reforms were reversed after Josiah's death. Ezekiel's visionary description of the temple in 592 certainly states that the temple had become polluted with foreign gods. The Egyptian communities may well have pre-dated Josiah, but it is difficult to prove this from the evidence of cultic sacrifices alone.

Of the allegedly 30,000 people moved by the Assyrians from Samaria to locations in Mesopotamia in 721, some had settled in their new homes. Other citizens of the former Northern Kingdom had emigrated to Egypt at the same time. Assyrian records refer to the forced resettlement of Samaritans in the cities of the Medes – thus confirming the reference in 2 Kings 17:6.

There were always some Yahwists in Samaria. The letters from Elephantine seeking advice on religious matters went to Samaria as well as Jerusalem. After Jerusalem was sacked, it was a group of Samaritan pilgrims that came to mourn the destruction of the temple (and were met by the murderers of Gedaliah.)

By the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE there is evidence of a significant Yahwist family, the Tabiah, across the Jordan in Ammon. Perhaps they were then already a Yahwist family of long standing.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Myths from Mesopotamia, translated by Stephanie Dalley, p 265.

<sup>2</sup> Zephaniah 3:10

<sup>3</sup> Cambridge p 155

The most recent Judean exiles to Babylon, amounting in total to 4,600 people according to the book of Jeremiah, was just one of the several ex-patriot communities. Most of these exiles were taken to towns not too far from Babylon where they took Jeremiah's advice to settle; and many of them prospered. A little later, another wave of emigrants went south to Egypt, including a reluctant Jeremiah. We may presume that these were not the only locations for emigrant communities; Ammon, Edom, Moab, Phoenicia, and Syria may also have been destinations

The citizens of Israel and Judah were not the only people to suffer exile. Exiles were taken from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim and forcibly placed in Samaria by the Assyrians. The states of Philistia were more or less completely emptied around 600 BCE by Babylonia for strategic reasons. Babylon wanted to clear the route south and leave Egypt with no vassals that could act either as a buffer against invasion or as a source of supply for an Egyptian army moving north. Judah, being off the main coastal route, avoided exile along with the others for these strategic reasons. Hindsight would suggest that the Judeans could have avoided it altogether had they been less tempted by dreams of independence.

Whilst 25,000 to 30,000 are believed to have lived in Jerusalem in Josiah's time, only 500 are thought to have scratched out an existence amongst its 6<sup>th</sup> century ruins. This means that the vast majority of those who moved out were not exiled, but left as economic migrants, seeking a new life elsewhere. The archaeological evidence charts the extent of the economic collapse of Judah. The amount of jewellery found that is dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century was a mere 4% of that dated to the 7<sup>th</sup>; metal artefacts are 7% of previous numbers; and the finds of written documents (labels, seals etc) fall to 17% of their former level. This is an economic disaster of huge proportions. Economic activity had fallen back to levels not seen during the previous 350 years.

But of Samaria and Galilee little is known. Some suppose that Judah was carved up between Edom and Samaria, and that just as Edom profited by Judah's demise, so did Samaria. Samaria could have continued with a relatively less damaged economy, and remained an ongoing centre of Yahwist belief, no longer dominated by Jerusalem.

### **In Egypt**

A good many people had become refugees in Egypt, escaping Babylonian rule or retribution. In Egypt they reverted to their pagan practices – if they had ever stopped – for they felt that the weight of evidence did not support the view that loyalty to the laws of Yahweh had promoted good fortune. In answer to Jeremiah's preaching and Baruch's writing, they said they would revert to the worship of the Queen of heaven.<sup>4</sup> When they had done this before they had prospered; but since Josiah's reforms there had been nothing but disaster.

It is probable that Baruch and Jeremiah took with them into exile the DH text, and a number of oracles, poems and prose accounts that Baruch edited to form a version of the book of Jeremiah.

Is it possible that Jeremiah and Baruch were involved in rescuing the Ark of the Covenant from the incoming Babylonians and in having it carried secretly to Egypt? This would account for Jeremiah's hope that the people would cease asking questions about the Ark. Could it have been taken to the Jewish community at Elephantine Island? Does this account for the continued practice of sacrifice in their temple? Did they do so because they believed that their Island had now become 'the place where the name of Yahweh dwelt'? The Elephantine community was destroyed in 410 BCE, but Ethiopian tradition has it that the Ark was moved to Lake Tana, from whence it was moved to Axum at the time of the Christian conquest of the country, where it remains to this day in the church of Maryam Tsion, guarded by a monk of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Western historians regard these claims with scepticism, but if they are not true then the Ethiopian Church is perpetuating a massive fraud on its people since a significant part of their liturgy is based on this belief. Each church has a 'Holy of Holies' and in every church, other than Maryam Tsion, a replica of the ark is kept.

### **Jeremiah; the final book**

We can be reasonably confident about the editing work done by Baruch on the text of Jeremiah. At the time of his enforced departure from Judah, the text probably included the book of 604 (the first 20 chapters of today's Jeremiah) and the 'middle' book written to deal with the question of exile. Scrolls with this content (roughly the first 25 chapters of Jeremiah) seem to have been sent to Babylon and also taken to Egypt. Baruch continued to work on the scroll in Egypt, whilst others worked on the scroll in Babylon. The two groups of exiles probably communicated and some of the

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<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah 44:16b -

work that Baruch did in Egypt probably reached Babylon, where others incorporated this material, in a somewhat different order and perhaps with some further additions and editing of their own. The result was that we now have two versions of the book of Jeremiah; one is the Babylonian version, which is generally held to be the basis of the Masoretic Text, and the other is the Egyptian version which seems to have been the basis of the book of Jeremiah in the Septuagint.

Baruch worked on a substantial biography of Jeremiah covering the years from the great siege until his exile into Egypt. This is now to be found in chapters 37 to 44 in modern bibles based on the Masoretic Text. The first two of these chapters contain the stories of Jeremiah's imprisonment and interviews with Zedekiah whilst the third describes the siege, Jeremiah's release from imprisonment and his somewhat surprising decision to remain in Judah. It concludes with four chapters covering the assassination of Gedaliah and the forced exile of Jeremiah and Baruch to Egypt.

In the Septuagint, the biography was introduced by the prose parts of the Little Book of Comfort; by contrasting stories about loyalty; and by an account of the reading, burning and re-writing of the scroll of 604. The extract from the Book of Comfort described Jeremiah's purchase of land near Jerusalem during the lull in the great siege and then goes on to describe Yahweh's frustration and anger with Jerusalem, but also his mercy and future plans – *"I will heal and cure Judah and Israel...in this place shall be heard once again the sounds of joy and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride"*. The first story about loyalty described the incident of the freeing of the slaves during the worst of the siege followed by their re-enslavement when the siege was temporarily lifted. This duplicity and failure to obey the will of Yahweh was contrasted with an account of the Rechabites, a nomadic group who eschewed the drinking of wine and the tilling of the soil, and who refused to be tempted to break with their ancestral traditions. Jeremiah compared the Rechabites obedience to their ancestor's wishes with the people's refusal to obey Yahweh's wishes<sup>5</sup>.

After incorporating his 'Life of Jeremiah', Baruch may have terminated his work with a personal note. He recalled the word of Yahweh concerning Baruch that Jeremiah had recounted earlier:

*I am going to break down what I have built, and pluck up what I have planted.... And you [Baruch], do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them! For I am going to bring disaster upon all flesh, says Yahweh; but I will give you your life as a prize of war in every place to which you may go.*<sup>6</sup>

The oracles against the nations that follow (inserted at this point in the Egyptian version, but in chapters 46-51 in the Babylonian version) were composed over a period of at least fifteen years, between 605 and 590 or later. Some of them were probably not composed by either Jeremiah or Baruch. The Edom oracle has verses in common with Obadiah and parts of the Moab oracle echo Isaiah as is illustrated in the following table: -

Jeremiah 48:29-31	Isaiah 16:6-7
<p><i>We have heard of the pride of Moab — how proud he is! — of his arrogance, his pride, and his insolence; and the haughtiness of his heart. I myself know his insolence, says Yahweh; His boasts are false, his deeds are false. Therefore I wail for Moab; I cry out for all Moab; I mourn for the people of Kir-heres.</i></p>	<p><i>We have heard of the pride of Moab —how proud he is! — of his arrogance, his pride, and his insolence;  His boasts are false. Therefore let Moab wail: let everyone wail for Moab; mourn, utterly stricken, for the rich farmers of Kir-hareseth.</i></p>

The oracle against Kedar and Hazor contains expressions of which Jeremiah was fond – such as *"terror on every side"* and *"the haunt of jackals"*

*Rise up, advance against Kedar*<sup>7</sup>!

<sup>5</sup> These contrasting stories can be found in Jeremiah 34 -35 in a modern western bible.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah 45:1-5

<sup>7</sup> Kedar was an organised confederation of Arabian tribes occupying land between Moab and Mesopotamia. The confederation gave Nebuchadrezzar problems in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Tradition holds that

*Destroy the people of the east!  
 Take their tents and their flocks, their curtains and their goods;  
 drive off their camels for yourselves.  
 A cry shall go up: "Terror on every side!"  
 Flee, people of Hazor, wander far away, hide in deep places,  
 ...  
 Hazor shall become a haunt of jackals, an everlasting waste;  
 no one shall live there, none shall settle it.*

The collection contains a set of oracles against Babylon. These are expressly attributed to Jeremiah in the Masoretic text, though not in the Septuagint. The collection includes the following hymn – which seems to owe something to the scribal wisdom tradition: -

*The Maker of Earth by his power,  
 established the world by his wisdom,  
 and stretched out the heavens by his knowledge.  
 When he speaks – thunder in the waters of heaven –  
 clouds rise up from the ends of earth.  
 He makes lightning strike with the rain,  
 and brings out the winds from his store.*

*All men are stupid – without knowledge;  
 goldsmiths are shamed by their idols;  
 the mouldings they cast are a falsehood  
 for no breath of life is in them.  
 They are worthless,  
 a joke that shall die on the day of reckoning.*

*Not like these is the God of Jacob,  
 for he is the Maker of All,  
 and Israel is the people he claims;  
 Yahweh of Armies is his name.<sup>8</sup>*

The hymn used other popular material: the lines about clouds, rain, lightning and wind are virtually identical with verse 7 from psalm 135, a psalm of praise; the opening lines are shared with a non-biblical psalm discovered amongst the jars of Qumran<sup>9</sup>; the whole hymn was repeated in chapter 10 where it was grouped with other material comparing the Living God with the lifeless gods of other nations, including the only line in Aramaic in Jeremiah. "*The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and the heavens*". According to the Targum, this line was the response Jeremiah suggested that the exiles should use when anyone asked them to worship idols. The hymn was presumably included here to encourage the exiles to maintain their faith in the God of Jacob as opposed to Marduk, the Baal-like god of Babylon.

The Egyptian version of Jeremiah followed the oracles with the material that preceded them in the Babylonian version. This material began with Baruch's description of the reading of Jeremiah's temple sermon and his subsequent arrest and trial. In this account, the review of the history emphasised the consequences of the peoples' refusal to listen – consequences that had now befallen them. The next chapter in the Septuagint dealt with Jeremiah's correspondence with the exiles in which he encouraged them to settle in Babylon and to work for the peace of that city, for he said it would be 70 years before the exile ended. It also included Jeremiah's response to Shemaiah's letter of complaint concerning the letter from the 'madman' Jeremiah; Jeremiah prophesied that Shemaiah would have no descendants who survived to see the good that Yahweh will eventually do for these exiles. In that respect he fared better than the 'false prophets' who preached to the exiles: these, Jeremiah prophesied, would be taken by Nebuchadrezzar and roasted on his fire. The Egyptian version continued with poetic material from the 'Little Book of Comfort' (although arranged in a different order from that found in the Masoretic Text), then with 'Cup of Wrath' indictment and an account of the 'Yoke of Babylon'

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they were descended from Ishmael.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremiah 51:15-19 and 10:12-16

<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah 1-20; Jack Lundbom; pp 593 - 596. Lundbom refers to Sanders' "The dead sea psalm scrolls". Cornell U.P. with respect to hitherto unknown psalm.

incidents including Jeremiah's battle with Hananiah.

The final chapter was an historical appendix probably copied from the Deuteronomic History that Baruch had completed earlier. The report of Gedaliah's governorship was omitted because it had been more extensively covered in Jeremiah 40-43. There was, however, additional material put into the version that became the Masoretic Text in terms of the numbers of the exiles in each deportation; these totalled 4600 compared to the 10,000 recorded in II Kings 24. If the Masoretic version was finalised in Babylon whilst the Septuagint was completed in Egypt, as scholars suppose, then the Babylonian version may be the more accurate.

Whilst much of the final chapter could have been completed early in the exile, there remained yet one more event to be recorded, an event that would give a last optimistic twist to the history that provided the dramatic background to this great work. But it was an event that most probably occurred after the death of Jeremiah. We do not know when or how Jeremiah died. There is a tradition that he was martyred in Egypt, but he may simply have died of old age. Jeremiah's prophesy that Babylon would destroy Egypt never came true. Egypt's policy of meeting external threats well away from its own borders wherever possible had proved remarkably successful. For the 150 years following the departure of the Assyrians, no foreign army penetrated Egypt's borders.

### **In Babylon**

Jeremiah entrusted some of his oracles against Babylon to Seraiah, Baruch's brother, to take to Babylon with the words:

*“When you come to Babylon, see that you read all these words, and say, ‘Yahweh, you yourself threatened to destroy this place so that neither man nor beast could live in it, and it should be a desolation forever.’ When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it, and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, and say, ‘Thus shall Babylon sink to rise no more, because of the disasters that I am bringing on her.’”<sup>10</sup>*

The words he was referring to are presumably the oracles now found in Jeremiah 51-52, some of which occur only in the Babylonian version of Jeremiah:

*‘Therefore the time is surely coming’, says Yahweh,  
‘when I will punish her idols,  
and the wounded will groan through all her land.  
Even if Babylon mounts up to heaven,  
and even if she fortifies her strongest towers,  
destroyers will come upon her from me’, says Yahweh*

*Listen! — a cry from Babylon!*

*...  
destroyers have come against her, against Babylon;  
her warriors are taken; their bows are broken;  
for Yahweh is a God of retribution,  
he will repay in full.*

*‘I will make her princes and counsellors drunk,  
her governors, deputies and soldiers shall sleep a perpetual sleep and never wake,’  
says the King, whose name is Yahweh of Armies.<sup>11</sup>*

The Babylonian version of Jeremiah was about 12% longer than the Egyptian version. Some of the difference was due to the extra material in the oracles against the nations, some due to additional glosses and some due to additions elsewhere in the book. For example, at the end of the book of comfort, after the section saying that there would once more be the sounds joy and gladness in Jerusalem, the Babylonian version had an insert regarding the house of David and the Levitical priests<sup>12</sup>. This insert included reassuring phrases such as:

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<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah 51: 60 - 64

<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah 51:52-57

<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah 33:14-26 This passage is not present in the Septuagint. Regarded as an exilic insert by Lundbom in his introduction to Jeremiah 1-20;AB. (p 99)

*If any of you could break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night would not come at their appointed time, then my covenant with my servant David that he would always have a descendant to sit on his throne could also be broken, and so could my covenant with the Levitical priests who minister to me.*

*Like the uncountable host of heaven and the un-measurable sands of the sea, I will increase the offspring of my servant David, and the Levites who minister to me.*

Clearly the exiled priest who added this felt the need to counter the idea that David's dynasty could be ended – an idea implicit in Jeremiah 22:30, “*record this man (Jehoiachin) as childless, for none of his offspring shall sit upon the throne of David*” (Jeremiah 22:30). Jehoiachin was in Babylon, had married and had children. Why not believe that one of them would one day sit upon the throne of David? Most of the Levitical priests would have been exiled to Babylon in the first and second deportations, so the linkage with the Levites is understandable.

Both versions of Jeremiah found their way back to Judah eventually – for fragments of both have been found in Qumran. A comparison of the two versions is shown in the following table:

### The structure of Jeremiah<sup>13</sup>

Chapter	The Masoretic Text		The Septuagint
<b>1-20</b>	<b>The book of 604</b>	<b>1-20</b>	<b>The book of 604</b>
1	Call	1	Call
2-4	Call to repentance	2-4	Call to repentance
4-6	The threat of desolation	4-6	The threat of desolation
7	Temple sermon	7	Temple sermon
8-10	Mourning	8-10	Mourning
11-20	The covenant destroyed	11-20	The covenant destroyed
<b>21-25:13a</b>	<b>The middle book</b>	<b>21-25:13a</b>	<b>The middle book</b>
21-22	The indictment of kings	21-22	The indictment of kings
23	The indictment of prophets	23	The indictment of prophets
24-25:13a	The good and bad figs	24-25:13a	The good and bad figs
<b>25:13b-51</b>	<b>Compiled in Babylon</b>	<b>26-51</b>	<b>Compiled in Egypt</b>
25:13b-38	The cup of wrath	32:13b-33	Extension to the Book of Comfort
26	Comment on the temple sermon	34	The treatment of the slaves
27-28	The yoke of Babylon incidents	35	The contrast with the Rechabites
29	Letter condemning false exilic prophets	36	Two scrolls
30-31	Book of Comfort pt 1	37-44	Baruch's biography of Jeremiah
32-33	Extension to the Book of Comfort	45:1-5	Baruch's commission
34	The treatment of the slaves	46-51	Oracles against the nations
35	The contrast with the Rechabites	26	Comment on the temple sermon
36	Two scrolls	29	Letter condemning false exilic prophets
37-44	Baruch's biography of Jeremiah	31-30	Book of Comfort pt 1 (order reversed)
45	Baruch's commission	25:14 - 20	The cup of wrath
46-51	Oracles against the nations	27-28	The yoke of Babylon incidents
<b>52</b>	<b>Historical Appendix</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>Historical Appendix</b>

The exiles in Babylon had been the establishment in Judah. They probably took with them all the versions of the national epic, the P and H texts, most of Deuteronomy and the work of DH (or

<sup>13</sup>This arrangement of the material may not have been the original one. Some scholars believe that chapters 25, 25, 35 & 36 - dated to Jehoiakim's reign - were originally a separate scroll whilst chapters 24, 27, 28 & 29 – dated to Zedekiah – were a parallel composition for the later reign. This may be true, but it is also possible that Baruch and the Babylonian editor broke up these passages within the lifetime of their author to aid the reinterpretation of the prophetic message for the situation they found themselves in.

Baruch if that was he), Ruth, some of Proverbs, the writings of Isaiah of Jerusalem, Hosea, Amos, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Nahum and Zephaniah and many psalms.

### **Babylonian Culture**

Some of the exiles became immersed in Babylonian culture. Within a generation, they had adopted foreign names such as Shawash-Sharusur (Shawash-protects) and Zerubabel (seed of Babylon). Babylon was an immense city by the standards of the time, filled with public buildings of great splendour. The main entrance to the city, through its double walls, was the beautiful Ishtar gate decorated with reliefs of bulls and dragons. The hanging gardens stood on the roof of the palace, draping it with flowers and greenery. A magnificent Ziggurat dominated a city of broad processional streets. The exiles would have been stunned by the riches and scale of all that they saw.

The Gilgamesh stories were as popular as ever, and included a flood story with which the exiles would have been very familiar. In Nippur the exiles would have found a carving describing one of the stories of Enki, in which pain is brought into the world as a result of eating a forbidden plant

The Babylonian religion was then just as it had been for a thousand years, centred around the worship of Marduk, the wisest of the gods, the sun. There was an annual ceremony of renewal in which the king celebrated Marduk's victory over primeval watery chaos and which probably involved the recitation of the ancient creation myth '*Enuma elish*' ('When on high'). This poem had probably been composed in the later half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE. If the elite of Judah had not heard it before, they would certainly have become familiar with it then. It described a creation process which originated with Tiamat – a precursor of the gods; represented by watery chaos, a serpent or a dragon.

The creation of the gods was described, including that of Marduk with his four sparkling eyes and fire blazing from his lips – the Sun of the Heavens. But the Sun disturbed the waters and the others get no rest; so a war was planned against Marduk, but it was Marduk the Sun who triumphed by killing Tiamat. Marduk split the shellfish-like body of the dead Tiamat to create the heavens. He set stations in the heavens for the great gods, twelve constellations, and gave detailed instructions for the moon. Then Marduk had an idea. He created a '*savage*' to be called '*man*' and charged him with the service of the gods. Man was instructed to build Babylon and within it a temple for the gods. When that was completed the gods sat down to banquet.<sup>14</sup>

The sequence of creation is similar to Genesis 1 – primeval chaos, light, firmament, dry land, the stars, man: but there are significant differences too. Enuma Elish has a plurality of gods who war amongst themselves and who ultimately create man for their convenience. There may be tiny resonances of these ideas in Psalm 89 – 'You scattered your enemies with your mighty arm' and verses like Genesis 6:1 'When people began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, the sons of god saw that they were fair; and took wives for themselves... The Nephilim were on the earth in those days – and also afterward – when the sons of god went into the daughters of humans, who bore children to them.' Perhaps these stories were part of the common culture of the Ancient Near East, and Babylonian exile merely reminded the exiles of the detail.

### **Ezekiel; the later oracles (585 – 568)**

Between 585 and 572 Ezekiel wrote a number of undated oracles. Most famous is the passage in which the prophet saw the exiled community as coming to life again, and returning to faith in Yahweh. The image of the dry bones may have been taken from Jeremiah's oracle in Topheth in which he condemned the priests, princes and people of Jehoiakim's Jerusalem. Their bones, he predicted, would be scattered in the valley: but Ezekiel envisioned a new life and a new spirit for the remnant:

*The word of the Lord came upon me, carried me and set me down in a dry valley: it was full of bones. He led me all around them. They covered the valley, countless numbers of them, and they were very dry.*

*He said to me "Son of Man, can these bones live?"  
I answered, "Only you know, Lord Yahweh."*

*Then he said to me "Give spirit to these bones, and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh. Thus says Lord Yahweh to these bones:*

*'I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live.*

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<sup>14</sup> ANET pp 60-69

*I will fasten sinews on you, bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin,  
put spirit in you, and you shall live.  
You shall know that I am Yahweh”*

...

*And as I spoke in the spirit as instructed, breath came into them; they came to life and rose to their feet – a mighty army. He said to me, “Man, these bones are the whole people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, our web is cut from the loom.’ Give spirit to them therefore and say that these are the words of Lord Yahweh:*

*‘My people, I will open your graves, restore you and bring you to the land of Israel...  
Then I will put my spirit in you and you shall live.*

*And I shall settle you on you own soil.  
You shall know that I, Yahweh, have spoken and I will act.’”<sup>15</sup>*

A second oracle followed in which Yahweh promised to make Judah and Israel into one nation, bound together just as two sticks can be bound together – an image that Ezekiel illustrated with the appropriate visual aids. The commitment to bring them back to their land was repeated, ‘*and my servant David shall be the prince forever*’. It concluded with the statement that the nations shall know that Yahweh will keep Israel sacred to himself and establish his sanctuary in their midst forever – hinting at the idea of the restored temple, the theme with which the book of Ezekiel was to conclude.

Ezekiel was aware that Yahweh’s decision to punish and purify his people by exile was seen by the nations around them as a weakness – as evidence of Yahweh’s inability to protect his people. So Ezekiel believed that Yahweh’s decision to bring his people back was something that Yahweh would do for the sake of his name:

*It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am about to act but for the sake of my holy name, which you have dishonoured amongst the nations where you have gone. When they see that I reveal my holiness through you, they will know that I am Yahweh.*

Yahweh’s name had been dishonoured not only by the exile itself, but because Judah’s leaders had broken oaths sworn in Yahweh’s name when they repudiated vassal treaties they had entered into confirmed by those oaths. But Yahweh’s intention was not just to bring his people back, he would also purify them and give them a new heart and a new spirit; he would make them conform to his statutes and live by his laws.<sup>16</sup> In Jeremiah’s words, he would write all his laws on their hearts.

The conflict with Gog can be seen as part of Yahweh’s plan to re-establish his holy name before the nations of the world:

*These are the words of lord Yahweh:  
‘In that day, when my people Israel are living peaceably, will you [Gog] not awaken and come with many nations from your home in the far recesses of the north, riding on horses – a mighty army? .... I will bring you, Gog, against the people of my land, that the nations may understand me, when they see me prove my holiness at your expense.’<sup>17</sup>*

But who was Gog?

He only occurs this once in the Hebrew Bible, and he appears to be unknown to history. Scholars have made a number of suggestions as to his identity: he was Gyges, king of Lydia; or Gaga, a name in the Armana letters; or the god Gaga from the Ras Shamra; or Alexander the Great; or perhaps a mythological representation of the forces of chaos ranged against Yahweh.<sup>18</sup> But perhaps the most interesting suggestion is that Gog was code for Nebuchadrezzar himself.<sup>19</sup>

He was stated to be the ‘*prince of the head of Meshech and Tubal*’ not, as in some translations, Prince of Rosh since ‘*rosh*’ is simply a transliteration of the Hebrew, whose meaning is ‘*head*’. Meshech and Tubal were in Anatolia (Turkey) and it is known that Nebuchadrezzar had

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<sup>15</sup> Ezekiel 37:1-14

<sup>16</sup> Ezekiel 36; especially verses 22-28.

<sup>17</sup> Ezekiel 38:14-16

<sup>18</sup> K.H Cuffey; Gog; AB

<sup>19</sup> J Galambush; Ezekiel; Oxford Bible Commentary.

influence in that area. There is even a suggestion that he, or his deputy, resolved a dispute between the Lydians and Medes concerning the control of Meshech and Tubal<sup>20</sup>. Apart from this evidence, there is the fact that Nebuchadrezzar and Gog are described in the same terms; both are rulers over many peoples, who come from the north with armies equipped with horsemen bearing shields, bucklers and helmets. One can imagine that the exiles were humiliated by their captor's comments: comments such as "*these are Yahweh's people: they have come from his land*"<sup>21</sup>, implying that Yahweh was a feeble god. It can be argued therefore that the ultimate defeat of Nebuchadrezzar was a psychological and theological necessity to Ezekiel and to the exiles – but not something it would have been wise to openly speculate about.

Whoever Gog was intended to represent, he was Yahweh's foe in the great apocalypse, the final battle. Gog would have no choice. He will be dragged out with his hordes with a hook in his mouth. Evil thoughts will come into his mind. The battle would take place in Israel after the restoration of the people to the land<sup>22</sup>.

*The day Gog attacks Israel, ... my furious wrath will boil over...*

*The fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the animals in the field, all creeping things on the ground and all mankind shall quake before me. Mountains will be torn down, cliffs will fall and every wall shall collapse...*

*I will bring him to judgement with disease and bloodshed; I will pour torrential rain, hailstones hard as rocks, fire and sulphur upon him and his troops and all who are with him. Thus will I prove myself great and holy and make myself known to the nations.*

*They shall know that I am Yahweh.*<sup>23</sup>

And afterwards it would take the Israelites seven months to bury the dead of Gog's horde; and it was to be done in a separate place, so that their land would not be contaminated by any of the bones. And then there was to be a great sacrifice where, in a reversal of the normal ritual, birds and animals would be fed on the flesh and blood of humans - the slaughtered enemies of Yahweh.

This part of Ezekiel concluded with an assertion that it was Yahweh who had punished Israel for their iniquities and it was Yahweh who would bring them back. Other nations should see that the exile occurred because Yahweh chose to discipline his people, not because Yahweh was too weak to protect his people. Ezekiel reveals Yahweh's explanation of the past and plans for the future<sup>24</sup>.

*The nations will know that the people of Israel went into exile for their sin, because they were unfaithful to me. ... I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their offenses, and I hid my face from them, ... Now I will show my tender love for all of them. I will make sure that my name is kept holy. They will forget their shame and all the unfaithfulness they showed toward me when they lived in safety in their land with no one to make them afraid. So I will bring them back from the nations. .... And I will use them to show many nations how holy I am. Then they will know that I am Yahweh their god, for I who sent them into exile will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. I will no longer hide my face from the people of Israel, for I will pour out my spirit on them*<sup>25</sup>

The scene was set for the imagined creation of a new temple in which Yahweh would be re-enthroned; thereby reversing Yahweh's departure from the old temple – the vision with which Ezekiel's book begun. The same figure that had led Ezekiel to see the destruction of the temple– the burning figure in the form of a man – led him now to see the restored temple.

This vision was dated to the 25<sup>th</sup> year of the exile, which was a Jubilee year. We know this because the superscription of the book gave an alternative way of dating the first vision; not only was it in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the exile, it was also in the 30<sup>th</sup> year of the Jubilee. Thus this vision takes place in the 50<sup>th</sup> year – the next Jubilee year, when debts were cancelled and slaves were freed. Further

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<sup>20</sup> D.J.Wiseman; Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings (626-556) in the British Museum; British Museum

<sup>21</sup> Ezekiel 36:20

<sup>22</sup> Ezekiel 38:4-10

<sup>23</sup> Ezekiel 39:18-23

<sup>24</sup> See Ezekiel 5:8&10&28:26, 34:30

<sup>25</sup> Ezekiel 39:21-29

confirmation comes from the fact that the Day of Atonement occurred at the start of the year<sup>26</sup>.

In the vision, Ezekiel saw the outer and the inner courts, the holy of holies and the exterior and interior of the temple itself. The temple was surrounded by a holy district, administered by a Levitical priesthood in observance with the Holiness Code. And then he saw the glory return.

*Then he brought me to the gate, the gate facing east. And there, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east; the sound was like the sound of mighty waters; and the earth shone with his glory. The vision I saw was just like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city – like the vision that I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. As the glory of Yahweh entered the temple by the gate facing east, the spirit lifted me up, and brought me into the inner court; and the glory of Yahweh filled the temple.*

Then he heard a divine speech which introduced a new theology. In future the residence of the living kings and the graves of the deceased should be kept well away from the temple. There would no longer be a close relationship between Yahweh and the kings of the land:

*He said to me: Son of Man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet, where I will reside among the people of Israel forever. The house of Israel, neither the people nor their kings shall no more defile my holy name through their whoring, and through the corpses of their kings at their death. When they placed their threshold by my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them, they were defiling my holy name by their loathsome practices; therefore I have put an end to them in my anger. Now let them put away their whorings and the corpses of their kings far from me, and I will reside among them forever.<sup>27</sup>*

Foreigners were to be excluded from the sanctuary and from participating in any way in the service of the temple. Whilst Deuteronomy may have called all Levites to come and minister before Yahweh in the place he will choose<sup>28</sup>, Ezekiel restricted this right to those descended from Zadok. The others could only act as temple servants<sup>29</sup>. All Zadokite priests should change into linen garments when they entered the inner court, and should change out again when they left, following the procedure previously laid down in Leviticus 16, which then applied just for the High priest on the Day of Atonement. The priests should abstain from drink when on duty (Leviticus 10:9). They should keep their hair tidy, they should only marry a virgin of the house of Israel or the widow of a priest, they should not defile themselves by going near a corpse (except that of a close relative) and they should teach the people the difference between the clean and the unclean. These rules follow the Holiness Code with minor variations.<sup>30</sup>

Only the priest and the temple servants were to be allowed to live in the holy area around the temple; outside this was land that was to be the property of the *prince* of Israel – Ezekiel avoids the use of the word ‘king’.

A simplified calendar of festivals was envisaged involving a cleansing of the temple at the start of the year followed by Passover 14 days later and an autumn festival in the seventh month.

Much of the material in chapters 45 and 46 of today’s book of Ezekiel seems to be a collection of miscellaneous regulations probably inserted by an editor, so that the main tour of the new temple resumes in today’s chapter 47 when Ezekiel was brought back to the entrance of the temple where a marvellous stream flowed out from under the temple threshold and quickly became a river on the banks of which: -

*... there will grow all kinds of fruit trees. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because they will be watered from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.”<sup>31</sup>*

<sup>26</sup> Jubilee years begin on the day of atonement. Galambush; Ezekiel; Oxford Bible Commentary

<sup>27</sup> Ezekiel 43:7-9

<sup>28</sup> Deuteronomy 18:6

<sup>29</sup> Ezekiel 6 -13. These verses concerning access and the priesthood may have been inserted by an editor. They are probably exilic and may explain why non-Zadokite priests were reluctant to return when the opportunity arose. The restriction on foreigners entering the sanctuary would be enforced on pain of death.

<sup>30</sup> Ezekiel 44:15-27. Compare Leviticus 21:1-15

<sup>31</sup> Ezekiel 47: 12

All the tribes would be settled in their appropriate places in the restored land. The temple was to be centred in a new Jerusalem. And the name of the new city? *Jerushalaim* shall become *Jahwehshamma* – ‘Yahweh is there’!

### **Structure, date and authorship**

The first seven chapters of the book of Ezekiel contain an account of Ezekiel’s calling and his prophecies concerning the impending fate of Jerusalem. From chapter 8 onwards, the book has an underlying chiasmatic structure:

- 8-11 The vision of the old temple: the glory of Yahweh departs
- 12-23 Oracles of doom
- 24 The siege commences
- 25-32 Oracles against the nations
- 33-35 The siege ends
- 36-39 Oracles of hope
- 40-48 The vision of the new temple: the glory of Yahweh returns

Josephus, however, referred to two books by Ezekiel and some subsequent critics have suggested that chapters 40-48 (the vision of the new temple) has a different author from the rest of the book – perhaps noting the powerful ‘conclusion’ in chapter 39 and the absence of obvious poetry thereafter. The chiasmatic pattern was slightly distorted by the re-arrangement of the texts in chapters 8-11 and the introduction of sermons into chapters 12 to 23 but it is underpinned by the device of Ezekiel’s dumbness in the first half of the book followed by his recovery in the second. The dates, too, may play an important role. There are two sets of seven dates, some of which align with days of special significance. The boiling pot is dated to the commencement of the great siege, whilst Ezekiel’s release from dumbness happened on the day he received the news of the end of the siege; the vision of the new temple was given on the Day of Atonement in the jubilee year. These are times when the exiled people were likely to have gathered to hear from their prophet.

There is some evidence of late editing; the erroneous Tyre prophecy was corrected, but not the equally erroneous Egyptian prophecy. However, Ezekiel’s scheme of festivals was not put into practice; Judah’s exile did not last for forty years. As none of these matters has been the subject of an editorial attempt to reconcile them with reality, it is probable that the book took its final form sometime between 573, the last dated prophecy, and 568, the date of the failed Babylonian expedition against Egypt.

Could the prophet who ate food cooked on dung for a year and uttered such spectacular oracles that the people came just to listen also have written the fairly well-structured book containing his oracles; could he have been his own editor? The careful dating of some of the oracles suggests the method of a systematic note-taker, whilst the language of the oracles has many of the characteristics of oral expression. It incorporated: -

- Vernacular expressions such as ‘*balls of shit*’ and many words of probable Aramaic origin (whose colloquial nature gives translators problems)
- Performance prophesy
- Rhythmic rhetoric, assonance and alliteration.
- Verbal repetition such as the use of the phrase ‘*and you shall live*’ in the dry bones oracle.
- Formulaic structure with oracles beginning with standard phrases such as ‘*The word of the Lord came upon me*’ and ‘*Prophecy and say*’ and concluding with ‘*They shall know that I am Yahweh*’ or variants thereon.
- Stereotypical characters used metaphorically such as the lion of Judah, the luxuriant vine, the dried-up twig, the faithful bride, the exposed prostitute.

On the whole it seems that some credit should be given to those who came to listen to the prophet, from whom one or two may have felt it worthwhile recording the more impressive oracles, and also to any editors who assembled the material into the book we now have.

### **The Exilic Psalms**

The ritual law upheld by the Temple priesthood prohibited sacrifice except in the Jerusalem

temple. The alternative Deuteronomic strand of thought had never been favourably disposed to sacrifice as a form of worship, believing it could obscure the need for obedience to the social covenant. Both the Egyptian and the Babylonian exiles recognised the need for non-sacrificial forms of worship. New psalms were required to maintain the faith away from home. Psalm 106 takes the form of a liturgy - opening and closing with praise and with confession enclosing recitation and prayer within. It takes a form in which it is tempting to assign distinct parts for the priest and the people.:

*Priest: Praise Yahweh  
Give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good*  
*People: For his goodness and mercy endures forever.*  
*Priest: Who can tell of his mighty acts*  
*People: Or declare all his praises*  
...  
*Priest: We have sinned like our forefathers*  
*People: We have sinned and done wrong*

The recitation which followed provided an account of Israel's persistent disobedience, very similar to the sermon in Ezekiel 20: they rebelled in Egypt, in the wilderness and in Canaan; and yet there is hope for Yahweh, in his boundless love has relented and raised compassion for the people in the hearts of their captors. The prayer and final blessing completed the psalm: -

*Priest: Save us, Yahweh our god,  
Gather us from amongst the nations*  
*People: That we may give thanks to your holy name  
And glory in your praise*  
*Priest: Blessed be Yahweh, the god of Israel  
From everlasting to everlasting.*  
*People: Amen. Praise Yahweh*

Some of the poems in the third book of the psalms (73 - 89) may have been composed at this time. They express the mood of repentance. Psalms 74 and 79 both reflect on the same occasion; here the author of psalm 79 laments the destruction of Jerusalem: -

*O God, the nations have come into your inheritance.  
They have defiled your holy temple.  
They have laid Jerusalem in ruins.  
They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the air for food=  
the flesh of your faithful to the wild animals of the earth.  
They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem,  
and there was no one to bury them<sup>32</sup>.  
We have become a taunt to our neighbours,  
mocked and derided by those around us.*  
*How long, Yahweh?  
Will you be angry forever?  
Will your jealous wrath burn like fire?<sup>33</sup>*

Some of these lines are reminiscent of lamentations, especially the plea at the end:

*Restore us to yourself, Yahweh, that we may be restored;  
renew our days as of old—  
unless you have utterly rejected us,  
and are angry with us beyond measure*

<sup>32</sup> These lines are similar to Jeremiah's oracle in Topheth. "And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth; and none will frighten them away" Jeremiah 7:33

<sup>33</sup> Psalm 79: 1-9

## Medes, Chaldeans and Persians

By 570 BCE the hanging gardens, created by Nebuchadrezzar to give his Median wife the pleasure of being surrounded by the beauty of her native land, must have been reaching a fine maturity. Babylon with its gardens, its great Ishtar gate and its towering Ziggurat was then a city without equal. The treaty between the Chaldean Babylonians and the Medes which had been cemented by this marriage had been good for both countries<sup>34</sup>. Not only had they then secured the end of the Assyrian Empire, but both had built on this to acquire additional territory; Babylon secured an

Chaldean Babylon	
626	Nabopolassar conquers Babylonia
605	Nebuchadrezzar succeeds
562	Amel-Marduk succeeds
560	Neriglissar usurps throne
556	Labashi-Marduk succeeds briefly
556	Nabonidus usurps throne
539	Cyrus conquers Babylon

empire that ran from the Mouth of the Euphrates up the fertile crescent and down to the borders of Egypt, whilst the Medes had extended their dominions northwards – from the Zagros mountains of Persia through Anatolia (modern Turkey) as far the Lydian kingdom in the west.

In 562, Nebuchadrezzar's long reign came to an end and Amel-Marduk ('Man of Marduk') came to the throne of Babylon. He would be known as Evil Merodach in the Hebrew bible. Shortly after Amel-Marduk came to the throne, an editor was able to add the final paragraph to both the book of Jeremiah and the DH text:

*In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of king Jehoiachin of Judah, on the twenty second day of the twelve month, King Evil-merodach of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released king Jehoiachin from prison. He spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the other seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. He changed his prison clothes and he ate with the king all days of his life. And an allowance, a permanent allowance, was given to him by the king's daily word all the days of his life.*<sup>35</sup>

Jehoiachin had a only a short time to get to know his benefactor around the dinner table, for the Babylonian died in 560 BCE. He was succeeded by Neriglissar who only managed another four years before dying after a campaign in Cilicia – an area in today's south-eastern Turkey.

To the south of the Zagros Mountains was the small vassal kingdom of Fars or Parsua (but known in the bible as Elam). Around 559, a new king, Cyrus, ascended to the throne of this small country. His maternal grandfather may have been Astyages, the Median emperor and his paternal grandfather was Achaemenes, the founder of the dynasty that had ruled Fars in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century. A few years after his accession Cyrus rebelled against Median rule. The rebellion climaxed in a battle at Pasargardae, between modern Shiraz and Isfahan. It was a particular genius of Cyrus to encourage substantial numbers of his enemy's forces to defect and he managed to achieve this in his first battle, circa 550. As a result, he took the Median emperor prisoner and advanced on the Median capital of Ecbatana (modern Hamadan), whose treasures he carried back to Fars.

### Nabonidus

In Babylon, Neriglissar was succeeded, albeit only briefly, by his son Labasi-Marduk. Labasi-Marduk had only reigned for a few months when he died, possibly murdered, and Nabonidus came to the throne of Babylon. Nabonidus was an Aramean, unconnected with the royal Chaldean family and a man who claimed never to have sought the kingship. It seems he owed his advance to his mother; it was she who introduced him to the ruling family and promoted his career; that at least is the inference of a biography of his mother inscribed in a stele erected by Nabonidus in Harran. Two or three years after acquiring the monarchy he conducted campaigns in southern Trans-Jordan and Northern Arabia eventually conquering and establishing himself in the city of Tema. Tema was a major city near Edom's border with Arabia; it would have controlled the major trade route from Arabia to Mesopotamia including the lucrative incense trade. Assyrian records show that they too had been strongly attracted by the wealth of Tema and had attempted, without success, to impose tribute on this part of Arabia. Nabonidus left his son Bel-shar-usur in charge of the Babylon. Bel-shar-usur is known

<sup>34</sup> The Treaty made between the conquering powers outside the walls of fallen Ashur in 614 BCE.

<sup>35</sup> 2 Kings 25:27-29

in the bible as Belshazzar – the man to whom the famous writing-on-the-wall was addressed; it is he whom some consider to have been Labasi-Marduk's murderer.

According to his Chronicle, Nabonidus' campaign included the capture of a place which scholars have interpreted to be 'City of Edom', probably its capital Bozrah<sup>36</sup>. It may have been news of this event which encouraged a Judean exiled in Babylonia to write: -

*Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah,  
a great slaughter in the land of Edom.  
Wild oxen shall fall with them,  
and young steers with the mighty bulls.  
Their land shall be soaked with blood,  
and their soil made rich with fat.  
For Yahweh has a day of vengeance,  
a year of vindication in Zion's cause.*<sup>37</sup>

Nabonidus made Tema his principle residence, enlarging the city, building new fortifications and stationing troops there. He did not return to Babylon till 543 or thereabouts<sup>38</sup>.

Meanwhile, following the battle of Pasargadae, Cyrus had added the substantial Median army to his forces. In the 540's the new emperor of the Medes and Farsians (or Persians), turned his attention to Lydia and its capital Sardis, 45 miles from the west coast of modern Turkey. The king of Lydia was the allegedly fabulously rich Croesus. The first battle for Sardis was inconclusive and Cyrus retired. As winter was approaching and Cyrus appeared to be returning to Persia, Croesus, keen to save unnecessary cost, dismissed his mercenaries and moved to his winter palace; but Cyrus was only pretending to withdraw. In the following battle Cyrus took the palace of the king when his troops found an unguarded pathway (possibly with inside help). In a follow-up operation, Cyrus subdued the Greek cities along the west coast of modern Turkey. In the years after 547, Cyrus extended his empire in the East, acquiring territories in Bactria, Parthia, Scythia and Soudiana.

Nabonidus' concern about these developments may have prompted his returned to Babylon in 543<sup>39</sup>. Once there, he despatched his son to Sippar, putting him in charge of a part of the army, and dismissed or replaced several administrators. He did not take the emperor's part in the worship of Marduk, preferring instead to rebuild the temple of Sin in Haran, his birth place.

The exiles in Nippur and Babylon may have been quite encouraged by all of this; an empire that has five rulers in less than ten years and ends up with a largely absentee monarch is surely weak. That monarch, furthermore, was not a worshipper of Marduk and had failed to observe the annual renewal festival whereby the monarch 'takes the hand' of the god, ensuring thereby the well-being of city and state. The emperor did not have the support of the powerful priesthood. The vigorous expansion of the Persians could not have gone unremarked. Maybe an opportunity to return would emerge from all of this.

The exile may have been the time and place when the three great Epics were brought together. The exiles had the documents they needed to do this, and the exiles included the most talented Judean scribes and their sons and daughters. There is evidence that the Epics were brought into exile as individual texts, and that, after the exile, Ezra was able to bring the new combined text with him to the restored people – a text that was new to the people to whom it was read. So when and how was this done?

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<sup>36</sup> J R Bartlett; article on Edom; ABD

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 34:6b-8 This is part of an extended poem (verses 5-17), which followed the apocalyptic vision of verses 1-4. In the full poem, Edom will cease to be a Kingdom but become instead the haunt of jackals and other unclean animals and birds. This was perhaps seen as imagined vengeance for Edom's failure to support Judah when Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon. Some of the images in this poem were reflected and reversed in the poem of Isaiah 35 which described an idealised Judah to which he exiles could one day return.

<sup>38</sup> Beaulieu: 'Tayma's importance for trade'; pages 149-205. Also C. Edens and G. Bawden, "History of Tayma' and Hejazi trade during the first millennium B.C.", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 32 (1989:48-103).

<sup>39</sup> Nabonidus' return to Babylon may have left a power vacuum behind which was filled by indigenous Kedarites in whose territory Tema lay. If it is correct that Nabonidus had captured and destroyed the capital of Edom during his Arabian Campaign, then it is possible that the Kedarite Arabs inherited Edom along with their own historical territory. It is a Kedarite king, not an Edomite one, that Nehemiah had to deal with when he arrived in Jerusalem about a century later.

## Combining the Primary Documents

The traditional hypothesis holds that J and E were combined as early as the reign of Hezekiah. But the argument that sustains it is circumstantial; it runs as follows: -

- Following the destruction of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 there had been a massive influx of refugees into Judah.
- This influx of northern refugees created social and religious strains in Judah.
- Whilst both Israel and Judah had shared the same faith in Yahweh, their traditions differed.
- Those responsible for civil order had cause for concern that the overcrowding and the conflicting loyalties of the two groups would precipitate an outbreak of disorder.
- There was therefore a need to re-unite the tribes.
- The creation of a unified national epic, around which both Judeans and Israelites could unite, was thus a politically sensible initiative. It would have been sponsored by the King.

There are some difficulties with this hypothesis: -

1. The resulting JE retained the stories concerning Aaron's blasphemy with the golden calves at the foot of the Holy Mountain. Why would Hezekiah sponsor a work which would have been strongly resented by the temple priests whom he otherwise supported so firmly and on whom he depended for his finances?
2. Public attitudes in an oral culture could not be changed by the creation of a written document which could only be seen by a few officials.
3. The merged version of J and E retain, as far as can be ascertained, virtually every word of both source texts. This difficult procedure would be justified if the source texts were already regarded as 'scripture'. This is unlikely to have been the case if the source texts were themselves fairly recent.

A conventional answer to the first question is to admit that the Priesthood did resent the production of JE and that this was the stimulant that provoked them into producing their own Epic. However, as we have seen, P does not respond to the anti-Aaronite passages with any determination. Indeed, the P text could well have been written in ignorance of E.

The question of Hezekiah's putative motivation in antagonising the priesthood remains unanswered. The timing issues that have been described in the 'Introduction to the Epics' make it difficult to accept that such a document could have had any impact in Hezekiah's time.

There is some internal evidence that a single scribe worked on merging most aspects of all three epics. The technique used in many of the passages is both very difficult to carry out and is common to the merging of all three texts. This technique involved using almost every word of the source texts, but splicing them together verse by verse, phrase by phrase, in such a way that a coherent unified account was created and the incompatibilities of the sources were disguised. Should we assume that two editors, working at different times, used the same very difficult approach? Or is it simpler to argue that the editor who carried out the task combined all three texts?

Although it is possible that the scribal work of combination could have been done in the middle 7<sup>th</sup> century, there is no evidence for this. On the contrary, there is evidence that the raw uncombined works were still in circulation in the time of the Deuteronomist and of Ezekiel. Ezekiel refers to a P passage as a continuous piece although it is broken up in the combined text. The Deuteronomist uses J passages which in the combined text are broken into by P<sup>40</sup>.

The intellectual centre of the faith was sustained by the Babylonian exiles following the destruction of Jerusalem<sup>41</sup>. It is possible that the exiled scribes, having brought with them their sacred scriptures, sought to harmonise them into one coherent account. It is clear that the first five books of the bible had reached their present form by the time that the Samaritan sect became separated from Judaism – for this sect maintains as their only scripture a version of these books which does not materially differ from the present text. Thus the creation of the combined work must have taken place before the late 5<sup>th</sup> century. The most likely scenario consistent with the evidence is thus that the works

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<sup>40</sup> Compare Deuteronomy 1: 40-42 with Numbers 14:25-42.

<sup>41</sup> The correspondence between Egypt and Babylon seems to have ceased after the death of Jeremiah. The exilic psalms seem to come from Babylon rather than Egypt whenever a provenance can be established.

were merged some time during the exile or in the early second temple period before the arrival of Ezra in Jerusalem in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. It is in these times, when the nation's religion, culture and ethnic survival were at great risk, that a unified national epic would have had the greatest psychological and practical importance.

In some instances the merging of the texts was not too difficult. The stories of the garden of Eden, of Cain and Abel and the tower of Babel, for example, only occur in the southern Epic (J), whereas the stories of Abraham and Abimelech, of Moses' dialogue with Pharaoh, and of the golden calf only occur in the northern Epic (E). The combined version contains all the versions of all the stories. Some stories that occurred in both texts, such as Abraham's passing of his wife off as his sister, could be presented as two stories – after all this is something that Abraham could have done more than once. But it must have taken extraordinary skill to combine two stories that were clearly about the same event, but had different details; the story of Jacob at Bethel, the story of Joseph and his brothers and the story of the Escape from Egypt through the parted waters were of this difficult type.

The skill of the editor who merged the stories can be seen from the excerpts from Genesis 37 that follow. Read the left-hand column only for the E version and the right-hand column for J. The combined story, the story as it appears in today's bible, is obtained by reading down the page top to bottom ignoring the column divisions. All three make sense. Whereas in the J story, Judah saves Joseph's life and in the E story it is Reuben, in the combined story they both say 'lay no hand on him'. The slight mix-up about the Midianites and the Ishmaelites has not troubled readers unduly for over two and a half thousand years.

The Northern version – E Exodus 37	The Southern version – J Exodus 37
<i>They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him.</i>	<i>They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams".</i>
<i>But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life." Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him". So that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father.</i>	<i>So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his coat, the long coat of many colours that he wore;</i>
<i>And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty and there was no water in it. Then they sat down to eat.</i>	<i>and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers agreed</i>
<i>When some Midianite traders passed by, they hauled Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit.</i>	<i>and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.</i>
<i>When Reuben returned to the pit, and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes.</i>	<i>Then they took Joseph's coat, slaughtered a goat, and dipped the coat in the blood. They had the long coat of many colours taken to their father,</i>
<i>He returned to his brothers, and said, "The boy is not there; and I, where can I go?"</i>	

*and they said, "We found this. can you recognise it? Is it your son's coat?" And he recognised it, and said, "It is my son's coat! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is torn, torn to pieces" Then Jacob ripped his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him.*

*Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard.*

One might argue that this story was easy to combine, since it may originally have been one story, from which two versions developed. In Exodus the editor confronts a different problem in the revelation of the name Yahweh, for whilst the southern epic had used Yahweh from the beginning, it was not until Moses was before the burning bush that the name Yahweh was revealed in the northern Elohist epic.

### Exodus 3 : E version

*Moses was looking after the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian and he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of Elohim*

*Elohim called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."*

*He said further, "I am the Elohim of your father, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at Elohim.*

*"The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; and also I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh..."*

### Exodus 3: J version

*There the angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was ablaze, yet it did not burn up. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When Yahweh saw that he had turned aside to see,*

*Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground."*

*Then Yahweh said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their slave drivers. For I know their sorrowss, and I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perrizites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.*

The core section then continues using the E text (now in Exodus 3:9-18). This establishes the continuity of the god of the patriarchs with the god now speaking from the burning bush and revealing the divine name, starting with "I am who I am", but relenting and allowing Moses to say to the

Israelites, “Ehyeh<sup>42</sup> (meaning ‘I am’) has sent you”. Elohim also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘Yahweh, the Elohim of your ancestors, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, has sent me to you’ This comes entirely from the Elohist epic. Then the combined passage concluded with the instruction that “you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘Yahweh, the god of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to Yahweh, our god<sup>43</sup>”.

The editor thus succeeded in including in this essentially Elohist story matters that are crucial to the structure of the Yahwist epic – the burning bush and the instructions concerning holy ground.

The merging of the stories concerning the Tablets of Stone was a somewhat more challenging task. There were four sources here that needed to be blended together – one each from E, J and P and a further version from Deuteronomy (D). Each text had a different statement as to what was written on tablets, but the Redactor (R) wanted to leave the impression that only one pair of tablets survived and that the contents were the Ten Commandments as recorded in Deuteronomy. He was slightly helped by the fact that the Deuteronomists version was placed in the imagined voice of Moses recollecting events that had happened 40 years earlier, at the start of his years in the wilderness, so that an exact match with the Deuteronomists words was not required. Here is a summary of what the Redactor did, with the sources indicated and the location of the texts in today’s Exodus given in brackets,

P: The people arrive in the wilderness of Sinai (19:1)

R: They had travelled from Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai (19:2a)

E: But Moses had gone up to Elohim where he was given a message for the people. He took the message down to the people and they agreed to do what Yahweh had said. Moses went back up to Yahweh who said he will come to Moses in the cloud so that the people will hear when Yahweh speaks to Moses. Moses passed on the people’s agreement. (19:2b-9)

J: Yahweh told Moses to prepare the people for consecration and sent him back down. Moses consecrated the people. (19:10-16a)

E: There was a theophany on the mountain. Moses brought the people towards Elohim (19:16b–17)

J: Mount Sinai was covered in smoke and fire. (19:18)

E: Moses spoke and Elohim answered. (19:19)

J: Yahweh came down on Mount Sinai and called Moses who went up. Yahweh warned Moses that the people must not come on the mountain and was told to go down and pass on the warning. ‘...and then you may come up’. (19:20-24a)

R: ‘and Aaron with you’. (19:24b)

``J: Moses passed on the warning (19:24c-25)

R: Then Elohim spoke all these words: (20:1)

D: Ten Commandments, one to four – “Remember the Sabbath...” (20:2-10 from Deut 5:6-14a)

R: At this point the redactor incorporated his theological reason for the Sabbath. It was to be observed because Yahweh rested on the seventh day. (20:11)

D: Ten Commandments, five to ten. (20:12-17 from Deut 5:16-18)

E: The people were frightened by the theophany and asked Moses to intercede for them. Moses reassured them but was called over to the cloud where he was given the Covenant Code. Then he went up with Aaron and 70 elders and bowed from a distance. He went back to the people and got their agreement to the code. Moses wrote it all down, made a sacrifice and read the scroll. Then Moses and the elders went up again and saw the God of Israel. Yahweh called Moses out, promising to give him the tablets ‘that I have written’. Moses went up to the mountain accompanied by Joshua. (20:18-24:15a)

P: Yahweh’s glory settled on the mount Sinai and Moses entered the cloud (24:15b-18a)

R: and he went up into the mountain (24:18b)

J: Moses remained on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights (24:18c)

P: Yahweh gave Moses instructions for making the cultic artefacts; for the ordination of Aaron and his sons; and for other matters. When he had finished, Yahweh gave Moses two Tablets of Witness - tablets of stone written by ‘the finger of Elohim’. (25:1-31:18)

<sup>42</sup> If “Ehyeh” is interpreted as a divine name, then this is the only place in which it was used. It is also possible to interpret the exchange as divine irritation at Moses impertinent request – expandable to “You do not need to know my name; it is sufficient to know that I am.”

<sup>43</sup> “Our god.” Here the Hebrew ‘elohim’ is treated as a noun and not as a divine name.

E: Meanwhile, Aaron made the golden calf. When Moses with Joshua were going down the mountain with the tablets, he learnt that the people had been corrupted; in his fury he smashes the tablets. The Levites carry out a punishment massacre. Yahweh told Moses to take the people away, but Moses pitched the Tent of Meeting outside the camp and met Yahweh there. (32:1-33:23)

J: Yahweh instructed Moses to prepare two stone tablets (34:1a)

D: 'and I'll write the words that were on the tablets you broke' (34:1b from Deut 10:2)

J: Moses brought the tablets up to the top of the mountain. Yahweh dictated the Ritual Decalogue telling Moses to write the words for himself. Moses remained with Yahweh for 40 days and 40 nights (34:2-28)

P: Moses goes back down the mountain carrying the Tablets of Witness; the people see that the skin of his face has been transformed. (34:29)

Thus he introduced the revelation of the Ten Commandments whilst the people were at the foot of the mountain as required by the story in Deuteronomy. He then allowed E's account of Moses' time on the mountain to imply that the Covenant Code was written on a scroll thereby enabling the Tablets of Stone promised by Yahweh in E to be available for the writing of the Ten Commandments. Then he used the statement that Moses was given the Tablets of Stone at the end of the long P passage concerning cultic artefacts to suggest that the tablets that were then handed over (called the 'Tablets of Witness') were in fact the ones that had been promised in the E text. He was then free to revert to the E text for the smashing of the tablets, because, by including words from Deuteronomy 10, he can convert the next J text, in which Moses makes tablets of stone, into a text in which Moses is making tablets to replace the ones that had been destroyed. Then he incorporated the J text concerning the revelation of the Ritual Decalogue. This introduced a slight problem because Moses was told to write the Ritual Decalogue on the Tablets himself whereas the text the redactor would use for Moses' final descent was from P who confirmed that the tablets being carried down were the Tablets of Witness – the name given by P for the tablets written by the finger of Elohim. Nothing is further heard about the tablets written by Moses. The Redactor thus left the impression that the words on the Tablets were the words of the Ten Commandments and that they were written by Yahweh. He may have hoped that people would be indifferent to the problem created by J's report that Yahweh instructed Moses to write something else on some other tablets. In this respect, his hope has proved to be well-founded. It is remarkable that very little was added by R. At one point he had Yahweh give permission for Aaron to accompany Moses on one of his many trips up the mountain, and more fundamentally he replaced D's explanation of need for the Sabbath (*to remind you that you were slaves in Egypt*) with a more priestly explanation (because Yahweh *rested on the seventh day*).

In some cases the incorporation of two potentially conflicting stories was simply a matter of timing. Thus the editor placed the Elohist version of how Shechem was acquired, as a result of a fair purchase, before the Yahwist's account in which it was obtained by the massacre of its inhabitants. The sequence and the separation make the inconsistency less troubling.

The earlier examples of two sources being combined involved E and J, but the same technique was used to combine the common stories in P and J. Both sources have flood stories. The editor began with J's introduction, the passage about Yahweh '*regretting*' that he had made the humans, albeit with the exception of Noah who had '*found favour in Yahweh's eyes*'. Then he inserted P's passage defining the generations of Noah, the instructions for building the ark (with the precise measurements that one would expect from P), and Elohim's promise to make a covenant with Moses. The combined text then continued:

#### P The Priestly text

*"...and of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring **two** of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female..."*  
*Noah did this; he did all that Elohim commanded him.*

#### J: The Southern (lay) text

*Then Yahweh said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation. Take with you **seven** pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, ... For in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights;*

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came on the earth.

**Two** of each, male and female, of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground went into the ark with Noah, as Elohim had commanded Noah

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.

On the very same day Noah with his sons ... entered the ark, they and every wild animal of every kind, ... , two each of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as Elohim had commanded;

And all flesh expired that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings

And the waters swelled on the earth for **one hundred and fifty days**. But Elohim remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And Elohim made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed.

At the end of **one hundred and fifty** days the waters had abated; ...; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains appeared.

And he sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth.

and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground." And Noah did all that Yahweh had commanded him.

And Noah with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood.

And after seven days the waters of the flood came on the earth.

The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights

and Yahweh shut him in. The flood continued **forty days** on the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. ...the waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep.

Everything in whose nostrils was the breath of life died; ... Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark

Then the rain from the heavens was restrained, and the waters gradually receded from the earth

At the end of **forty** days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made

Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; but the dove found no place to set its foot, ...He

*In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters began to dry up from the earth;*

*In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. Then Elohim said to Noah, "Go out of the ark, ...". And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.*

*waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; .... Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him anymore.*

*And Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was dry.*

*Then Noah built an altar to Yahweh, and took some of each of the clean animals and some of each of the clean birds, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.*

The two text streams are clear examples of the traditions from which they come; P talks of covenants, gives exact sizes and dates, views the flood as a cosmic event in which water came from the windows of heaven and the fountains of the deep, and proposes no sacrifices (since, for him, only the descendants of Aaron were authorised to Sacrifice). J has a more 'human' god who closes the ark personally. J sees the flood as caused by a lot of rain, and has Noah take on enough animals to provide for a final sacrifice of thanksgiving. Then there are linguistic differences; J talks of all life 'dying', whereas P uses a different Hebrew verb – here translated as 'expiring'. And there are numerical differences, which are highlighted in the text above; thus P had 2 not 7 sacrificial animals and P's flood lasted 150 not 40 days.

The editorial technique and guiding principles used here to incorporate P material with J are the same as those used to incorporate E with J. The editor was faithful to all the texts, even though this resulted in confusion as to how many pairs of clean animals were taken into the ark, or how long the flood lasted. The merging technique was very intimate with even small phrases being interleaved together. The similarity of technique does not prove that it was the same person – but it is suggestive.

Editorial skill of a high order was demonstrated not only in this micro-editing of potentially conflicting texts, but also in the large-scale arrangement of the stories from the different texts that were not in conflict. This can be seen in the Jacob cycle from Genesis where a chiasmic structure has been used on an assembly of texts from all three traditions.

Source	Reference	Content
J	25:19-end	A: Jacob's Birth with Esau; promise of national fatherhood
J	26:1-22	B: Isaac in Gerar; wife pretends to be sister
J	27:1-40	C: Jacob takes blessing by deceit
P	27:41-28:5	D: Jacob's flight from Esau
J & E	28:10-22	E: Jacob's Ladder and the angels of God
J	29:1-30	F: Arrival in Haran
J & E	29:31-30:24	G: Jacob's Children
J	30:25-43	G: Jacob's Wealth
E	31	F: Departure from Haran
E	32:1-2	E: Jacob's meeting with the angels of God
J & E	32:3-32	D: Jacob's return to Esau
E	33	C: Jacob offers a blessing on his return
J	34	B: Jacob in Shechem; prince falls for daughter
J & E & P	35	A: Isaac's Death; promise of national fatherhood fulfilled

This structure accounts for all the verses of the present Jacob cycle with the exception of two short references to Esau's wives which appear to have been later insertions<sup>44</sup>.

Some of the sections have striking resonances – such as the unusual '*malach elohim*' (angels, or messengers, of God) of Genesis 28:12 and 32:1; '*malach*' is the same word as is used in 32:3 for the messengers that Jacob sent before him to Esau. Even more interesting is the use of *laqach berakah* meaning 'take my blessing/gift' as Jacob meets Esau on his return, a phrase which matched Esau's angry 'he has taken my blessing' when Jacob deceived Isaac. In this case the first passage is from J whilst its chiasmic partner is an E text. Has R adjusted the wording to fit? R has put very little of his own words into this whole passage - perhaps only a phrase in chapter 33, pointing out that Jacob was returning from Paddam-Aram, the priestly term for the Haran area. Chiasmic structures are characteristic of priestly writings, used by P and especially by H, and the whole cycle was enclosed by priestly texts – the generations of Ishmael (25:13-18) and the generations of Esau (36:1-30)<sup>45</sup>. The evidence is thus of skilful editing in the priestly style, but there are clear indications of the difficulties that forced a measure of contrivance on the overall structure. Neither the A nor B sections have chiasmic partners that form the sort of matches that P and H achieve in their own original writings. B is particularly awkward for Isaac was apparently able to pass Rebekah off as his virgin sister despite the fact that in the previous chapter she had given birth to the twins Jacob and Esau. Clearly the narrative sequence required these passages to be in the reverse order, but the editor has put the requirements of thematic structure ahead of chronological consistency.

There are two other occasions where a P story was merged with a J story. One was the story of the spies, where P casts Joshua as one of the good spies in addition to J's Caleb. The other was the rebellions of Korah, Dathan and Abiram<sup>46</sup>. The rebellions are clearly two different stories; in one Dathan and Abiram complained about Moses leadership and were dealt with when the ground opened up in front of their tents and swallowed them; in the other, the Korah family challenged Aaron's exclusive hold on the holiest ranks of the priesthood and was dealt with when fire consumed them in front of the tent of the meeting. It is difficult to see why these stories were merged; they could comfortably have stood as separate stories. Perhaps a later less competent editor muddled the two stories together?

The Elohist's Epic ended with the death of Moses. It is probable that the combined Epic ended there as well. J was a longer work, but there would have been no need to combine its later chapters, since there was no conflicting northern tradition. The death of Moses, now to be found in Deuteronomy 34, was probably covered by all three sources. During the exile, the combined Epic could finally be wrapped around Deuteronomy incorporating the various accounts of Moses death. It is also possible that the editor himself may have added some material of his own. The ancient northern poem known as the 'Blessing of Moses' was probably inserted as an introduction to the account of Moses death, which could now be incorporated into the redacted version of Deuteronomy. The merged version of Moses death began with an Elohist text which told how Moses went to the top of Mount Nebo and from there Yahweh showed him all the lands which the Israelites would occupy and then: -

*Yahweh said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there." (E)*

*And Moses, Yahweh's servant, died there in the land of Moab at Yahweh's command. He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-Peor, but no-one knows his burial place to this day (J)*

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<sup>44</sup> Genesis 26:34-35 (the Hittite wives) and 28:6-9 (Ishmael's daughter). Genesis 26:34-35 is not consistent with the account of Esau's wives given in 36:2 – probably a P text.

<sup>45</sup> There may be more than one source for these texts; 25:18 and 36:1 may be editorial insertions by R. The generations of Esau (36:2-30) are not consistent with other P texts covering the same ground, so may have been an independent document.

<sup>46</sup> The events at Peor in Numbers 25 may also appear like a merging of two stories, but is really two separate stories from which some text has been lost. In the first, Israelite men are led astray by Moabite women and worship Baal, so that Moses orders their execution – but the text dealing with the implementation of this order is missing. In the second story, Phinehas executes an Israelite who was embracing a Midianite woman in or near the tent of meeting, and as a result Yahweh stopped a previously unmentioned plague and rewarded Phinehas with the exclusive right to the priesthood for him and his descendants. Two unrelated half stories have been put together with the first part of one preceding the second part of the other.

*Moses was 120 years old when he died, (P or Redactor)*  
*His sight was not dimmed, nor his vigour abated (J or Redactor)*  
*The Israelites wept for Moses for thirty days in the plain of Moses – till the period of mourning for Moses was ended. (P or Redactor)*

The final versions of the first five books of the bible contain some material from sources other than the primary texts of E, J, P, H, and the Deuteronomic authors. It is impossible to know when all the editorial tasks that culminated in the production of a ‘final’ redacted version first five books of the Bible were accomplished. All that can be observed here is that un-merged examples of the primary texts existed during the early exile and that therefore the process probably did not begin much before 570 and had probably been completed by 450 BCE.

### **Second Isaiah**

An anonymous new prophet had arisen in the exiled Jewish community. This ‘Second Isaiah’ viewed Cyrus with great hope. Surely Cyrus had been sent by Yahweh to set his people free once more, so that they could return from exile.

*Thus says Yahweh to Cyrus, his anointed, ...*

*“I will go before you and level the mountains  
I will break down gates of bronze  
And hack through iron bars  
I will give you treasures from dark vaults  
And riches hidden in secret places  
That you may know that I am Yahweh”.*

Cyrus was to be the Yahweh’s “shepherd”; he was to enable Jerusalem to be rebuilt, the foundations of a new temple to be laid and the exiles to be freed.<sup>47</sup> The idea that a foreigner could be Yahweh’s anointed, (Hebrew ‘*messiah*’) may have shocked the exiles who heard this oracle. It seems that some of them opposed the idea but the prophet was adamant. He answered his critics as Yahweh would answer:

*Does the pot argue with the potter?  
...  
Would you question me concerning my children;  
instruct me in the work of my hands?  
...  
I alone made the earth  
and I put man upon it;  
...  
I alone have aroused this man in righteousness  
and I will smooth his path before him.<sup>48</sup>*

### **The Redemption poem.**

This prophet produced the extended poem that may now be found between Isaiah 40 and 48. An editorial process would insert the first of the Servant poems into this section, and add an essay on idolatry. A later editor would also add chapters 49 to 55 which comprise the other Servant poems and the Songs of Zion and attach the whole to the book associated with the name ‘Isaiah’. In Duhm’s 1892 seminal study of the book of Isaiah, this body of texts was attributed to ‘Second Isaiah’<sup>49</sup>. The term remains in use today, though it is not universally held that all the texts associated with Second Isaiah came from the author of the Redemption poem.

The Redemption poem was addressed to the exiles in Babylonia after Cyrus had become the

<sup>47</sup> Isaiah 45:1a & 2-3 are quoted; the other references can be found in Isaiah 44:28 and 45:13.

<sup>48</sup> Isaiah 45:9-13a

<sup>49</sup> Duhm (1892) was the first to divide the book into three sections each composed at a different time; Rabbi ibn Ezra had expressed doubts as to the unity of the book as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

emperor of the Medes and probably after he had returned from his forays in the East when it must have seemed likely that Cyrus would soon target Babylon. There is no suggestion in these works that Babylon had fallen, so the likely date is the between 547 and 539.

The Redemption poem is unusual in that, despite its length, it is not a collection of poems and oracles. Attempts to divide it up into shorter episodes have largely failed with no single solution gaining general support. It seems therefore that it was conceived as a single work; probably in written form from the beginning. Carefully interwoven throughout the poem are its major themes including Yahweh as the sole god who was thus the creator god; Yahweh as the god of history who declares events to come through his prophets; the uselessness of Babylonian idols; the redemption and liberation of an 'Israel' that is to be Yahweh's servant; and 'Israel' as a witness to Yahweh by means of a second Exodus. More than any writer that preceded him, this author focuses on Yahweh as creator. It is the theme that provides a stream of metaphors; the mountains are levelled; rivers fill the desert; flowers bloom or wither – all at Yahweh's command. The voice of the poem changes frequently and often without introduction; sometimes the voice is that of the prophet, sometimes Yahweh, sometimes the people; sometimes others; the identification of the voice is often left to the reader to decide.

The record of the prophet's commissioning can be found in chapter 40. Like every prophet before him, he is concerned about the lack of steadfastness amongst the people – the ease with which they are blown about. Unlike most of his predecessors, however, he starts by bringing good news. After the years of exile, the prophet was instructed to comfort the people:

*“Comfort, comfort my people”, says your God.  
“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and tell her  
that her sentence is served, her penalty paid.  
She has received from Yahweh’s hand double for all her sins.”*

*A voice cries out:  
“Clear a way in the wilderness for Yahweh,  
make a highway in the desert for our god.  
Let every valley be filled, and every mountain and hill be levelled;  
the uneven ground made smooth, and the rough places plain.  
Then the glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together.  
For the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.”*

*A voice says, “Cry out!”  
And I said, “What shall I cry?”*

*All flesh is grass, and all the lovingkindness of it is like the flower of the field.  
The grass withers, the flower fades  
as the breath of Yahweh blows upon it.  
The grass withers, the flower fades  
but the word of our God will stand forever.*

*...  
Cry to the cities of Judah  
“Your god is here!”<sup>50</sup>*

Parts of this passage were later used by the Gospel writers as a prophecy concerning John the Baptist; but they achieved this by changing the reading from ‘*A voice cries out “Clear a way in the wilderness”*’ to ‘*A voice in the wilderness cries, “Clear a way...”*’. Their reading is unlikely to be correct as it breaks the required parallelism between ‘*in the wilderness*’ and ‘*in the desert*’. The passage may contain a reference to Ezekiel's vision of ‘*the glory of Yahweh*’ – stating that, although originally a private revelation, now all the people will see it. The form of the calling – ‘*Cry out!*’, ‘*What shall I cry?*’ has similarities with the calling of Isaiah of Jerusalem – ‘*Who shall we send?*’, ‘*Send me!*’ The image of the people being like a ‘*fading flower*’ may have been influenced by the same image as used in Isaiah 28:4. Similarities such as these may have led a later editor to append this work to that of Isaiah ben Amoz.

The prophet declared that Yahweh was the most powerful of gods. Like Ezekiel, he needed

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<sup>50</sup> Isaiah 40:1-9. Phrases emphasising the grass-like nature of the people are omitted here as they are thought to be scribal interpolations. *McKenzie (1967)*

to deal with the tendency of foreigners to see the exile of Yahweh's people as evidence of Yahweh's weakness rather than his discipline. For this prophet Yahweh was the not only the god of Israel, but also the god of creation; he emphasised Yahweh's power by asking dramatic questions:

*"Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and marked off the heavens with a span? Who enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? ...*

And he concludes;

*The nations are to him just drops from a bucket, dust on the scales...*<sup>51</sup>

He mocked the exiles who compared Yahweh to the Babylonian gods with their carved images and ironically asked what likeness could be found for Yahweh:

*Do you not know, have you not heard?  
Were you not told from the beginning,  
have you never understood – never since the world began –  
He sits on the vaulted roof of the earth  
– whose inhabitants are like grasshoppers?*

*...  
He reduces the great to nothing;  
makes princes less than nothing:  
Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,  
scarcely have they taken root on earth  
before he blows on them and they wither away  
– the whirlwind carries them off like chaff...*

*"To whom then will you liken me,  
whom set up as my equal?"*

Nothing can hinder Yahweh's purpose: neither the nations, nor the gods represented by statues, nor kings, nor any weariness.<sup>52</sup>Yahweh addresses all nations, "*who is it that puts nations in his power, makes kings go down before him*", and then Israel, "*I have chosen you, my servant; I have chosen you – not cast you off*". In a court scene, the gods of the nations are challenged to account for the events of history or to prophesy the future; they can do neither, "*I ask a question and no-one answers; they are nothing; their works are nothing; their images are the empty winds.*"<sup>53</sup>

An editor inserted the first Servant Song into the opening verses of what is now Isaiah 42, so the Redemption Poem originally continued in what is now verse 10 with a hymn of praise to Yahweh.

*Sing to Yahweh a new song,  
his praise from the end of the earth!  
Let the sea roar and all that fills it,  
the coastlands and those who live on them.*<sup>54</sup>

This passage has a common inspiration with parts of psalms 96 and 98, here put together:

*Sing to Yahweh a new song;  
sing to Yahweh all the earth.  
Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;  
the world and those who live in it.*<sup>55</sup>

The ability of the creator to transform the world was maintained following the earlier verses of the poem, but this was a warrior's hymn and Yahweh was in destructive mood, "*I will dry up the*

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<sup>51</sup> Isaiah 40: 12 & 15

<sup>52</sup> Isaiah 40: 21-31

<sup>53</sup> Isaiah 41

<sup>54</sup> Isaiah 42:10

<sup>55</sup> Psalms 96:1 and 98:7

*mountains and hills, I will wither their vegetation.*” The author linked different passages in his work by repeating similar images but extracting a different meaning each time; here *‘withered grass’* is an example of Yahweh’s power, earlier it was used as a comment on both the irresolution of the people (40:8) and the powerlessness of earthly princes (40:24).

After the hymn, Israel was addressed once more, *“Listen, you deaf! Look and see, you blind!”*, and the failings of his servant Israel as a messenger for Yahweh was explored: but immediately (43:1) there was a re-affirmation of parental love, *“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine”*. Then the poem returned to the courtroom. Notwithstanding her failings, Israel was to be Yahweh’s witness to the nations and, as witness, Israel was called to re-enact the Exodus:

*For your sake I will send to Babylon and break down all the bars,  
and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned to lamentation.  
I am Yahweh, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.*

*Thus says Yahweh,  
who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty ocean,  
who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior;  
they lie down, they cannot rise,  
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick.  
“Do not remember things past? Do not consider things past!  
See, I am doing something new; it breaks fourth now! Can you not see it?*

...  
*For I produce water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert –  
a gift for my chosen people to drink.  
I have formed this people for myself; they shall praise me!”<sup>56</sup>*

The description of Yahweh as the Holy One of Israel recalls passages from the First Isaiah texts where this phrase was equally common. Two thirds of the occasions where God is called ‘The Holy One of Israel’ occur in First or Second Isaiah.

In case they might be fearful, the people were promised that they will be transformed by Yahweh much as rain transforms a desert (an image than runs through the whole poem). This passage used the ancient name of ‘Jeshurun’ for Israel, only used elsewhere in the Song of Moses and the Blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 32 & 33). The image of a second Exodus was strengthened: -

*“Do not be afraid, my servant Jacob,  
Jeshurun whom I have chosen,  
for I will pour out rain on the thirsty soil,  
showers on the dry ground –  
I will pour out my spirit on your race,  
my blessing on your children...*

Yahweh affirms his uniqueness

*Thus says Yahweh, the king and redeemer of Israel, Yahweh of Armies,  
“I am the first and the last; there is no god (elohim) but me...*

*“Do not tremble, do not be afraid; have I not told you long ago?  
You are my witnesses; is there any god (eloah) other than I?”<sup>57</sup>*

The unusual and ancient *Jeshurun* is complemented by *eloah*, a word for god that is unusual outside of the book of Job, but one that also occurs in the ancient song of Moses:

*“Jeshurun grew fat and unruly.  
fat, boated and gorged!  
He abandoned Eloah who made him -  
scoffed at the ‘Rock’, his salvation.”<sup>58</sup>*

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<sup>56</sup> Isaiah 43: 14-21

<sup>57</sup> Isaiah 44: 2b-3 & 6b & 8

<sup>58</sup> Deuteronomy 32:15

From there, too, we find the use of the word 'tsor' (Rock) used as a name of god – indeed this is how the King James Bible and some modern translations render it. Verses 9-20 of chapter 44 are a prose insert, possibly by another hand: the poem resumes at verse 21 with Yahweh's forgiveness:

*"Remember these things, Israel and Jacob:*

*You are my servant. I have formed you.  
You are my servant. Do not forget me.<sup>59</sup>  
I have swept away your sins like a cloud –  
your transgressions like a mist.  
Return to me; I have ransomed you."*

Then the poet summarised the main themes of his work:

*Thus says Yahweh, who redeems you, who formed you in the womb  
"I am Yahweh, who made all things, ..."*

*Yahweh frustrates false prophets...  
He fulfils his servant's prophecies...  
He says of Jerusalem, "She shall be inhabited once more..."  
He says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd to accomplish all my purpose..."*

This led naturally to Cyrus' call and thence to a reaffirmation of the power and uniqueness of the Creator God:

*I am Yahweh, there is no other.  
I form light and I create darkness.  
I produce good and I create evil  
I Yahweh do all these things.<sup>60</sup>*

The author faced up to one of the theological difficulties of monotheism; the problem of the creation of evil by a god considered to be wholly good. Some note that the author may have been influenced by the Zoroastrian dualism of the Persian 'liberators'. Their theology conceived of two opposed spirits; one who chooses good and one who chooses evil, though both are parts of a single original creation.

The poet condemned those who would question Yahweh's ways – whether the questioners were concerned with the general theological question or on Yahweh's specific use of Cyrus.

*Will you question me about my children?  
Do you direct the work of my hands?  
I made the earth,  
and created humankind (adam) upon it.  
It was my hands that stretched out the heavens,  
and I direct all their stars.  
I have aroused him [Cyrus] in righteousness,  
and I will smooth out make all his path.  
He shall build my city  
and set my exiles free...*

*Thus says Yahweh, the creator of the heavens,  
He is Elohim, who made the earth and formed it,  
He is its founder, who did not create it unformed,  
but who made it a place to inhabit,*

*"I am Yahweh; there is no other."<sup>61</sup>*

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<sup>59</sup> This reading follows the Septuagint and a Qumran scroll: the MT has 'you will not be forgotten by me'. See McKenzie (1968); Second Isaiah (AB); p 72.

<sup>60</sup> Isaiah 45:6b-7

These verses may have referenced the opening lines of the Priestly creation epic ‘In the beginning of Elohim’s creating of the heavens and the earth – the world then being unformed and unfilled’. The word used here for unformed, ‘*tohu*’, links to that text; it is used only 19 times in the bible – seven of those being in texts from Second Isaiah<sup>62</sup>.

The closing assertion ‘*I am Yahweh; there is no other*’ is repeated eight times in this poem.<sup>63</sup> The message is universal; not just for Israel:

*Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth  
For I am God (El) and there is no other.*<sup>64</sup>

The destruction of Babylon is envisaged. A contrast is made between the Babylonians carrying out their gods on the day of their defeat and Israel being carried by Yahweh<sup>65</sup>. In the event, the Babylonians did not carry out their gods when they were defeated, although such happenings were common in the ancient Middle East. Here the author was writing theology, not prophecy – certainly not post-event prophecy.

The defeat is played out using a metaphor commonly applied to Jerusalem by other prophets – the virgin daughter. Here it is applied to Babylon – the captive virgin daughter taken into slavery. The sexual allusions have nothing to do with the wanton woman images used by Ezekiel and the other prophets. This is enforced nakedness. The language is brutal.

*Come, sit in the dust virgin daughter Babylon  
Sit on the ground dethroned, daughter Chaldea!  
For no longer will they call you soft and dainty.*

*Take the millstone, grind the meal  
Take off your veil, remove your skirt  
Bare your thighs, cross the rivers  
Be displayed naked – let your shame appear!*

*“I will take vengeance; I will accept no pleas!”  
Says Yahweh of Armies, our redeemer, the Holy One of Israel  
“Sit in silence; go off to the shadows, daughter Chaldea...  
When I was angry with my people...  
I gave them into your power but you showed them no mercy...”*

*Now hear this, you complacent pleasure seeker,  
Who said ‘I am, and there is no other’,  
and I shall never be widowed, never bereaved’,  
Both these things will happen to you suddenly – in the same day!”*<sup>66</sup>

The words used to condemn the luxurious complacency of Babylon echo similar ideas concerning the women of Jerusalem in Isaiah 3 and concerning Nineveh in Zephaniah 2 – ‘Is this the city that said “I am, and there is none other?” What a desolation it has become.’

Nothing like this actually happened. Babylon and its citizens were well treated by Cyrus and the city remained wealthy and prosperous for some time. But in the poem, the prophet suggested that the astrologers of Babylon, the star-gazers as he called them, should be invited to save the state, but he prophesied that they would be found to be like burning stubble – useless for either cooking or heating.

The poem climaxed with a great call to the people of Israel; Yahweh will reveal a new thing – the restoration of Jerusalem: -

*“Listen Jacob – Israel whom I have called*

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<sup>61</sup> Isaiah 45:11b-13 & 18

<sup>62</sup> Apart from the Genesis, there are a further four elsewhere in Isaiah, and three in Job.

<sup>63</sup> It may be a quote from the reflection in Deuteronomy 4, see verse 39, or possibly from Solomon’s prayer (1 King’s 8:60) thought to be a late addition. It is quoted by Joel 2:27.

<sup>64</sup> Isaiah 45:22

<sup>65</sup> Isaiah 46.

<sup>66</sup> Isaiah 47:1-9

*I am one: I am the first and also the last  
It was my hand that founded the earth,  
my right hand that stretched the heavens.*

...

*Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea.  
Declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it!  
Cry out to the ends of the earth.  
Tell them, "Yahweh has redeemed his servant Jacob!"<sup>67</sup>*

### Songs of Zion

Between chapters 49 and 55 of Isaiah are to be found four Songs of Zion and three of the four Servant Songs. The Songs of Zion are normally attributed to the author of the Redemption poem, although some scholars recognise a different voice to that of the so-called 'Cyrus' material found in chapters 40 to 48.

Zion was an alternative title for Jerusalem, mainly found in poetry. It was extensively used in Jeremiah, Lamentations and Isaiah as well as in the Psalms. It originally referred to the temple mount, and by extension to Jerusalem and thus to the faithful people of Israel. Its etymology is uncertain; one suggestion derives it from a hypothetical Hebrew word *siyan*, suggesting 'fortress' – an idea strengthened by the earliest reference to Zion which says that David captured the stronghold (*metzudah*) of Zion and renamed it the city of David (2 Samuel 5:7). But *siyan* does not actually occur in any Hebrew text. Strong's Lexicon links Zion to *tzy'un*, a monument or market place or to *tzy'ah* a dry place. More probably it derived from Zaphon, the mountain home of the Canaanite Baal, for both Zion and Zaphon were Holy mountains. Indeed, in Psalm 48, Zion was identified with the summit of Zaphon!<sup>68</sup>

There is a real sense of the imminence and possibility of a return to Jerusalem in the Zion songs, but equally it is clear that no return has yet happened. These songs are probably a bit later than the poem of 40-48; probably composed between 540 and 538 BCE.

The opening poem seems almost to pick up from where the great redemption poem ended. There the exiles were being urged to return to Jerusalem. Here the prophet views the return from the perspective of Zion. The purpose is once again to give good news:

*But Zion said, "Yahweh has abandoned me,  
my Lord has forgotten me."  
Can a woman forget her nursing child,  
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?  
Even these may forget,  
yet I will not forget you."<sup>69</sup>*

The great Zion poem deals with the topic of restoration. The opening verses are messages in Yahweh's voice to those who seek deliverance – *rejoicing will be found in Zion, praise and the sound of singing*; to the peoples and nations – *my salvation shall endure forever*; and to those who know righteousness – *my victory will endure forever*. The prophet responds, weaving together elements of the Babylonian creation myth with the Exodus from Egypt.

*Awake, awake, put on strength, Yahweh's arm!  
Awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago!  
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, you who stabbed the Dragon?  
Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep;  
who made the seabed a way for the redeemed to cross over?*

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<sup>67</sup> Isaiah 48:12-13 & 20. Verse 21 is not part of the poem. It seems to have strayed here from 57:21 where it is properly placed.

<sup>68</sup> Psalm 48:3. Most translations prefer to render Zaphon as the 'North'; Zaphon was in the North and the word became used with this alternative meaning – but such a translation is awkward and devoid of much meaning.

<sup>69</sup> Isaiah 49: 14-15. The entire poem is 49:14 – 15:3

*So Yahweh's redeemed shall return, and come to Zion with singing;  
Happiness shall be upon their heads for ever.  
And they shall have joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.<sup>70</sup>*

Rahab, Leviathon, Sea, Abyss, and Tiamat are all alternative references to primordial chaos<sup>71</sup>. Canaanite mythology has Ba'al (meaning the 'Lord') defeating Yam (Sea) or the Leviathon (described as a serpent). The Mesopotamian 'Enuma Elish' has Marduk defeating Tiamat (watery chaos). The Rahab reference here also recalls Psalm 89, "You crushed Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm." The reference to the redeemed uses an idea that will be made memorable in Job – "I know that my redeemer lives". The prophet saw that Yahweh had acted in the past as the 'go'el', the redeemer, of Israel. He was the redeemer who had brought Israel out of Egypt; he states Yahweh would do so again and ransom Israel from Babylon. The poet continues with key themes and images from the redemption poem:

*It is I, I myself who comfort you; of whom then should you be afraid?  
Of man? – he dies.  
Of the son of man? – he is no more than grass.  
Have you forgotten Yahweh your maker,  
Who stretched the heavens and founded the earth?*

Towards the end of this poem, the prophet sees a vision of Yahweh returning to Jerusalem.

*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news,  
who announces peace, who proclaims salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."*

*Listen! Your watchmen raise their voices, together they sing for joy.  
With their own eyes they see Yahweh return to Zion.  
Break out together with ringing shout of joy, ruins of Jerusalem,  
For Yahweh has comforted his people. He has redeemed Jerusalem.<sup>72</sup>*

Is there a reference to Ezekiel's vision of the return of Yahweh - once the vision of a prophet but now nearer to a reality that will be seen by watchmen in Jerusalem's ruins?

The third Zion song (54:1-17) concerned Yahweh's enduring love for his people, metaphorically described as a temporarily abandoned wife. The once barren wife will 'break out in song ...for the abandoned one will have many children'. She is urged to extend her tent to accommodate them all.

*"For a brief moment I abandoned you,  
but with great compassion I will gather you.  
In a flood of anger, I hid my face from you,  
but in everlasting loving kindness I will have compassion on you,"  
says Yahweh, your Redeemer.*

Yahweh is almost repentant:

*"For me, this recalls the days of Noah  
when I swore that the waters would not pour over the earth again.  
So now I swear never again to be angry with you,  
nor to rebuke you.  
For the mountains may move,  
and the hills may shake  
But my love will not move from you,  
My covenant of peace will never be shaken"*

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<sup>70</sup> Isaiah 51: 9-11

<sup>71</sup> See Job 9:13 & 26:12 for Rehab and Psalms 74 & 104 for the Leviathon.

<sup>72</sup> Isaiah 52:7-9

The last song was also written largely in Yahweh's voice. The opening was astonishing, for it began with the cry of the water seller "*Hey, thirsty, come for water!*"; but there was no charge and what was on offer was more than ordinary water; it was the word of God.

*Come to me and listen to my words.  
Hear me and you shall have life  
I will make a covenant with you –  
This time for ever - to love you faithfully as I loved David...*

*Let the wicked abandon their ways  
And evil men their thoughts,  
Let them return to Yahweh who is merciful –  
to our god, who multiplies forgiveness.  
For my thoughts are not your thoughts  
your ways are not my ways.<sup>73</sup>*

Ezekiel had contrasted Yahweh's ways with mankind's ways (18:25-32) and threatened to judge according to the ways of men. But Yahweh called them to turn to his ways – "*Turn then and live!*". The ideas in this song are picked up in Christian teaching, especially in the fourth gospel, when Jesus talks with the Samaritan women about the gift of living water (St John 4:4-15). The fundamental power of the word of God, made explicit in the opening of that Gospel, is also the way Second Isaiah opened and closed his work. In the opening he had said '*the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of Yahweh will stand forever*'; and the song ended ecstatically with an affirmation of the power of the word working through the people: -

*My word shall accomplish all!  
  
For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace.  
And the mountains and the hills shall burst into song before you,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.<sup>74</sup>*

### The Servant Songs

The four Servant Songs<sup>75</sup> occur in today's bible between Isaiah 40 and 55; thus they are within the body of texts sometimes attributed to Second Isaiah, but there is no scholarly consensus as to their authorship. They were isolated as a separate group of texts by Bernard Duhm in 1892 and this identification is generally accepted today. They seem to have been regarded as 'difficult' from their earliest days, for the editor who placed them within the Second Isaiah material also provided a comment, or response, for each of the first three of these poems.<sup>76</sup> In the second song, the servant is identified as 'Israel', which generally in Second Isaiah means the faithful exiled community in Babylonia<sup>77</sup>, but other hypotheses are possible. In some contexts, the author identifies himself as the servant, but all prophets would have regarded themselves as servants of Yahweh; so did second Isaiah mean something other than this? The theme of the '*ebed*' (meaning 'servant' or 'slave') is special to Isaiah and particularly to Second Isaiah. Amongst the prophets only Isaiah used the word in this general sense; elsewhere it is used as a title as in "my servant David". Of the 21 uses of the word in the book of Isaiah, 17 occur in the portion of the text attributed to Second Isaiah.

In the first song, just four verses, the servant was the one who would bring Yahweh's justice and righteousness to the nations; perhaps therefore a prophet. But it would be consistent with the writing of Second Isaiah if the servant was the faithful community of 'Israel': -

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<sup>73</sup> Isaiah 55:3 & 7-8

<sup>74</sup> The full song is Isaiah 55:1-13.

<sup>75</sup> 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9 & 52:13-53:12

<sup>76</sup> 42:5-11; 49:7-13; 50:10-11

<sup>77</sup> Isaiah 49:3 "*You are my servant, Israel, through whom I will win glory*". Many scholars, however, regard the addition of the name Israel as a gloss introduced by an editor. On the other hand, it is witnessed to in all the versions of the text and in all manuscripts of the Masoretic Text except one, so there is little justification for removing it. See McKenzie (1968); Second Isaiah (AB); p. 104.

*See my servant, whom I uphold,  
My chosen in whom I delight  
I have put my spirit upon him,  
He will bring justice to the nations.*

*He will not cry nor raise his voice  
nor shout out in the street.  
The crushed reed he will not break  
nor quench the fading wick*

*He will faithfully bring justice.  
He will not faint nor be crushed  
until he has established justice on the earth  
and its outer limits have received his law.<sup>78</sup>*

The response to the poem began with a phrase familiar from the creationist ideas in the redemption poem – ‘*Thus says Yahweh God, who created the heavens and stretched them out*’ – and goes on to expound the servant’s mission: in Yahweh’s words it was ‘*to bring sight to blind, release to the prisoner*’.

The second song was in the voice of the prophet and mentioned his calling which, like Jeremiah’s, was from birth. He was called to bring Israel back to Yahweh. He complained that he has laboured to do this, but in vain. The poem includes Yahweh’s answer which reiterated the comment of the first song, albeit with a touch of irritation:

*Is it too slight a thing for you to be my servant; to restore the tribes of Jacob  
and to bring back the saved of Israel;  
I will make you a light to the nations  
So that my salvation shall reach the ends of the earth.<sup>79</sup>*

In the response Yahweh called his servant “*the contemptible one, the abominated of nations, the slave of rulers*”. He stated that nevertheless kings will bow down to the servant, because he has been chosen by Yahweh. He shall bring out the prisoners, and feed them and lead them on Yahweh’s road from the North and the West.

The third song, in the voice of the servant, continued to deal with the experience of the prophet in Yahweh’s service. He has never turned back from that service, has even ‘*offered his back to those who strike, his cheek to those who pluck his beard.*’ He affirmed that since Yahweh stands by him, no insult can hurt him.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and longest song may have been modelled on a thanksgiving psalm. Normally, in a thanksgiving psalm, the rescued person first described his tribulations, then the acts of Yahweh in rescuing him and finally gave thanks and praise to Yahweh in the presence of the congregation so that they too may praise Yahweh. Psalm 22, is an example of this form which may have provided some inspiration for the Song. It will be recalled that Psalm 22 began with a lament that included lines uttered by a man who saw himself despised and rejected saying “I am a worm, and not a man; abused by men, and scorned by the people”, but went on to plead “But you, Yahweh, do not be far away!...Rescue my neck from the sword ...that I might proclaim your name to my brethren and praise you in the congregation”, and concluded that “Yahweh’s kindness is from eternity to eternity”. However the 4<sup>th</sup> servant song is more complex than the ancient psalm and is voiced very differently. In the song, the sufferer remains silent throughout; his afflictions are described in ‘our’ voice, and the song is opened and closed by the voice of Yahweh:

*“See, my servant prospers; he is exalted and raised up very high.  
Just as many were appalled at him –  
so disfigured was his appearance that he no longer looked like a man –  
so many nations will recoil; kings shall shut their mouths before him.  
For they shall see that which had not been told,  
and shall perceive that which they had not heard.”*

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<sup>78</sup> Isaiah 42: 1-4

<sup>79</sup> Isaiah 49:6

*Who believed what we have heard?  
To whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed?  
For he grew up before him like a young plant –  
like a root out of arid land.  
He had no beauty, no majesty that we should look at him,  
no grace that we should desire him.  
He was despised, rejected by men;  
a man of pain, knowing disease, a thing from which men looked away.  
He was despised; we held him of no account.*

*But it was our disease that he bore; our pains that he carried.  
We counted him as stricken, touched by God with affliction.  
But he was wounded for our rebellions, crushed for our iniquities;  
He bore the punishment that made us whole; by his bruises we were healed.*

*All we like sheep had gone astray.  
We had each turned to our own way,  
and Yahweh laid on him the transgressions of us all.  
He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.  
He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.  
Like the silence of a sheep before its shearers, he did not open his mouth.*

*By a perversion of justice, he was taken away.  
Who was concerned with his case?  
He was cut off from the land of the living,  
For the rebellion of his people he was punished.  
He was given a grave with the wicked, a tomb with evil doers,  
though he had done no violence, and spoken no deceit.  
Yet it was the will of Yahweh to crush him with pain.*

*If you will make of his life a sin-offering,  
then he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days.  
And the will of Yahweh shall prosper through him.  
By his anguish, he shall see light and be satisfied*

*“By his knowledge, my righteous servant will deliver many.  
He will bear their sins.  
Therefore, I will allot him a share with the great.  
He shall divide the spoil with the strong.  
For he exposed himself to death, and was counted with the rebellious.  
He bore the sins of many, and interceded for the rebellious.”<sup>80</sup>*

The interpretation of this poem has been the subject of controversy for at least two millennia. In the Acts of the Apostles, Philip accosts an Ethiopian eunuch struggling with this passage and asking: “About whom does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Christians have tended to see in this poem a description of the life, sacrificial death and mission of Christ. Jews see it as referring to the sufferings of their people. Others note that poem reads as if describing events from the author’s past and see no need for allegorical interpretations. The servant is sometimes understood as the righteous exiles, and the poem can be understood in that way. The righteous exiles, Jeremiah’s ‘good figs’, were taken into captivity by Yahweh’s will along with the unrighteous. In exile they suffered, but it was always Yahweh’s intention that the experience of exile would bring his people back

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<sup>80</sup> Isaiah 52:12-53:12 for the whole poem. The text poses numerous problems for translators. Here ‘*who was concerned with his case*’ is a possible reading achieved by amending the Hebrew *doro* (fate) to *d’baro* (case). The normal “*For the rebellion of my people*” can be amended to “*his people*” following a Qumran scroll (1QIs<sup>a</sup>). His burial ‘*with evil doers*’ has been amended from his burial with ‘*the rich*’ by emending the Hebrew *asir* to *ose ra*. ‘*By his suffering, my servant will deliver many*’ comes from the Vulgate; the Hebrew has ‘*by his knowledge*’ and adds ‘*righteous*’ to ‘*servant*’, probably as a result of a copyist’s error. McKenzie (1968); pp 129-132. The text quoted is based on a study of McKenzie, NRSV and NEB.

to him. The original exiles died in exile, so it was for a new generation that they sacrificed themselves, the generation that the prophet is addressing in this poem. “If you make Israel’s life a sin-offering, then Israel shall see his offspring and shall live on, prospering the work of Yahweh”. There is a long and significant history of identifying the servant as Jeremiah. As early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn Ezra quoted Saadia’s identification of the servant as Jeremiah with approval. Rabbi Modecai Shreiber<sup>81</sup> has recently summarised the history of this identification and pointed to the verse by verse connections that seem to tie the 4<sup>th</sup> servant poem to the life and work of Jeremiah. Some of the key links are: -

- *Isaiah 53.2. For he grew up before him like a young plant – like a root out of arid land* God chose Jeremiah before his birth (Jeremiah 1:5). The arid land was where both the Israelites and the Servant came from (Jeremiah 2:6).
- *53:3 He was despised, rejected by men; a man of pain, knowing disease, a thing from which men looked away...* Jeremiah was banned from the temple; had to go into hiding; is rejected by his family; has his scroll rejected and burnt.
- *53:4 But it was our disease that he bore; our pains that he carried, while we counted him as stricken – touched by God with affliction.* Jeremiah took on the suffering of his people and, according to tradition, wrote the anguished poems in the Book of Lamentations. Jeremiah paraded in the streets of Jerusalem in a filthy loincloth, or with an iron bars around his neck. He was repeatedly scorned by his listeners, who regarded him as a misguided and tortured soul.
- *53:5a He was wounded for our rebellions, crushed for our iniquities. By his bruises we are healed.* It was Jeremiah’s consistent calling of the people to repent of their disobedience that led to his many punishments. He was beaten and thrown into a cistern.
- *53:5b-6 We all went astray like sheep; we had each turned to our own way.* The people were like leaderless sheep divided between the Babylonian and the Egyptian parties and in the end making the wrong decision.
- *53:7 He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and like the silence of a sheep before its shearers, he did not open his mouth.”* Jeremiah himself said ‘I was led like a gentle lamb to the slaughter’ (Jer. 11:19b).
- *53.8 He was cut off from the land of the living,* Jeremiah said that those who plotted against him had said “let us cut him off from the land of the living” (*Jer 11:19c*)

But perhaps the power of the poetry derives from the ambiguity about the identity of the servant. The reader finds the meaning in a combination of the poem and his own needs and experience. Whatever the intentions of the poet, it may be used as a point of departure for individual meditation on the subject of suffering and sacrifice, and on the nature of the justice of God.

### **The fall of Babylon; Cyrus’ decree of restoration (539 - 538)**

By his early triumphs Cyrus had surrounded the Babylonian Empire to the East, North and West. In the late 540’s, Cyrus’ thinking was focused upon the Babylonian empire itself. It was to his advantage that the then emperor, Nabonidus, was neither a Chaldean nor a worshipper of Marduk. Nabonidus’ preference for the moon-god Sin over Marduk would have caused the Babylonian priesthood no little displeasure. For a period of ten years, the king had not celebrated the important New Year ritual in which Marduk ‘took the hand’ of the king. For a propagandist as skilful as Cyrus this was a gift. His agents let it be known within Babylon that, unlike Nabonidus, Cyrus was Marduk’s friend; indeed, Cyrus felt called to restore the worship of Marduk to its rightful place in the lives of the Babylonians. Nabonidus returned in 543, but it was too late to win back the people and the priesthood.

Cyrus agents probably contacted the exiled groups, indicating how favourably the Persian king was inclined to view their causes. An unknown author urged co-operation with the Persians in his ‘*Oracle against Babylon*’<sup>82</sup>.

*On a bare hill raise the banner,  
Shout to them, beckon them to enter the gates of the nobles.*

<sup>81</sup> Jewish Bible Quarterly Vol 37. No 1, 2009 pp 35-44. “The real suffering servant”.

<sup>82</sup> Not all scholars would date this oracle to 538-9, but the oracle is clearly about Babylon and the attackers are clearly Persians. Babylon revolted against Persian rule in 521 and 482; revolts that were put down with more violence than was allegedly used by Cyrus. But events happening in Babylon after the exiles’ return to Judah would be unlikely to be of such interest to a prophet of Yahweh.

*I have issued the command to my consecrated ones,  
I have summoned my warriors, exultant and proud, to execute my anger.*

Possibly influenced by Jeremiah<sup>83</sup>, he envisaged a terrible day when Yahweh would exact vengeance.

*See, the day of Yahweh is coming, with cruel anger and burning rage,  
to lay waste the land and destroy the sinners within it.*

This author did not limit his vision to the destruction of Babylon, for even the Sun and Moon would be extinguished and the heavens themselves would tremble<sup>84</sup>. But in the chaos ‘*all will turn back to their kin and flee to their native land; any found lagging will be skewered*’

*See, I will rouse the Medes against them,  
They do not care for silver, have no delight in gold,  
no pity for the fruit of the womb,  
no compassion for the children*<sup>85</sup>.

If the dating is correct, then there was real fear, even in the exiled Judean community, as the Persian army approached. Something similar emerges from the oracle entitled ‘The Sea-Wilderness’. Much of this poem seems to be taken up by the Prophet’s anguish as he enters an ecstatic state in which he will receive a ‘*grim vision*’. In it he learns that ‘*the traitor betrays, the looter is looted*’. In it he is told to watch for a chariot drawn by two horses whose rider cries “*Fallen, fallen is Babylon and all the statues of her gods lie smashed on the ground.*”<sup>86</sup>.

But it did not turn out like that – at least not according to the official Persian records. Cyrus’ propaganda had persuaded the governor of Babylonia’s easterly province to defect. Cyrus used this governor, Gubaru, to lead a force against his erstwhile sovereign. The problem was to breach Babylon’s defensive wall that stretched from the Tigris to the Euphrates between Sippar and Opis. It was the dry season: reports of famine in the area suggest that river levels were exceptionally low in 539 BCE. Rumour has it that the Tigris was diverted to enable Cyrus’ troops to capture Opis in September. The Persians captured Sardis without a battle one month later on October 10<sup>th</sup>. Two days later Gubaru and his troops walked into Babylon where they were greeted by a cheering people spreading green branches before them. Cyrus was not even present, and yet he had now become the ruler of the world from the Caspian to the Mediterranean seas and from the Persian Gulf to the border of Egypt. Seventeen days later he entered his new dominion. It was just eleven years since, as king of tiny Fars, he had revolted against the Medes.

The priesthood of Marduk showered him with praise. Cyrus’ propaganda machine released this statement to commemorate the event:

*‘A weakling had been installed as the ‘enu’ of his country... The worship of Marduk he changed into abomination. He tormented the inhabitants with forced labour without relief. He ruined them all.*

*Upon their complaints the Lord of the gods became terribly angry, ...But Marduk... had mercy on them. He scanned and looked through all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler willing to lead him in the annual procession. Then he pronounced the name of Cyrus... Marduk... beheld with pleasure his good deeds and his upright heart and therefore ordered him to march on his city Babylon.... Without any battle, he made him enter Babylon, sparing Babylon any calamity.*

*All the inhabitants of Babylon, as well as the entire country of Sumer and Akkad, princes and governors, bowed to him and kissed his feet, their faces shining - jubilant that he had received the kingship. They greeted him happily as a master through whose help they had*

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<sup>83</sup> Jeremiah 50-51 contains a polemic against Babylon using phrases that recur in Isaiah 13. For example Jeremiah talks about ‘*raising the standard* (Hebrew *nes*)’ (50:2,51:12), about ‘*consecrating* (Hebrew *qds*)’ *Yahweh’s forces to their task* (51:27-28); about everyone ‘*turning back to their kin and fleeing to their native lands*’ (50:16). Blenkinsop (2000); Isaiah 1-39 (AB); pp 277-8.

<sup>84</sup> The ‘Sun’ and ‘Moon’ are possible references to Babylonian gods.

<sup>85</sup> Isaiah 13:2-3 & 9 & 17&18b. (18a is corrupted and omitted here)

<sup>86</sup> Isaiah 21.

*come to life from death, and had been spared damage and disaster, and they worshipped his name.*<sup>87</sup>

Cyrus troops moved about freely in Babylon, forbidden to terrorise anyone. He rebuilt damaged buildings, and *'daily endeavoured'* to worship Marduk. Cyrus restored the gods back to their rightful places. It was Cyrus' policy to support the religions of all the peoples in his dominion. Consistent with this policy he would have been concerned with the restoration of the people of Yahweh to their shrine in Zion. Thus in 538 he issued the proclamation of release recorded in both Chronicles and Ezra -

*"Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may Yahweh his god be with him! Let him go up."*<sup>88</sup>

The euphoria engendered by the prospect of return was captured in a poem that became part of the anthologies assembled by the editors of both Isaiah and Micah:

*It will come to pass in days to come  
that the mountain, Yahweh's house,  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
raised high above the hills.*

*All nations shall stream to it,  
many peoples shall come and say:  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths."*

*For instruction shall go out of Zion,  
and Yahweh's word from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between the nations,  
arbitrate for many peoples.*

*They shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they study war any more.*<sup>89</sup>

The mood of exultation was shared in a poem that in today's bible is placed at the end of the first Isaiah anthology. The poet there described a Holy Way back to Jerusalem – a Holy Way that could have been based on the Processional Way leading to Marduk's temple in the heart of Babylon. It concluded with a chorus of joy which may have been taken from the Great Zion poem: -

*A highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Holy Way.  
The unclean shall not travel on it,  
it shall be for the people of God;  
No traveller, not even fools, shall go astray.  
No lion shall be there,  
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it –  
they shall not be found there.*

*The redeemed shall walk there*

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<sup>87</sup> The Cyrus Cylinder. Now in the British museum. Text based on ANET p 315-316

<sup>88</sup> 2 Chronicles 36:23 in Hebrew. A similarly, but more extended version occurs in Ezra 1:2 in Aramaic. No versions have so far been found in Persian archives, but there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the edict. It is consistent with Cyrus general policies in the lands under his control.

<sup>89</sup> Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3

*and the ransomed of Yahweh shall return,  
They shall come to Zion with singing –  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.  
They shall have joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.<sup>90</sup>*

### **Job; the poetry (ca. 550 - 500)**

The ancient story of Job is one of a number of wisdom narratives that circulated in the Ancient Near East during the Second Millennium BCE. The opening and closing prose passages in the book are probably the remains of one such story. Most scholars however consider that the poetic discourses in between these prose passages are a 6<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century re-writing of the core of the story. The Job of the prose patiently endures his suffering, praising the god who gives and who takes away: the Job of the poetry is never going to merely suffer patiently; this Job has the audacity to attack God, accusing him of injustice. The separate origins of the poetry and the prose are evidenced by the lack of references between the two, the different personalities of Job, and differences in the language and in the names used for the deity. In the poetic discourses the deity is called El, Eloah and Shaddai whereas the prose uses Yahweh<sup>91</sup>. Although Eloah is an unusual divine name outside of Job, it is used within that book over forty times. In the whole of the rest of the Hebrew Bible, it is used on only fifteen occasions<sup>92</sup>, in one of which it states that Eloah came from Tema<sup>93</sup>, a town near the border of Edom with which the poet was familiar. In 543 it was the town from which Nabonidus and his retinue had just returned.

The evidence for the date of the poetry comes mainly from the language. This appears to have been influenced by the spoken Aramaic of the sixth or fifth centuries BCE. In addition, the hierarchy of officialdom (kings, counsellors and princes) corresponds to the Persian structure. The mention of Caravans from Sheba and Tema point to a late Babylonian or early Persian date.

One theory is that the book was written in Tema<sup>94</sup>. According to a version of this theory, Nabonidus' troops stole the author's possessions, forcing him to ransom his life. Tema was mentioned in the bible by Jeremiah, Second Isaiah, the author of the Job poem, and by the editor who inserted the genealogies into Genesis – all of whom were probably alive in the sixth or fifth centuries BCE, when Tema was in its economic prime.

The text included Job's wish that his words could be '*cut with an iron tool in hard rock and filled with lead for ever*'<sup>95</sup> which may be a reference to Darius' lead filled inscription at Behistun; if so, then a date after 522 is suggested.

The sympathetic treatment of Job, an Edomite, gives some scholars a problem. The Edomites were supposed to be in disgrace in exilic circles following their treacherous behaviour during the sacking of Jerusalem. The difficulty disappears if it is conceded that the author was an Edomite. The places from which Job's friends come – Tema, Shuah and Naamah – are probably towns on the edges of Arabia; in the Northwest, near Edom; Northeast, near to middle Mesopotamia; and South, near to Sheba or Sabia. The references to Caravans travelling to Tema and Sheba imply the incense trade; these caravans would have passed through Edom on their way to Mesopotamia. Edom was known to have had a reputation as a source of wisdom literature; Jeremiah even began his oracle against Edom with the words "Is there no longer wisdom in Tema?" The difficulties in the dialect support the idea of a non-Israelite origin. If it is accepted that the author was an Edomite, then the puzzle becomes that of understanding how the book came to be accepted as part of scripture. It is not surprising that there were dissenting voices arguing against its inclusion in the canon right up to Christian times. The book entered the canon on the basis of its quality, but was admitted only with reluctance.

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<sup>90</sup> Isaiah 35:8-10. See also Isaiah 51:11 for the last verse.

<sup>91</sup> There is just one use of Yahweh in the body of the poetry. This occurs when Job uses the common expression '*for Yahweh's hand has done this*' in 12:9; It may be that he was quoting a well known saying "*Ask the cattle..., which of these does not know 'what Yahweh's hand has done?'*" The only other use of Yahweh outside the prose envelope is in Yahweh's final answers to Job.

<sup>92</sup> Overall, Eloah is used twice in the Song of Moses, once each in Chronicles and Nehemiah, forty one times in Job, five times in the psalms – one of which, in psalm 18, may be a reference to the song of Moses, once in Second Isaiah – again a probable reference to the song, three times in Daniel and twice in Habakkuk.

<sup>93</sup> Habakkuk 3:3.

<sup>94</sup> Guillaume, A. 1968. *Studies in the Book of Job, with a New Translation*. Leiden

<sup>95</sup> Job 19:24

The work deals with the question of innocent suffering. In that respect it has resonances with Second Isaiah and the Servant Songs. These authors share an awe before the power of the creator god. The passage from Job made famous by being included in the text of Handel's Messiah incorporated the idea that Job may be rescued by a heavenly 'redeemer'. The redeemer was an ancient legal concept, somewhat like an advocate or a protector, whose practical application is key to an understanding of the story of Ruth, but the idea of a 'heavenly redeemer' is a concept shared only by Second Isaiah and Job, although they use the idea differently.

The theological questions addressed by the poet in Job had been themes in wisdom texts in the Ancient Near East from at least the early Second Millennium BCE. The Mesopotamian "I will praise the Lord of Wisdom" argues that suffering may be averted by the proper execution of cultic ritual. "The Babylonian Theodicy" is similar to Job structurally in that it comprises a dialogue between the sufferer and his friend who, like Job's friend Zophar, was shocked by the blasphemous nature of the suggestion that the sufferer's good deeds have not been rewarded. The Sumerian "Man and his God" argued that no human can claim to be innocent and that the sufferer should repent and wait upon the mercy of his god. The Egyptian 'Admonitions of Ipuwer' concluded that his god was indifferent to human suffering – may even enjoy the idea of death. Also from Egypt "The Dispute over Suicide" described a man who, like Job, longed for death as 'the sick man's recovery'. These Egyptian texts, like the book of Job, have prose envelopes surrounding a poetic core. It is quite possible that the author of the poetry in Job was aware not only of the ancient folktale, but also of some of the wisdom thinking that pervaded the Ancient Middle East.

The poetry that has come down to us is probably not the full original work. The structure of the poem implies three cycles of dialogues with Job's friends, but in our text the third cycle is incomplete. Instead there is a lengthy passage put into the mouth of a new, distinctly Israelite, character who speaks using different terms to those employed by Job's friends in the dialogues.

In the story, Yahweh had put Job into the hands of the heavenly prosecutor in an experiment to determine whether Job's piety can survive extreme misfortune. In the poetry, Job, reduced to poverty, his children dead and his health destroyed, debated with three friends the possible causes of his afflictions. Eliphaz, the first friend, argued that Job's protestations of innocence were false; he must have sinned, else why would he be being punished:

*Think now, who that was innocent ever perished?  
Where have you seen the righteous destroyed?*<sup>96</sup>

Eliphaz made use of a visionary experience to define the issue that was to be confronted in the poem. Some suggest that this passage has affinities with Mesopotamian mantic wisdom in which prophesy was mediated through dreams or by possession by a divine spirit. In the deepest part of the night, a sleeping Eliphaz sensed a spirit glide past his face causing the hairs of his flesh to stand on end and a dreadful trembling to overtake him. He heard an apparition murmur:

*"Can man be more righteous than Eloah,  
Or a creature purer than his maker?"*<sup>97</sup>

Eliphaz gave it as his opinion that, far from complaining, Job should be pleased by the attention God was giving him:

*"How happy is the one whom El reproves;  
therefore – do not despise the discipline of Shaddai."*<sup>98</sup>

Job was so consumed by his suffering that he was scarcely able to reply. He would like to die rather than continue as he was. He says he expected comfort from his friends, but they have become for him like a stream that vanished in the heat of the day. "Teach me," he cried, "make me understand; where I have gone wrong?"

Job asked why God was attacking him. "Am I Yam or Tannin?" he asked, referring to the monsters of the Western Semitic creation myths, monsters that must be destroyed for creation to emerge from chaos. He utterly rejected Eliphaz' suggestion that he should be glad that God was noticing him. On the contrary he asked God to look away for a moment so that he 'might swallow his

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<sup>96</sup> Job 4:7

<sup>97</sup> Job 4:17

<sup>98</sup> Job 5:17

*spittle*'.

With Job so adamant that he was innocent, his second friend, Bildad, suggested that it may have been Job's children who had sinned. That was why they died. That was why he was suffering. Perhaps the best course was for Job to repent anyway:

*"How long will you say these things,  
- and how long will the words of your mouth be like a blustering wind?  
Does El pervert justice?  
Does Shaddai pervert righteousness?  
When your children sinned against him  
he left them to be the victims of their sin.  
If you seek El –  
appeal for the favour of Shaddai –  
if you are pure and upright –  
then surely he will look after you  
and restore you to your rightful place."<sup>99</sup>*

Job did not consider he would have much chance appealing to the heavenly court *"This I know for truth"*, he says, *"no man wins a case against God. God will not answer one question in a thousand."* God is too powerful; he can move mountains, stop the sun from rising, crush the sea-monsters back...

*If I summoned him to court and he responded  
I do not believe that he would listen to my plea.  
For he bears hard on me for a trifle,  
and rains blows on me without a cause.  
He will not let me get my breath,  
but fills me with bitterness.  
If it is a contest of strength, he is stronger!  
If a matter of justice, who will make him hear me?  
Though I am innocent, he would condemn me from my own mouth;  
though I am blameless, he would twist my words."<sup>100</sup>*

He addressed God directly saying, *"Though I wash myself with soap and disinfect my hands, you would plunge me into mud and my clothes will make me filthy."* His thoughts returned to the idea of the trial, but he complained there could be no arbitrator to act between him and God, no-one to remove God's rod from his back so that he might speak without fear. Job was sickened of life, sickened by the relentless onslaughts from God. He pleaded *"Let me alone that I may brighten up a little, before I go to the land of gloom and deep darkness, never to return."<sup>101</sup>*

The third 'friend' Zophar, in apparent irritation at Job's obstinate protestations of innocence, argued that Job had better get used to the idea that he was getting off lightly:

*"Should such a multitude of words go unanswered?  
should the ready tongued be always right?  
Should your endless talk confine others to silence?  
When you mock, shall no one rebuke you?  
For you say, 'My conduct is pure;  
I am clean in your sight.'  
But if Eloah would speak,  
and use his tongue on you,  
he would tell you the secrets of wisdom!  
For wisdom is many-sided.  
Know then that Eloah exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.*

The friend of the sufferer in the 11<sup>th</sup> century 'Babylonian Theodicy' had remarked that "The

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<sup>99</sup> Job 8:1-6

<sup>100</sup> Job 9:18-20

<sup>101</sup> Job 9:30-31 & 10:20

mind of a god, like the centre of heaven, is remote. Knowledge of it is very difficult. People cannot know it”<sup>102</sup> The words of Zophar echo this sentiment:

*Can you fathom the mystery of Eloah?  
Can you find out the limits of Shaddai?  
It is higher than heaven; you can do nothing  
It is deeper than Sheol; you can know nothing.*<sup>103</sup>

Fed up with all the advice he was getting, Job responded sarcastically:

*“No doubt you are perfect men and wisdom will die with you”*<sup>104</sup>

Job sought answers for himself. He turned first to natural philosophy and concluded that ‘*in God’s hand are the souls of all that live*’. Wisdom, strength, purpose and understanding – the normal attributes of kings – belong to God, and he sports with men. He makes fools of judges, leads priests about barefoot, strikes counsellors dumb,

*He strips understanding from the rulers of nations  
leaving them pathless, wandering in a wasteland,  
groping in the dark without a light,  
staggering like a drunkard.*<sup>105</sup>

All this, Job said, he had seen with his own eyes; he knew it; his friends knew it. So what was the point of talking with them – they who whitewashed truth with lies, who were useless physicians? Job will speak directly with God. He was even prepared to risk God striking him dead, for merely appearing before God will prove his case since no godless man can do that. Job wanted to force God to leave him alone or to specify his offence; what was the offence with which he was charged?

The first friend returned and responded to Job’s claim that he was wise enough to perceive the lack of justice in his situation. Job was not the only wise person on earth. All this intellectual talk was wasted if it was trying to prove God wrong; indeed, it undermined proper religion, for

*...you are doing away with the fear of El,  
and are hindering prayer.  
For your iniquity dictates what you say;  
you choose the words of the crafty.  
You are condemned out of you own mouth – not by me.  
Your own lips testify against you.*<sup>106</sup>

Eliphaz repeated that Job must have sinned because all men are guilty,

*What is man, that he should be innocent,  
Or any born of woman, that they be righteous  
If God puts no trust in his holy ones  
and even the heavens are not clean in his sight,  
Then how much less so is man, who is loathsome and filthy  
and drinks up evil like water?*<sup>107</sup>

Eliphaz gave Job the benefit of his own experience, which he claimed was also that of the wise ‘*which they have not concealed from their ancestors*’<sup>108</sup>! Was the author making Eliphaz out to be pompously absurd, or was this a scribal error? Most translations assume the latter and amend the text accordingly, but this author was quite capable of making fun of his characters.

Job responded that he had heard all this before. The Ancient Sumerian poem ‘A Man and his

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<sup>102</sup> ANET 601-604

<sup>103</sup> Job 11:1-8

<sup>104</sup> Job 12:2

<sup>105</sup> Job 12:24

<sup>106</sup> Job 15:4-8

<sup>107</sup> Job 15:14-16

<sup>108</sup> J.L.Crenshaw’s article on Job; Oxford Bible Commentary.

God' had also quoted the proverb "Never was a sinless child born to woman"<sup>109</sup>. (In that poem too, the innocent sufferer pleaded "My god, I would stand before you, would speak with you... would bemoan the bitterness of my path")

Meanwhile his friend was wearying him with false sympathy whilst really attacking him. He rejected Eliphaz' statement that all men are evil, saying that he himself, although suffering, had never committed a violent act and his prayer was always pure. After a second attack by Bildad, who again insisted that god punishes the wicked, Job breaks down and pleads for relief from his friends: -

*Have pity on me, have pity on me, my friends,  
for the hand of Eloah has touched me!  
Why do you persecute me, as El persecutes me,  
never satisfied with my flesh?  
...  
For I know that my redeemer lives,  
and that in the end he will stand on the dust.  
And after my skin has been destroyed,  
then in my raw flesh I shall see Eloah,  
I shall see him for myself.  
My eyes shall behold him, each part of him.<sup>110</sup>*

The concept of the redeemer was based on an aspect of the common law of the time that is still part of the culture of the desert Bedouin to this day. A redeemer, a 'go'el', is a senior member of a family who has a duty to vindicate a family member whose justice is threatened. He does so by, for example, buying what the victim was forced to sell (remember Jeremiah's purchase of a field), or by providing protection (as in the story of Ruth) or in some cases by taking revenge against the oppressor. The concept of the redeemer permeates Second Isaiah, who sees God acting out this role on behalf of Israel. Here, however, the intended meaning was probably that the redeemer will act for Job in an action against Eloah, whom he perceived to be his persecutor. The redeemer will enable Job to address Eloah directly; this being Job's fervent wish. The Hebrew is difficult as footnotes to the translations make clear – indeed the NEB describes the last line of the Hebrew as unintelligible<sup>111</sup>. Unfortunately, the familiarity of the translation used in Handel's Messiah gives us an unjustifiable comfort in a particular interpretation.

But the friends gave Job no respite. Zophar returned to the fray, saying that surely Job knew that the triumph of the wicked is short lived, but Job disputed this asking 'Why do the wicked live on, reach old age, grow mighty in power?' He argued that the prosperity of the wicked was in their own hands, whose purposes were very different from God's, but God does little about them, even when they openly asked "Who is Shaddai that we should worship him?". When one dies, he remarks, he is buried with great honour and thousands keep watch at his tomb. "How false are your answers", he said to his erstwhile friends.

This attack on God convinced Eliphaz that Job was thoroughly wicked. He accused him of every crime imaginable, and of believing that God cannot see him. But in the end, he called him once more to repentance. Job, in his reply, looked forward to the trial he sought and in which he will vindicate himself. Then he reinforced his previous remarks and condemned God for being the uncaring perpetrator of an immoral universe:

*The wicked remove land marks and carry off flocks and shepherds... they drive off the orphan's donkey ...they snatch the fatherless infant from the breast...they take the poor man's child in pledge...  
The poor scavenge for food for their young in the wastelands... they lie naked at night, ...wet with the rain...they cling to the rock for shelter...and like wounded men cry out...  
Yet god pays no attention to their prayer<sup>112</sup>*

In an intense section, Job said that God protected those who harm the barren childless women. "Is it not so?" he asks "Who will prove me wrong?". No-one takes up the challenge. After only a few

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<sup>109</sup> ANET p 589-591; translation by S N Kramer.

<sup>110</sup> Job 19:21-27.

<sup>111</sup> The last hebrew words have with meanings associated with the kidney, the stomach or breasts. Translators often omit them.

<sup>112</sup> Job 24:2-12

words from Bildad, Job interrupts:

*What a help you have been to the man with no power!  
What assistance you have given to the arm with no strength!  
What advice you have offered to a man without wisdom!  
How fully you have explained it all!  
Who has inspired you to say such things?  
Whose spirit imbues your speech?<sup>113</sup>*

Job followed this with a hymn apparently full of the praise of the creator God, making full use of the ancient creation myths, but he gave it a twist in the ending:

*By his power he has tamed Yam the sea,  
By his skill struck down the monster Rahab,  
By his breath he clears the skies;  
And by his hand he skewers the sea-serpent.  
This is but the fringe of his power –  
but how faint the whisper we hear of him!<sup>114</sup>*

The poetry has become almost blasphemous. But the idea that the gods do not care much about men was not new. The Egyptian author of “The Admonitions of Ipuwer” (early 2<sup>nd</sup> Millenium BCE) had already asked of his god “Where is he today? Is he asleep?” and had complained that his power was not seen in the affairs of men.<sup>115</sup>

In the following speeches, Job appeared to articulate views previously attributed to his friends and dismissed by him<sup>116</sup>. The third round of the discourses was left incomplete – we never get to hear from Zophar again. These facts have lead some scholars to the view that what is now in chapters 27-31 was not part of the original poem – an idea supported by the change in the introductory formulae. No more does the poet say ‘*then Job answered*’; rather he says things like ‘*then Job resumed his discourse...*’. Perhaps the original material became intolerably blasphemous and was cut from the version that we have; perhaps the rest of the third cycle of the discourses was simply lost or mis-copied; perhaps the poet left the work unfinished; perhaps a tailing off was deliberately intended, though this seems unlikely. Instead, amongst the material that sits where the rest of the third round of the discourses should have been, there is the stand-alone poem ‘*Where can wisdom be found?*’. This piece ended by quoting the proverb ‘*The fear of the Lord is wisdom and to turn from evil is understanding*’. A clue to its independence of the rest of Job comes from the hebrew word used here for ‘Lord’; it is ‘*Adonai*’ and it is used nowhere else in Job; indeed as a stand alone name for God, it is used only rarely in the bible outside of the psalms and prayers.<sup>117</sup> These chapters are followed in today’s text by what seems to be another insertion – the six chapter long uninterrupted speech by Elihu, a character who has not even been mentioned prior to this point, although the reader was expected to believe he has been there all along. He knew all that had been said, and furthermore he had a good inkling of what God was going to say later. Elihu was different to all the other characters in that he was an Israelite, a descendant of Buz, Abraham’s nephew. His language contained more Aramaicisms and, amongst other differences, he preferred the short version of the personal pronoun. He had his own prose introduction. It seems likely that this insert was created at a later date by someone who found the arguments produced by Job’s friends insufficient to meet the case advanced by Job. The original poetry probably resumed in what is now chapter 38, the first of Yahweh’s responses.

Yahweh speaks out of the whirlwind in an affirmation of the power of the creator. Second Isaiah had dealt with the same theme when he wrote “*Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and marked off the heavens with a span...*”<sup>118</sup>; the author of Job echoed this: -

*“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”*

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<sup>113</sup> Job 26:1-4

<sup>114</sup> Job 26:11-14

<sup>115</sup> J L Crenshaw; Job, the book; ABD.

<sup>116</sup> For example Zophar’s conclusion that the wicked suffer and that ‘*this is Elohim’s reward to the wicked, their inheritance appointed by El*’ are precisely the words which Job uses in 27:13 expressing similar sentiments.

<sup>117</sup> It is of course commonly used in combinations, such as ‘the Lord Yahweh’ or ‘the Lord God’

<sup>118</sup> Isaiah 40:12. See above – the redemption poem.

*Tell me, if you have understanding,  
Who determined its measurements—surely you should know!  
Who stretched the line upon it?  
On what were its bases sunk;  
who laid its cornerstone  
when the morning stars sang together  
and all the sons of the gods shouted for joy?*

...  
*“Have you, in all your days, ever commanded the morning,  
have you caused the dawn to know its place,  
so that it might grab the skirts of the earth,  
and shake the dog-star out?*

...  
*“Have you entered the springs of the sea,  
and walked the unfathomable deep?  
Have the gates of death been revealed to you;  
have you seen the doors of darkness?  
Have you comprehended the breadth of the earth?*

*Tell me about this – if you know.<sup>119</sup>*

Yahweh concluded with the demand “*Shall a litigant find fault with Shaddai? Let he who reproves Eloah answer!*” But Job declined and Yahweh continued:

*Do you deny that I am just?  
Do you condemn me so that you may be justified?*

...  
*Have you an arm like El  
Can you thunder with a voice like his?*

...  
*If you can deck yourself with majesty and dignity,  
cloth yourself with glory and splendour...  
look upon the proud and humble them...  
tread down the wicked where they stand...  
Then I in my turn will acknowledge  
that your own right hand can deliver you.*

And he invited Job to consider two animals of mythical power, the Behemoth and the Leviathan<sup>120</sup>, ‘*which I created along with you*’; of the Leviathan he asked Job;

*Can you put a rope in its nose  
or pierce its jaw with a hook?  
Will it plead with you –  
Speaking softly to you?  
Will it make a promise to you,  
to be your servant forever?  
Will you play with it as with a bird?  
Will you put it on a leash for your girls?<sup>121</sup>*

But Job had achieved his objective; he had appeared before God and survived. Therefore he was vindicated. Now he had the last word:

*“I know that you can do all things;  
no idea is impossible to you....*

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<sup>119</sup> Job 38. Note the reference to the heavenly council, using the same phrase as was used in the prose opening of the book, ‘*the sons of the gods*’ which could equally be translated as ‘the sons of Elohim’.

<sup>120</sup> The NEB elides the two into one – ‘the chief of beasts, the crocodile’

<sup>121</sup> Job 41:1-5 (omitted from NEB)

*I have spoken of that which I did not understand  
– things too wonderful for me to know...  
I had heard of you only by report,  
But now I see you with my own eyes.*

*Therefore I melt away.<sup>122</sup>*

The rest of the last line is ambiguous; it has to do with dust and ashes; but whether Job repents using them (*I repent on dust and ashes*) or has decided against using them (*I repent of dust and ashes*) is unclear – perhaps deliberately so. The poetry ended here. The ending of the ancient prose tale completed the book. In it, Job’s friends were rebuked, and Job’s wealth was restored to him two-fold; he lived to a ripe old age and had a new family, including three daughters who were the most beautiful women on earth. But of the heavenly council and the prosecutor who caused all this trouble, we hear nothing.

### **Babylonia 540 BCE**

Despite Cyrus’ generosity, the Judeans in Babylon and the Kebar canal and elsewhere were in no rush to form a caravan going to Jerusalem, for there were new opportunities in Babylon. Babylon was now a major centre of the Persian Empire - the largest empire the world had thus far known. The empire needed able administrators, linguists, cultural experts, accountants, merchants and scribes and looked for talent amongst anyone in Babylonia; to be an ethnic Babylonian was no longer a special advantage. The Judean expatriate community was the second or third generation of the ablest people in Judah – and no doubt felt well qualified to take up the opportunities now before them at the heart of the Persian Empire.

By this time, it seems, they no longer thought of themselves as Judeans; they were now the new Israelites – the intellectual remnant of all the twelve tribes. There must have been many a family debate as to whether it would be better to return to Jerusalem or stay where they were as a growing and prosperous expatriate community.

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<sup>122</sup> Job 42: 2-6a.