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THE PROMISED LAND
TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF EXILE

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THE PROMISED LAND: TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF EXILE

Possibly no topic stirs the hope, imagination and yet consternation of people more than the topic of Palestine or the land of Israel. One need only look at a current newspaper for a modern discussion or turn to the Bible for a replete ancient discussion of the land promised by God to Abraham and his descendants. The centrality of the land of Palestine has long been recognized as central to Judaism. In fact, this land has played a critical role in at least the three major monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Some biblical scholars, such as Walter Brueggemann, have argued that the land is the central motif to Old Testament theology. Brueggemann states, "The Bible is the story of God's people with God's land."¹ This land can mean so much to so many, if not in a physical sense, at least in a metaphorical or spiritual sense.

This land, however, has had a rocky history changing hands no less than ten times in recordable history. Jews have called it home for at least three thousand years and possibly longer. Although they have called it home, they have actually lived on the land in full possession of it less than 800 years out of the last 4000 (from the Israelite conquest c. 1250 B.C. to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., some years during Hasmonean rule, and from 1948 A.D. to the present), and some of these years are debatable. At all other times

¹Walter Brueggemann, The Land (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 13.

someone else has been in control of the land. So in reality, it might be a misnomer to call the land area of Palestine, "the land of Israel." For the people called Jews, the over-riding theme of the past 4000 thousand years has been exile, being forcible expelled from the land or under the domination of another national power. Arnold M. Eisen states, "Exile, therefore, could no longer be seen as a mere interruption of Israel's divinely assigned homecoming. Rather, it was Israel's brief span upon the Land which had to be regarded as an interruption --of exile."² Although the Jews have found themselves in exile a greater proportion of their existence than not, what they have experienced we all experience in exile. Arie Lova Eliav says, Thus, from the beginning of civilization, the human race has been afflicted by two kinds of slavery: one to nature, for the sake of survival; the other, of the weak to the strong, out of fear. This dual bondage has been the lot of humankind for countless centuries.³

One hope of this investigation is to comprehend exile better and the theology surrounding it, and in some way, find application for every human in exile.

This paper will seek to move from the beginnings of Israel's dealings with the land to more recent movements in hopes of gaining a better understanding of what the people called Jews have thought about the land while they have been away from the land in exile. The goal is to come to a theological understanding of exile, and not so much a sociological/psychological/political understanding. This goal has certain

²Arnold M. Eisen, Galut: Modern Jewish Reflection on Homelessness and Homecoming (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 36.

³Arie Lova Eliav, New Heart New Spirit: Biblical Humanism for Modern Israel (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1988), 67-68.

underlying assumptions about theology, namely, that Jewish dealings with the land of Palestine are rooted in the belief that they have been promised the land by God through Abraham, and that Judaism as a religion has continued a certain self-consciousness of a place in the divine plan for history. Much more could be said concerning this, but simply stated, this is a theological quest and inherent to this quest is God.

It must be recognized from the beginning that the topic of the paper could easily lend itself to a full length monograph. Because this is true, the following investigation will only touch on major streams of thought, bypassing (more?) important topics at points. The object is not to investigate every possible thinker, thought, or movement on the topic of theology in exile, but rather to skim the views of important personages and movements with the desire of gaining a better appreciation for Jewish exile.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR POSSESSION OF THE LAND

Anyone seriously looking into the topic of the exile of the Jewish people must at some point in the investigation explore the foundations in the Bible for the promise of land to the Jews. As has been mentioned, living on the land is a central motif to the Old Testament; but it is also just as true that being exiled from the land is just as much a motif. Brueggemann says, "These two histories set the parameters of land theology in the Bible: presuming upon the land and being expelled from it; trusting toward a land not yet possessed, but empowered by anticipation of it."⁴ He further comments, Israel is landless people as we meet it earliest and most often in biblical faith. Although it is without place, it has a sense of being on the way to a promised place. Israel is a people on the way because of a

⁴Brueggemann, 15.

promise, and the substance of all its promises from Yahweh is to be in the land, to be placed, and secured where Yahweh is yet to lead it.⁵

This landlessness occurs in three periods: the earliest is the sojournings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the next is the period of wanderings during the exodus from Egypt; and the final is the period of exile under the Babylonians.⁶

The first promise of land to the Jewish people is found in Genesis 12:1, which reads, "Now Yahweh said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.'"⁷ Abram (later changed to Abraham) was from Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen. 11:31) and a relatively insignificant, seventy-five year old wandering nomad with no children. God had a plan for Abram which involved land and lineage, both promises seemingly impossible at the time. The promise of lineage was fulfilled through the miraculous birth of Isaac (Gen. 18). The promise of land, however, was a long time in coming. God had made a covenant with Abram in Gen. 15:18 in a common covenantal fashion promising him "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canannites, the Gergashites, and the Jebusites" (Gen. 15:18-20). It was this promise that has been central to the Jewish faith ever since.

After the promise was given, the descendants of Abraham wandered down to Egypt in search of food (the story of Joseph and his family). The promise was almost forgotten over the next several hundred years as the Israelites were

⁵Ibid., 6.

⁶Ibid., 7.

⁷All scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, 1971.

forced into slavery by the pharaohs. But God raised up a man named Moses calling him through the theophany of the burning bush (Ex. 3). God said to Moses,

I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:7-8).

After a series of events, God enabled Moses to lead the Israelites out of bondage and into freedom, though this freedom meant forty years in the dessert.

The fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham can be seen in the conquest of the promised land by Joshua and the Israelites in Joshua 21:43-45.

God had fulfilled the promise made to Abraham many centuries before. When the Israelites were on their trek through the wilderness, they found themselves exposed and alone with only Yahweh to rely on. They were without land, without home, without anything to support their life except the promises of Yahweh, that He would be with them. Brueggemann states, "To be placed in the wilderness is to be cast into the land of the enemy--cosmic, natural, historical--without any of the props or resources that give life order and meaning."⁸ Since Israel had no resources, it had to trust fully in God. The land meant safety and security. It was a gift, but it was also a responsibility.

As Israel was approaching the time of entering the promised land, God made a covenant with Israel. The word "covenant" comes from the Hebrew word berith which occurs 286 times in the Old Testament and means a binding

⁸Ibid., 29.

agreement between two parties often including some type of relationship and obligation. A common feature of ancient Hittite treaty formula is that it contained both curses and blessings in the stipulation section of the treaty. The covenantal formulas in the Old Testament follow these treaties in a remarkable and noteworthy fashion.⁹

A covenant pertinent for our study is the covenant God made with Moses and the Israelites on Mount Sinai which can be found in Deut. 5-ff (cf. Exodus 19-23). The theme of the covenant can be seen in summary in Deut. 5:32-33: You shall be careful to do therefore as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land which you shall possess.

The stipulation part of the covenant agreement is then stated in the passages which follow, including the Ten Commandments. Thus, the covenant stipulation actually had a simple formula: Do as Yahweh commands and you will live in the land, but disobedience leads to expulsion. The land was a free gift of grace from God. Brueggemann states, "It is a gift from Yahweh and binds Israel in new ways to the giver. Israel was clear that it did not take the land either by power or stratagem, but because Yahweh had spoken a word and had acted to keep his word."¹⁰ All the promises that God had made to the Israelites concerning the land came true (Josh. 21:45), but if at some point Israel stopped being distinct among the pagan environment in which it found itself, then God would no longer fight Israel's battles (Josh. 23:14).

⁹For a brief overview of scholarship concerning the topic of covenant, see Ernest W. Nicholson, God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 1-120.

¹⁰Brueggemann, 47.

The stipulations of the covenant form the Torah (in the sense of law/instruction and not in the sense of scripture). One reason the law was given was so that Israel would become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). For Israel part of the mark of being a holy nation meant that they would be allowed to dwell in the land which Yahweh had promised and which Yahweh had helped conquer. Brueggemann goes so far as to even say, "But Israel's Torah is markedly uninterested in a religion of obedience as such. It is rather interested in care for land, so that it is never forgotten from whence came the land and to whom it is entrusted and by whom."¹¹ Yet, obedience to the stipulations (laws) of the covenant meant peace in the land. If Israel failed to obey, the land would be lost.

Some tentative conclusions can be made at this point concerning land for Israel. First, Israel was a people without land given the promise of land through a covenant. Land is promise. Second, Israel did not conquer the land without God's help. Land is grace. God made a covenant with Israel concerning the land and which contained certain stipulations. Land is responsibility. God's plan for Israel as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation included living in the land. Land is holiness.

THE LOSS OF THE LAND

As is well known, the land was lost and the Israelites were forced into exile. The possession of the land in Judges 2:6 became exile from the land in 2 Kings 24:14-15. Brueggemann defines exile as "being cut off with no way back."¹² He also states, "The literature of Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and

¹¹Ibid., 60.

¹²Ibid., 9.

2 Kings is the account of the tortuous route by which heirs became exiles."¹³

The period considered as the period of dwelling in the land of promise began with the conquest under Joshua and continued on through the monarchies of the Davidic dynasty. One has to ask, however, if this truly was a period of possession of the land. For example, as Brueggemann points out, "Kings will be kings and the business of kings is to stalk about and have their way in the land which sooner or later becomes their land." The prophet/judge Samuel had warned Israel against just this thing happening (1 Sam. 8:10-18). Israel's kings were to be only servants of God on the land. Brueggemann further states, "Remarkably, in one generation [Solomon] managed to confiscate Israel's freedom and reduce social order to the very situation of Egyptian slavery."¹⁴ "The very land that promised to create space for human joy and freedom became the very source of dehumanizing exploitation and oppression."¹⁵

With this in mind, one can then better understand the role of the prophets of Israel. The prophets were for the land to remind the people that they were to be holy and not to defile themselves like their neighbors (Dt. 18:9-15). The power of the kings and the potential for abuse of the land elicited the need for prophets. The prophet existed, according to Brueggemann, to affirm continually Israel's precariousness and contingency in the face of more attractive but illegitimate alternatives.¹⁶ Thus, "it is the business of the prophets to discern what kings cannot see and to articulate

¹³Ibid., 73.

¹⁴Ibid., 10-11.

¹⁵Ibid., 11.

¹⁶Ibid., 91-92.

what kings cannot bear."¹⁷ Furthermore, "The history of Israel in its classical period is presented as a tension between royally secured land and covenanted precarious land."¹⁸

This tension is evident throughout the period of the monarchy. The tension mounted even more with the advance of the Assyrians. In the Northern Kingdom of Israel, anarchy had resulted after the death of king Jerobaom in 746 B.C. with five kings reigning within ten years time (2 Kings 15:8-28). The Israelite king Manahem (745-737) was forced to pay tribute to Tiglath-pilesar III, king of Assyria. The prophet Hosea paints a vivid picture of what life was like in Israel. For example, he describes the complete collapse of law and order, prophesying, "Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel; for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land" (Hos. 4:1ff; cf. 7:1). Israel had broken the covenantal agreements and the land was in danger of being lost

--and it was. Israel and its capital city Samaria fell to the Assyrian kings Shalmaneser V (726-722) and Sargon II (721-705 B.C.) in the late summer or autumn of 722/721. Israel's history came to an end. According to John Bright, "Thousands of its citizens--27,290 according to Sargon--were subsequently deported to Upper Mesopotamia and Media, there ultimately to vanish from the stage of history."¹⁹

King Ahaz of the Southern Kingdom of Judah likewise found he and his

¹⁷Ibid., 107.

¹⁸Ibid., 100.

¹⁹John Bright, A History of Israel (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 275.

kingdom under Assyrian domination. Judah never fully recuperated, although king Hezekiah (715-687) tried to rebel against the Assyrian king Sennacherib (704-681) which failed in 701. The Assyrian Empire fell to the Babylonian Empire in about 612. King Josiah (640-609) of Judah was able to gain independence for a short time beginning in 629. In 603 Judah once again became a vassal but this time to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. In 597 Nebuchadnezzar exiled over ten thousand people of the leading class of the southern kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 24:14; Jer. 52:58). After king Zedekiah (597-587) revolted against Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king besieged Jerusalem which fell in 587. Solomon's temple was burned and the king deported with many more of the people (Jer. 52:30). The Babylonian stronghold over Israel ended in 539 when the Persian king Cyrus captured Babylon.

It is difficult to determine how many Israelites went into captivity and how many remained in Judah. Ralph Klein comments, "While this Palestinian remnant never went *into* exile, the exilic hardships and their challenge to the faith were surely theirs."²⁰ The exile may have been hard on the people of Israel, but not all was a loss. Bernard W. Anderson, in painting a different picture of the exile, says that the exile was quite favorable to the Jews economically. "Babylonian Jews were permitted to move about freely, to live in their communities within or near the great cities, and to carry on their way of life."²¹ The big temptation, however, was religious. Those exiled had to deal with the formidable Babylonian culture with the marvelous temples and

²⁰Ralph W. Klein, Israel in Exile (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 3.

²¹Bernard W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 418.

the thriving agriculture of their captives. Several theological challenges resulted because of the exile. First was the destruction of the temple, the footstool of God (Lam. 2:1), God's dwelling place (1 Kings 8:13; Ezek. 43:7), His resting place (Ps. 132:14; Isa. 1:12). This was a direct challenge in the minds of the Israelites to the power and authority of Yahweh. The serious theological question had to be asked, could Yahweh be worshipped in a foreign land, since the temple was destroyed? A second challenge was the end of the Davidic dynasty. A theology had arisen around the dynasty of David that it was eternal (2 Sam. 7), that the king was God's son (Ps. 2:7) and the medium of God's blessing (Ps. 72:6, 16). Another challenge was the loss of the land, the promise of Yahweh to Abraham (Gen. 12:1). Furthermore, the temporary loss of the priesthood and sacrificial system raised serious questions for those in exile.²² Klein asks, "What kind of future was possible for a people which traced its unique election to a God who had just lost a war to other deities? What kind of future was possible for a people who had so alienated their God that categorical rejection was his necessary response?"²³

Some fell away, but many strengthened their faith. The exile was a time of religious activity when redaction of the prophetic and historical literature took place. Anderson says, "They were interpreters who believed that the sacred heritage was relevant to their time. To them the tradition was not just a museum-piece out of the past, but a living tradition through which God spoke to their contemporary situation."²⁴

²²Klein, 3-4.

²³Ibid., 5.

²⁴Anderson, 421.

Was there any reason(s) for the exile beyond simply a political move by Babylonians for conquest? One cannot say with certainty by any scientific method of investigation. For the Israelites, however, there was a clear reason why they went into exile.

One of the most significant prophets who warned against exile was Jeremiah. Much of his prophetic effort was directed against warning the people of Judah to repent and return to Yahweh. In Jeremiah's commissioning Yahweh tells him that his life was "to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). A great power from the North (Babylon) was coming against Jerusalem as a means of judgement against the violation of covenant. Jer. 12:4 states, "How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither? For the wickedness of those who dwell in it the beasts and the birds are swept away, because men said, 'He will not see our latter end.'" The people had a false security believing that Jerusalem and the Temple were indestructible because these were the dwelling place of God. But they under-estimated the power of righteousness and judgement. They were no longer embarrassed at their abomination (Jer. 4:22; 8:12). Even the dynasty of David was coming to an end (22:29-30). Brueggemann adds, "So land and covenant, inheritance and fidelity, belong together."²⁵ Judah like Israel had violated covenant and for that they were to lose the land.

Not all hope was lost. Jeremiah also prophesied a new covenant (31:31ff) and the restoration of the Israelites (32:37-41). Exile was a time of purification and a time of strengthening of faith. John Bright writes, When one considers the magnitude of the calamity that overtook her, one marvels that Israel was not sucked down into the vortex of history along

²⁵Brueggemann, 120.

with the other little nations of western Asia, to lose forever her identity as a people. And if one asks why she was not, the answer surely lies in her faith: the faith that called her into being in the first place proved sufficient even for this.²⁶

Israel found itself in a state of theological emergency with the exile. It centered on Yahweh's promise of eternal choice of Zion and the unconditional promise to David of an unending dynasty. When in exile, the solution was to be found in the message of the prophets who had forecast tragedy, particularly Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Bright adds,

By incessantly announcing it as Yahweh's righteous judgment on the nation's sin, these prophets gave the tragedy coherent explanation and permitted it to be viewed, not as the contradiction, but as the vindication of Israel's historic faith. . . . The exile could be seen both as a merited punishment and as a purge preparing Israel for a new future.²⁷

Since the cultic centers of Israel's faith were gone, the law and keeping covenant were stressed more. Bright states,

The future for which the exiles hoped was one of eventual restoration to the homeland. The hope never died. Though some undoubtedly soon resigned themselves to life in Babylon, the hard core of the exile community refused to accept the situation as final. This was partly, no doubt, because the exiles sensed that their status was a provisional one, an internment rather than a true resettlement.²⁸

Second Isaiah (chs. 40-55), an unknown prophet before or during the fall of Babylon, gave Israel's theology a new focus with three thoughts: (1) Yahweh the one God, sovereign Lord of History, will redeem his people again. (2) the future will be the universal triumph of Yahweh's rule over both Jews and Gentiles. A new exodus will take place where Yahweh would reestablish his

²⁶Bright, 347.

²⁷Ibid., 349.

²⁸Ibid., 350.

covenant with Israel. (3) Israel will be the servant of Yahweh, whose mission will be to bring Yahweh's law to the nations, calling Israel back to her God and of being a light to the darkness of the nations.²⁹

To those in exile, exile was only temporary and the promise of land was once again the hope of the future, as Psalm 137:4-6 says,

How shall we sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right wither!
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy!

Yahweh had given Jeremiah the promise,

When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile (Jer. 29:10-14; cf. Dt. 4:27, 29).

In 538, the Persian king Cyrus issued a decree ordering the restoration of the Jewish community in Palestine. Through much hardship a small group of exiles returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple in 520. The old way of life would never again be achieved. The Davidic dynasty would never reign. The Jews had to look at their lives in a much different fashion. Bright states, "Disappointment had led to disillusionment and this, in turn, to religious and moral laxity."³⁰ In addition, "The danger, in short, was real

²⁹Ibid., 355-358.

³⁰Ibid., 378.

that if the community could not pull itself together, regain its morale, and find direction, it would sooner or later lose its distinctive character, it not disintegrate altogether.³¹ The efforts of Nehemiah and Ezra in the fifth and fourth centuries saved the Jews from self-destruction. Even though the Jews had a form of freedom, it was still a form of exile. Nehemiah 9:36-37 says:

Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that thou gavest to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom thou has set over us because of our sins; they have power also over our bodies and over our cattle at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.

Nehemiah preached against the religious laxity of the Jews (Neh. 13:15-22), saying, "Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this evil on us and on this city?" (Neh.13:18). Surely the Jews should have learned their lesson. Ezra continued Nehemiah's reforms armed with a copy of the law and the authority of the Persian king Artaxerxes (Ezra 7). By winning over the leadership, Ezra was finally able to purge the Jews of any pagan religious practices and lead them back to repentance and restoration of covenant (Ezra 10). Little is known about the Jewish community in the land of Israel over the next several centuries. It appears that the community was able to function as an autonomous commonwealth under the administration of the Persians. The Persian empire came to an end with the rise of Alexander the Great in 336. After the death of Alexander in 323, his empire fell apart and was divided up by his generals. Palestine fell into the hands of the general Ptolemy and his descendants for over a century. Palestine was then acquiesced by the Seleucid Antiochus III in 223. The Jews who had been

³¹Ibid., 379.

suffering under the Ptolemies found relief under the Seleucids and were able to live their lives as they wished. With the rise of Rome, the Seleucid Antiochus IV attempted to unify his domain which meant the spread of Hellenistic thought and religion. This lead to open rebellion by the Jews and the Maccabean Revolt (166) in an effort to purify the temple and Jewish religious life.³² All throughout this period the Jews were learning to put their trust in Yahweh and reinterpret their hope for the future. Bright adds, "Thus the Day of Yahweh, once the day of the nation's vindication, by the prophets made into a day of national judgment, assumed new importance as the day when Yahweh would, in the context of history, judge the tyrant power and reestablish His people on their land."³³

From 142 to 63 B.C. the Jews were relatively independent under the rule of the Hasmoneans, a priestly house of princes. Simon, the first Hasmonean, had so much made Judea an independent entity that the Jews designated him high priest, general, and ethnarch for eternity.³⁴ First Maccabees 13:41 says, "Thus the yoke of the Gentiles was removed from Israel, and the people began to write in their documents and contracts, 'In the first year of Simon, the great high priest and commander and leader of the Jews.'"

In 63 B.C. the Romans occupied Palestine and placed their procurators in charge. These leaders had to please both the Jewish population and those in higher power. One of these leaders, Herod I, rebuilt the Jerusalem Temple from 20-10 B.C., enlarging and hellenizing it. This period was marked by

³²Ibid., 405-427.

³³Ibid., 453.

³⁴Bo Reicke, The New Testament Era (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 65.

cultural advances, building programs, growth in education, and spread of Jewish ideas. Herod was never popular with the Jews because of "his descent, his ten wives, his collaboration with the Greeks and Romans, his arbitrary treatment of laws and traditions."³⁵ The hope was that a ruler would arise after Herod who could lead Judea into freedom.

After Herod, either his sons or other procurators ruled Palestine which had been divided as a form of inheritance. Popular movements such as the Zealots began to arise and push for revolt against the tightening Roman fist.

The Romans preferred to allow indigenous people a certain degree of autonomy especially in religious affairs. The period between A.D. 44-66 saw a rise in the tension between Jews and Greeks/Romans due to several factors: the vanishing of the glory of Herod's kingdom, the stress between the two cultures, Jewish nationalists' burning hatred of domination, the risk of losing the purity and freedom of Jewish religion, and general disregard for Roman law.³⁶ The Christians of the ear often found themselves in double jeopardy with persecution from both the Romans and Jews.

In 66 the Jews rebelled against Rome because of, according to Reicke, "the cultural policies of the Emperor and the financial measures of the procurator. . ."³⁷ The revolt of 66 rocked Palestine and reached all the way to Rome. The Romans lead by Titus sieged Jerusalem in April of 70 and by August had conquered the city and burned the temple. Independence was lost and Palestine became Jewish only ethnically. This period marked an end to the

³⁵Ibid., 105.

³⁶Ibid., 203.

³⁷Ibid., 256.

office of high priest and the cultic worship at the temple. The center of Jewish thought moved to Jamnia.

Several more tentative conclusions can now be made. First, One can live on the land and still be in bondage. Second, living on the land was not to be taken for granted. Third, when living on the land law and land are inseparable entities. Fourth, physical exile begins with spiritual exile. Fifth, exile forces one to once again rely totally on God (grace) and not on one's self (works). Sixth, exile can create religious revival or fervor because the security blanket of land is no longer a factor. Seventh, exile creates the opportunity for a future hope, a change for the better.

THE YEARS OF DIASPORA (GALUT)

With the loss of Jerusalem and the temple, once again the Jews were forced to consider their situation both theologically and politically. A unique feeling occurred called galut ("exile"). The Hebrew term ____ (galut, from here on simply "galut")

expresses the Jewish conception of the condition and feelings of a nation uprooted from its homeland and subject to alien rule. . . . Only the loss of a political-ethnic center and the feeling of uprootedness turns Diaspora (Dispersion) into galut (Exile). The feeling of exile does not always necessarily accompany the condition of exile.³⁸

The rest of our investigation will center around this term, galut, incorporating both exile and diaspora.

As we begin exploring the galut after the fall of Jerusalem, James Parkes reminds us that the key to Jewish history is found in two factors: (1)

³⁸Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, "Galut," Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 7 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1971), 275.

the ethical monotheism, and (2) the Jewish will to survive as a people.³⁹ Both of these factors become important over the next two millennia. Though their monotheism was never challenged, the Jews had to reconsider their views on the land and God's relationship to them and the land. Michael Lodahl says, "With the disappearance of the Temple--the revered symbol of God's presence with the people Israel in the land of Israel--it was on their shoulders to reconceive Israel's covenant with God in accordance with its ominous circumstances of extremity and exile." He sees two approaches for the Jews: (1) "a retrieval of the Deuteronomic code of rewards and punishments; the destruction and exile were God's just punishment 'for our sins' . . ."; (2) "affirmation of the Shekhinah's faithful presence with the people Israel. . . . God, bound by covenantal commitment to the people, even went into exile with them, sharing in their agonies."⁴⁰ The second answer was more accepted, "because it encouraged an awareness of divine faithfulness and companionship with the Jewish people; it was also the answer which most deeply captured their hearts and minds." There still was a commitment to the God's rule. "Though God might share in Israel's exile out of a deep covenantal love, that same love insured that God's might would eventually right all wrongs."⁴¹

As the Roman empire became more and more Christian, especially after the reign of Constantine, the leadership of the Jewish world moved to Babylon where it remained while the rabbinic schools persisted. When these schools

³⁹James Parkes, End of an Exile: Israel, the Jews and the Gentile World (Marblehead, Mass.: Micah Publications, 1982), 90.

⁴⁰Michael Lodahl, Shekhinah/Spirit: Divine Presence in Jewish and Christian Religion (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 81.

⁴¹Ibid., 82.

closed, Judaism became dispersed with a dozen simultaneous or successive centers.⁴² While in Babylon, however, Judaism developed a religious life centered in a book and focused in communities so that wherever they were to go, Jews could live as Jews. It was during this time that the Midrash (investigation or commentary on Torah) was written down. Yitzhak Baer comments, "The Midrash completed the concept of history that developed during the time of the Second Temple, and lovingly depicted the nation's character and the process of redemption that was the meaning of its history and of the history of all humanity."⁴³

Moreover, it was believed during this period because of the increase of anti-Semitism and martyrdom that, according to Baer, the process of atonement consists in Israel's enslavement by the empires and expiatory pilgrimage among the nations; the meaning of this process is immeasurably deepened by the idea that the Shekhinah itself takes part in the Galut and also waits for deliverance. . . . The more terrible the suffering of the Diaspora, the more it operated as seed thrown forth in the world for the dissemination of the true faith.⁴⁴

As the Jews tried to make sense of their situations, it was believed by many that they were suffering somehow for Judaism, that their suffering was part of the divine plan, and as Baer hints above, the presence (Shekhinah) of God was exiled and was waiting for redemption. This idea was to be developed later on through some of the mystics during the Middle Ages. As Jews began to spread out (often forced out) from Palestine, for survival's sake they were forced into the position of traders and middlemen. This economic function is one

⁴²Parkes, 96.

⁴³Yitzhak F. Baer, Galut (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), 11.

⁴⁴Ibid., 12.

reason why the centers of Jewish culture were in areas such as Babylon. With even this, though, "Palestine could still serve as the center of the political and geographical world picture."⁴⁵

From early on the Jews began to settle in the lands to which they were either forced or to which they fled. Ben Zion Dinur gives a rather broad, yet helpful insight into the situations of Jews in galut which began early and has persisted even to the present:

The character of every single period of Jewish history in the Diaspora, and the various processes of transition from one to another, are determined by these two diametrically opposed tendencies: at the one extreme there is stability and the effort to take permanent root in the lands of the Dispersion and to achieve the greatest possible degree of conformity to their ways of life; and, at the other, a feeling of insecurity and utter strangeness in these foreign lands and an eager expectation of imminent redemption.⁴⁶

Dinur sees Diaspora Judaism divided into eight periods alternating between security and crisis. These periods set the context for our further investigation of the thoughts of the Jews during galut. Though these categories may seem to be a bit arbitrary or simplified, they allow us a broad overview of the historical periods under investigation. Following this, we will deal not so much with the history as such, but rather the major thinkers of these periods.

The first was a period of stability beginning with the Arab conquest and ending with the First Crusade (636-1096). It was during this time that Jews began to settle in other lands and become productive. The second was a period of crisis beginning with the persecutions of the Crusades and ending with the

⁴⁵Ibid., 18.

⁴⁶Ben Zion Dinur, Israel and the Diaspora (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), 8-9.

decrees of Pope Innocent II and the resolutions of the fourth Lateran Council defining the status of the Jews in Christian Lands (1096-1215). Messianic ferment and insecurity mark this period. The third was a period of stability from the decrees of Innocent III to the "Black Death" (1215-1348). This stability was in the form of servitude to various rulers and authorities. The fourth period was of crisis beginning with the "Black Death" and ending with the expulsion of Jews from Spain and Portugal (1348-1496), during which whole communities were either destroyed or forced to convert. The fifth was a period of stability beginning with expulsion of Jews to the Chmelnicky massacres of 1648, when Jews were "officially" protected. The sixth period was a crisis of inner decay from the Chmelnicky massacres down to the French Revolution (1648-1789), a decay marked by growing insecurity, economic impoverishment, social decline and loss of community. The seventh was a period of stability from the French Revolution to the pogroms in Russia (1789-1881) with growth of naturalization and emancipation. The final period was of crisis from antisemitism to the establishment of the State of Israel (1881-1948), and was marked by massive persecution of Jews in various countries.⁴⁷

Even though the outward circumstances of the Jews varied over the course of the last two millennia, they never lost hope of returning to the land of Palestine. The religious had to ask serious questions; galut needed explanation. For example, IV Ezra 3:32-34, 6:59 question God: "Have the deeds of Babylon been better than those of Zion? Has any other nation known Thee besides Zion?. . . If the world has indeed been created for our sakes, why do we not enter into possession of our world? --How long shall this

⁴⁷Ibid., 66-76.

endure?"⁴⁸ Various explanations, rationalization, and interpretations of galut were given. The following will briefly trace some of these explications by utilizing two sources that summarize and clarify the phenomena, Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson and Yitzhak F. Baer.

The rabbis never thought that galut would mean total destruction for Israel. Suffering only served to enhance Jewish religion, they believed, and was the prerequisite to redemption. Since there was no temple and no sacrificial system, it was feared that Judaism might lose itself in the midst of other nations. Ben-Sasson comments, "When the national organism sought means of defense and survival for its separate life as a community in an alien environment, it was realized that in exile the nation had lost all signs of social-national unity. . . ."⁴⁹ The Torah became central to unity and survival.

Concern increased as the exile continued. More and more Jews took comfort in Messianic promises because they believed that the Messiah would bring the exiles back to Palestine.⁵⁰ After the 7th century, the Jews no longer took up arms but rather "left the ranks of warring nations and put their fate altogether in the hands of God. . . ."⁵¹ From time to time persons would appear claiming to be Messiah. "Behind this phenomenon lay always a real belief that God could not refuse to answer if there was a sufficient

⁴⁸Quoted by Ben-Sasson on 277. For other explanations, cf. IV Ezra 4:23-25; II Baruch 10:9-16; 67:2-8; 77:13-14.

⁴⁹Ben-Sasson, 280.

⁵⁰Ibid., 281.

⁵¹Baer, 19.

inner preparation and purification on the part of the people."⁵² According to Baer, the Jews had an eschatological conviction: "that history is a process of exile and redemption, fixed from the beginning--a movement back to a lost Golden Age. Through penance, and through a wise policy of preparation for what history has in store, it is possible for men to hasten the process; but political and spiritual redemption can proceed only from God."⁵³ changes began to happen for, as Ben-Sasson sees the situation, "during the tenth century, after a number of messianic movements had failed, rationalist and skeptical outlooks increased within the community and a Judaism was conceived which did not anticipate redemption."⁵⁴

During the turn of the millennium, the Jews only had their past history in Palestine, their present reality of Torah, and the future hope of dwelling in the land again. "For a visible object of veneration, there could now remain only the land itself where all the wonders had once taken place and were to take place again."⁵⁵ During the crusades, the poetry of the Jews excelerated. Piyutim, poems of the past and future, were added to the prayer book. These poems describe the thoughts of the times about galut and are most obviously seen in the poetry of Spanish Jews.

As persecution and political repression increased, a tremendous amount of force was placed on the Jews of Europe to convert to Christianity. Different views arose in answer to this. Solomon Rashi (1040-1105) advocated

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., 20.

⁵⁴Ben-Sasson, 282.

⁵⁵Baer, 22-23.

a commonly accepted view among Jews that "the cause for the cruel persecution of the Jews originates in the jealousy of the nations of the Divine election of Israel. . . ." Utilizing Ezekiel 20:32-33, Eliezer of Beaugency (fl. 12th century) understood that it was part of the divine decree for Jews to persevere in Christian lands. Eliezer ben Samuel of Metz (d. 1198) saw exile as a lack of political independence. Moses ben Jacob of Coucy (13th century) regarded the exile as an opportunity to convert and train proselytes. Abraham ben Hiyya ha-Nazi (1065-1136) believed exile to be part of the divine decree of creation: "this harsh exile in which we find ourselves today was decreed by the King in the six days of Creation."⁵⁶

Judah Halevi (1075-1141) was the first Jewish thinker to fully consider theoretically the problem of exile. He wrote in Kuzari (1140), "The Jewish religion is not to be reduced to a collection of abstract articles of faith; it is bound up inextricably with the historical election and the historical destiny of Israel."⁵⁷ Furthermore, the election was facilitated by the elimination of the unworthy and the choice by God. He said, ". . . the Jewish nation is the only true, the only really living nation, because it has preserved unchanged in its people, throughout the whole of human history, that prophetic soul which God granted to the first man."⁵⁸ He saw great merit in suffering in galut. The reason Jews suffer is for the sins of other nations. "To suffer humbly and be patient is the mission of the Jews in Galut"; the reason galut remained was because few Jews were willing to accept their

⁵⁶Ben-Sasson, 284-285.

⁵⁷Quoted by Baer, 29.

⁵⁸Ibid., 30.

responsibility in exile.⁵⁹ Ben-Sasson states,

He enlarges upon the ancient simile that the nation in exile is to be compared to "the seed which falls into the ground": to the person who observes the external condition of the seed, its sowing signifies its destruction; but to the one who has real knowledge, the sowing "transforms earth and water into its own substance, carries it from one stage to another until it refines the elements and transfers them into something like itself."⁶⁰

Halevi viewed Palestine as a safe refuge in which to place hope. He warned against getting too comfortable in the Galut lest Jews forget their true "home." Thus, for Halevi, "The Galut is the destruction of an ideal situation that must be re-established."⁶¹

Another important personage was Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon (1135-1204) also known as Maimonides. He saw the downfall of the Jewish state being caused by a preoccupation with astrology because it took Jewish attention away from military skills and foreign conquests. Exile was another attempt to turn Jews away from their religion. He believed that "Israel's survival or fall depends not on natural causes but on the people's submission to God or revolt against him."⁶² Bear states that for Maimonides, "the survival of the Jewish people is as sure as the eternity of the Torah--the ideal and sources of all knowledge for all ages--as sure as the establishment of the messianic kingdom, and the rebuilding of the Temple in its ancient glory."⁶³ He believed that Jews sanctify the land and not so much the land itself. Chaim Seidler-Feller

⁵⁹Ibid., 32.

⁶⁰Ben-Sasson, 286.

⁶¹Baer, 32.

⁶²Baer, 36.

⁶³Ibid., 38.

states, "The Land is not so much a sacred centre as it is a *centre of sacred behavior*. It is not the Land that holds the key to holiness but the human community inhabiting the Land--most specifically the Jewish people--that is charged with maintaining the Land's holiness."⁶⁴ What causes exile is rape of the land and moral depravity.

Rabbi Moshe ben Nahman (ca. 1195-1270), also known as Nahmanides, was also to play a significant role in understanding exile. Nahmanides believed that exile was a crisis in Divinity itself. As Ben-Sasson states, "There is 'additional' power in God as lord of His own estate compared with the power which He has in the remainder of His world; exile is the disruption of the link with this special 'emanation' of the Divinity."⁶⁵ When God's people do not dwell in God's land then a religious crisis occurs. Prophecy, the nature of faith, world and God are impaired. For Nahmanides, people, land, and Torah all belong together. Ever since creation, the land of Israel was given a special place. Whenever the conduct of the Jews defiled it, it spit them out. The commandment to conquer Palestine given in the Bible is still in effect in exile. The only problem is, is that in foreign countries, the Jews cannot completely fulfill God's laws, but still they are to practice the laws in exile so that when they do reconquer the land of Palestine, they will be familiar with the laws. Fulfillment of the law, redemption, and living on the land will come only with the Messiah. "Only then will there be an end to

⁶⁴Chaim Seidler-Feller, "The Land of Israel: Sanctified Matter or Mythic Space?" Three Faiths, One God Edited by John Hick and Edmund S. Meltzer (Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1989), 151.

⁶⁵Ben-Sasson, 287.

doubt."⁶⁶ The physical condition of Jews like Nahmanides in Spain were prosperous. Because of this, Ben-Sasson comments, "He recognizes the potentials of the physical and spiritual existence of the remainder of the nation and the possibility of preservation to a certain degree of the link with God."⁶⁷

To the contrary, unfavorable conditions were instore for the Jews as they were expelled from Spain and other areas. Before, during, and after these turbulent times, Jewish mysticism began to play an important role in understanding galut. Baer states, "Mysticism took over the task of reinforcing the structure of tradition that had been shaken by rationalism and Christian polemic. . . . the whole life of the Galut took on the character of a secret pattern in a cosmic process of exile and redemption."⁶⁸

Important in Jewish mysticism is Kabbalah. Kabbalah is a term which simply means "tradition," and is most often associated with the esoteric teachings and mysticism of Judaism, especially those from the Middle Ages on. Rather than give a detailed explanation or exploration of Kabbalah, it would better serve our purposes to look at the main ideas of Kabbalah concerning God and exile. Kabbalah contains three elements: mysticism, esotericism, and theosophy. According to Gershom Scholem, in the mystical sense, Kabbalah "seeks an apprehension of God and creation whose intrinsic elements are beyond the grasp of the intellect. . . ." It emphasizes both God's transcendence and immanence which are revelation, but God is seen most clearly through human

⁶⁶Baer, 51-52.

⁶⁷Ben-Sasson, 287.

⁶⁸Baer, 50.

introspection. In the realm of theosophy, Kabbalah "seeks to reveal the mysteries of the hidden life of God and the relationships between the divine life on the one hand and the life of man and creation on the other." Finally, Kabbalah is esoteric in that it "can be transmitted, but those who possess it are either forbidden to pass it on or do not wish to do so."⁶⁹ That which was passed on was believed to be part of the oral law given to Moses at Sinai.

Lodahl says, ". . . in the Kabbalah a hermeneutic of exile displaced the dominant rabbinic hermeneutic of certainty and divine power."⁷⁰ Part of the hermeneutic was the understanding that the universe was fractured internally.

Scholem comments,

. . . the historical exile of the Jewish people also has its spiritual causation in various disturbances and faults in the cosmic harmony for which it serves as a concrete and concentrated symbol. The situation of the spiritual worlds at the time of the exile was completely different from that ideal state in which they were supposed to exist according to the divine plan and in which they will find themselves at the time of redemption.⁷¹

For some Kabbalists (such as Isaac Luria, see below), Scholem states, ". . . the exile of Israel is connected with Adam's sin, the outcome of which was the scattering of the holy sparks, both of the Shekhinah and of Adam's soul. When the sparks became diffused even further in Adam's descendants, the mission of gathering them and raising them up, that is, of preparing the way for redemption, was awarded to Israel. The exile is not, therefore, merely a punishment and a trial but is a mission as well. The Messiah will not come until the good in the universe has been completely winnowed out from the evil . . . "the ingathering of the exiles itself means the gathering of all the sparks that were in exile."⁷²

⁶⁹Gershom Scholem, "Kabbalah," Encyclopaedia Judaica, vol. 10 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1971), 490.

⁷⁰Lodahl, 83.

⁷¹Scholem, "Kabbalah," 617.

⁷²Ibid., 618-619.

The Kabbalah was a means or method whereby many Jews in galut were able to make some sense out of their existence, most significantly in circumstances of persecution, and still maintain some spiritual sense to their belief that someday they would return to the land of Palestine.

A significant kabbalist was Isaac Luria (1534-1572) who lived in the Palestinian village of Safed. After the expulsion of Jews from Spain and other countries, Luria rethought the hermeneutic of exile in a creation myth. Lodahl states, "Here God, humanity and creation are envisioned as ever participating within the tensions of presence and absence, indwelling and exile."⁷³ This divine drama includes three cosmic moments: tsimtsum (creation), shevirah (fall), and tikkun (redemption). With tsimtsum God creates creation out of His own being, that somehow God shrank in His being, a form of divine galut. Lodahl states, "God's own galut, then, becomes the primary cosmological fact which underlies all historical or existential experiences of galut."⁷⁴ He adds, "Already in the first moment of creation, there is a postponement of divine presence, an exile of God which is simultaneously both from and into God's own self in order to 'make space' for creation, to give birth to a creative space. This is the divine self-divestment, a divestment of both full presence and absolute power."⁷⁵ God's next moment is shevirah which is a self-investment. God underestimated or miscalculated this and somehow created a brokenness in creation, leaving nothing unbroken. This moment is also a galut for God in that God's Shekhinah

⁷³Lodahl, 93.

⁷⁴Ibid., 94.

⁷⁵Ibid., 94.

(presence) is exiled from the world. "With Luria, existence is envisioned to have been exilic from the moment of its original impulse out of God. To exist is to exist in exile, and even God is not immune. . . ."⁷⁶ God wants to end exile but cannot do so without the help of humanity, which is seen in the third moment called tsimtsum. This term describes the human responsibility in mending the rift in God by Torah observance and meditation. The coming of the Messiah who would mend this rift has been permanently postponed. Lodahl says, "Perhaps the full presence of deity, manifesting a primordial unity and fullness, is forever exiled from human experience, a postponed presence."⁷⁷ Luria's position may seem highly imaginative, yet for the Jewish people who had been in "exile" for 1500 years with many false Messiahs arising and no potential for redemption of the land of Palestine, Luria's ideas find a more welcome context.

The humanist Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508) could be considered a central figure in the development of the historical ideas of Judaism. He looked at the Bible historically and viewed galut in terms of Hellenistic and Medieval eyes, and also through evolutionary-historical eyes. By this later approach, he believed galut to be coming to an end. One of the reasons for diaspora was the dissemination of Judaism among the peoples. He considered the expulsions from Spain in 1492 and the events of his own time as closer steps to messianic times. Redemption had already begun. Only God knew the end of Galut so Jews should not try to free themselves before the appointed time.⁷⁸ According to

⁷⁶Ibid., 95.

⁷⁷Ibid., 96.

⁷⁸Baer, 60-68.

Ben-Sasson, Abravanel saw a threefold gain from the galut: "The steadfastness of Israel as manifested in endurance of suffering, in holding fast to the faith in disputation and in maintaining purity of religion and worship."⁷⁹

As the Jews were driven from Spain, Portugal, and Italy during the late Middle Ages, a time of persecution was coming to an end. Many Jews during this time were either forced to be baptized or forced to flee. It was believed by many that God had forsaken His people. Messianic expectations and new thoughts of immigration to Palestine quickly arose. In 1560, a Safed rabbi wrote, "No Jew has lived in Spain for seventy years, and we are sure that no Jew will ever again pitch his tent there, for God will soon gather together the scattered remnants of his people of Israel."⁸⁰

Solomon Ibn Verga, who immigrated to Portugal in 1492 with other exiles, wrote a book called Shevet Yehuda (Rod of Judah) which looks at the reasons lying behind the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in the guise of fiction. His views show an enlightened Jew rooted in tradition. Baer states, "Ibn Verga sees the Galut as a trial imposed by God, but he is ready to admit a causal-historical interpretation in addition to the religious interpretation: 'For if our merits are small, then the Galut will continue through natural causes.'"⁸¹ According to Baer, for Ibn Verga the reason other nations hate the Jews is because, "The ruling nation seeks to transform other peoples into its own image."⁸² Most of the persecution, according to Ibn Verga, comes from

⁷⁹Ben-Sasson, 289.

⁸⁰Quoted by Baer on 69.

⁸¹Ibid., 78-79.

⁸²Ibid., quoted on 79.

uneducated mobs and not the ruling class. "The hatred of the people rests on religious fanaticism, stimulated by the monks, on economic hardship, on the envy of the Christians and the greed and arrogance of the Jews."⁸³ Ben-Sasson puts these reasons for hatred succinctly: ". . . on the one hand, religious fanaticism which paves the way to belief in fantastic libels against the Jews, on the other, the desire for loot and the fact that every community 'seeks to absorb its neighbor and to integrate it within itself.'"⁸⁴ Ibn Verga believes that "the Jews could not live together in a state of their own, but would destroy themselves by internal conflict."⁸⁵ Thus, he sees no real political solution to the problem of the Jews, but rather sees the solution in religious tolerance.

The thought of Judah Lowe ben Bezalel (c. 1525-1609), also known as the Maharal of Prague, shows one who had both positive and negative experiences of galut. Ben-Sasson states, "The Maharal divides the 'night of exile' into three 'watches': the first is one of painful slavery, the second of massacres and forced conversions, while the third--that in which he is living and which appears to him the last before dawn--consists essentially of consecutive expulsions." In addition, the Kabbalah can be seen with Bezalel when he believes that ". . . exile is an anomaly in the eternal natural order, every deviation from which cannot be but casual and temporary."⁸⁶ Bezalel considers exile as the opportunity for Jews in exile to prepare for the era of

⁸³Ibid., 79.

⁸⁴Ben-Sasson, 289.

⁸⁵Baer, 81.

⁸⁶Ben-Sasson, 290.

perfection when they will rule. Spiritual factors unite the nation and are expressed by national solidarity and Torah study. To the question of why the Jews undergo oppression and expulsion, he replies, "this world is not the portion of Israel," so it is to their benefit that Jews are removed from the benefits of having land.⁸⁷

Another significant personage is Simone Luzzatto (1583-1663) who wrote Discorso circa il stato degl' Hebrei ("Discourse on the Condition of the Jews," Venice, 1638) which posed the rights of Jews in Venice and the advantage to the state of having Jews as residents. He was the first to deal with Galut in economic terms. Wherever Jews reside commerce flourishes. "The Galut made the Jews a commercial people, and this gave the Jews their special and useful role."⁸⁸ Jews should be treated justly because this shows the wisdom and justice of the regime.⁸⁹ Baer states, "His political-humanistic thinking brings the problem of the Galut back to the elementary concepts of freedom and servitude. This sort of rationalism knows no theology and no philosophy of the Galut. The Galut is simply bleak--lacking political freedom and lacking in consequence all higher culture."⁹⁰ He made the destiny of the Jewish nation dependent solely on God.

As was mentioned, many false messianic movements arose throughout Jewish galut. Significant in this regard was Sabbatai Zevi who created messianic revival around 1665 that went throughout much of the Jewish world. He

⁸⁷Ibid., 291.

⁸⁸Baer, 84.

⁸⁹Ibid., 89.

⁹⁰Ibid., 90.

combined rationalism, mythology and mysticism, and the traditional faith to show that messianic times were near. Bear says that for Zevi, ". . . all necessary conditions had existed, but at the last moment this generation had been found unworthy and an incomprehensible demonic power had halted the whole process."⁹¹ Gershom Scholem states,

Among the believers and penitents a new emotion, which was not restricted to the traditional expectation of a political deliverance of Israel alone, began to make itself felt. This is not to say that hope for a divine liberation from the bondage and degradation of exile was not an important element in the general contagion, but rather that various psychological reactions which accompanied it soon took on an independent existence of their own.⁹²

As Scholem goes on to describe, the times were ripe for such expectations with the history of Kabbalah and Isaac Luria's writings prominent. People believed a new era of history of redemption was beginning and they were excited to be part of it. Zevi later converted to Islam, but his movement persisted for about 150 years and was labeled as heresy.⁹³

Another seventeenth century Jew significant in our exploration was Manasseh Ben Israel who addressed his writings to Gentiles in a missiological fashion. He "expressed not only the desire for survival of the galut but also its tendency toward extension with the expansion of the known world and the discoveries of new territorial and social horizons." He believed that as Jews were forced from one location to another, they enriched the countries to which they came bringing with them their commerce and religion. The redemption

⁹¹Ibid., 107.

⁹²Gershom Scholem, The Messianic Idea in Judaism (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 86.

⁹³Ibid., 86-88.

would come some day when the prophecy of Daniel is fulfilled and the exile has extended to the "extremities of the world."⁹⁴

Around the eighteenth century there seemed to be two streams of thought: one stream was the "naive mythology of history full of wonderful light and an involved and metaphysical system of historical speculation, half magical in its atmosphere"; the other was a rational philosophical trend later leading to skepticism. But both of these trends remained bound to the idea of people, land, and Torah. The people stayed together because of a national consciousness of the real land of Palestine.⁹⁵

According to Parkes, several things helped Jewish unity during the diaspora from the Middle Ages until modern times when the concentration of Jews was in Eastern Europe. First is living in compact masses: "in culture and religion, the land of Israel had been transferred to Eastern Europe." Second is living among the lowest peasants which meant that "there was nothing to tempt a Jew to be anything other than Jewish, or to seek cultural interests outside his own circle."⁹⁶ A peculiar culture developed. Parkes describes it the following way:

Its language was Yiddish, liberally sprinkled with Hebrew words, its folklore was Jewish, but perhaps somewhat sprinkled with beliefs from the Gentile world around, its customs had their origin in rabbinic teaching, and were universally accepted as authoritative in every department of life, its dress was peculiar to Jews; and it was as completely a 'Jewish' life as any Jew could hope to live in the land of Israel itself.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Ben-Sasson, 292.

⁹⁵Baer, 109-110.

⁹⁶Parkes, 145.

⁹⁷Ibid.

Furthermore, Jewish religion found expression in two forms, rabbinism which was becoming an increasingly a form of pure intellectual escapism, and the Chassidistic movement which arose as an emotional appeal against the intellectualism. Chasidism, founded by Baal Shem Tob, believed "that at the centre of religion was joy; worship should be founded on and express joy; social life and meeting should be filled with joy. And the source of that joy should be the realization of the indwelling presence of God. . . ." ⁹⁸ Chasidism was popular, in part because, according to Parkes, "Such a religion was admirably calculated to counter the gloom of the long northern winter, the primitive poverty in which most Jews lived, the narrowness and the overcrowding of their homes, and the external restrictions of their existence."⁹⁹

As a conclusion of this quick walk through Jewish thinking on galut, several more provisional theses can be offered. First, Jews were able to survive in exile because of strong religious convictions. Second, exile can be a positive missiological moment in that it spreads the message of God. Third, long exiles produce times of serious question-asking about items of faith, with answers all the way from unorthodox to ultra-orthodox. Fourth, during the darkest times of exile, the stronger become stronger and the weak tend to become weaker or even to apostasize. Finally, exile leads one to turn to one solid foundation, which in the case of the Jews was Torah.

THE ZIONIST MOVEMENT

⁹⁸Ibid., 146-147.

⁹⁹Ibid., 147.

As the nineteenth century began, Jews continued to hold out hope in some day returning to the land of Palestine. This hope was alive, and as Parkes states, ". . . seldom did the land become mere tradition, seldom did it become just a dream of the future. Almost always, it had a spiritual presence, an immediacy for the soul. Reverence and will embraced it in a similar way."¹⁰⁰ Not only was this hope alive, but it grew in intensity. This intensity was fed by the rise of nationalism during the nineteenth century. Hans Kohn says, "The faith of the nineteenth century was its nationalism; more precisely its state-nationalism, the attachment of a sovereign people to a specific territory that it owned and possessed. . . . Nationalism was the principle that separated and attached."¹⁰¹ The nationalistic faith of many people was disintegrated after World War I. It may have sparked a fervor for the principle, but the facts of destruction and the gruesome war machine ate away at hope for many. In the nineteenth century, young Jews determined to live off the land began to immigrate. Settling the land was almost impossible because the land had laid in waste for so long and the constant threat of bedouins ravaging their work remained.

Howard Sachar sets the context of exile quite well by observing two distinct movements within Judaism during the nineteenth century. On the one hand, Western Jews tended to accept the nineteenth-century consensus that loyalty to a national state was incompatible with pluralism in cultures. In increasing numbers, they dropped the traditional allusions to Zion in their ritual observances and spoke of the messianic age less in terms of return to the Land of Israel

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 139.

¹⁰¹Hans Kohn, "Nationalism," in The Jew: Essays from Martin Buber's Journal, Der Jude, 1916-1928, Edited by Arthur A. Cohen (Alabama: University of Alabama, 1980), 21.

than of a miraculous 'end of days,' or of an era of 'universal brotherhood.'¹⁰²

On the other hand, Eastern Jews, especially Russian Jews, saw things differently. For them, "distraught and quarantined under the tsars, clinging fast to their accumulated sacred literature, the Holy Land was no mere featureless idyll, to be embellished in lullabies and fireside tales. The recollection of its loss was a visceral wound."¹⁰³ This was apparent in their holidays and daily prayers. The final section of this paper will explore the concepts behind these two movements, first by investigating the Zionist movement and those who wished to return to Palestine, followed by an examination of the views of those Jews who did not wish to return to Palestine.

One of the first nationalists and forerunner of Zionism was the German Moses Hess who set forth Jewish nationalism in a book entitled, Rome and Jerusalem. His thesis was: "We [Jews] shall always remain strangers among the nations; these, it is true, will grant us rights from feelings of humanity and justice, but they will never respect us so long as we place our great memories in the second rank, and accept as our first principle, 'ubi bene, ibi patria.'"¹⁰⁴ Another significant figure was the Russian Leo Pinkster, who wrote in 1882, Autoemancipation, where he argued for the solidifying of Jews into a Jewish nation through a regenerated "national consciousness."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²Howard Sachar, A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to our Time (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1976), 4.

¹⁰³Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁴Elmer Berger, The Jewish Dilemma (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1945), 64-65.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 66.

The Zionist movement arose as a call for Jews to return to Palestine and to create a Jewish state. It was a call to end the exile that had lasted close to two millennia. Zionism was brought about by three forces: (1) the tribulations of the Jews, (2) their hope for redemption in their ancient homeland, and (3) the advent of modern nationalism.¹⁰⁶ Theodore Herzl was a key person in nineteenth and twentieth century Judaism because he transformed the attempts of settling Palestine that had been going on for some time without much success into this international movement called Zionism. Major books have been written on Herzl and Zionism and it is unfortunate that Zionism will be given only cursory attention here.

According to Arnold Eisen, Herzl got the Zionist movement going by publishing Der Judenstaat, in 1896. It did not matter to Herzl where the land of the Jews was located. God did not have to help, rather "it was the people who would return, propelled by the power of their idea."¹⁰⁷ Zionist groups and leaders agreed in principles stressed by the ancient prophets: "the sanctity of life, peace, justice, freedom, equality, brotherhood, and mercy." These were translated into modern goals: "the establishment of a democratic, productive, tolerant, peace-loving Jewish state."¹⁰⁸ Herzl based his movement on two factors: Jews were in a plight, and the Jews were one people. Where other plans and movements had failed to end galut, Herzl believed he could be successful because he accepted Jewish nationhood. Eisen states succinctly,

¹⁰⁶Eliav, 181.

¹⁰⁷Eisen, 60.

¹⁰⁸Eliav, 185. The question remains, has Zionism achieved these goals in a positive manner? One has to wonder after the displacement of 1.5 million Arabs.

If jews were to live, as Jews, they would have to do so somewhere else. Pious Jews had been able to endure life in exile for centuries because of their conviction that God watched over them there and would one day bring the Messiah. Modern Jews, informed by sociological understanding, knew that without such faith there was no way for the Jewish people to preserve their distinctiveness among the nations, except for persecutions which strengthened the Jewish "spirit" (i.e., identity) while destroying the body

--hardly a bargain.¹⁰⁹

The Zionistic spirit can be seen in the following quotes of Zionists:

Zionism is the lineal heir of the attachment to Zion which led the Babylonian exiles under Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple, and which flamed up in the heroic struggle of the Maccabees against Antiochus Epiphanes. The idea that it is a set-back of Jewish history is a controversial fiction. The great bulk of the Jewish history is a controversial fiction.

The great bulk of the Jewish people have throughout their history remained faithful to the dream of a restoration of their national life in Judea.¹¹⁰

The return to Zion must be preceded by our return to Judaism.¹¹¹

The new Judea must be the spiritual descendant of old Judea; and the mission of Judea, new or old, is first of all to be Judea.¹¹²

We will return to Zion as we went forth, bringing back the faith we carried away with us.¹¹³

Zionism finally had its way when the State of Israel was created in 1948. Though there were many more factors involved in the creation of the State of Israel in Palestine, surely the Zionistic movement put the hopes of so many Jews into a concrete political drive.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹Eisen, 96.

¹¹⁰ Lucien Wolf, 1910, in Encyclopedie Britannica, quoted in Joseph Herman Hertz, ed., A Book of Jewish Thoughts (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1926), 122.

¹¹¹Theodore Herzl, 1897, quoted by Ibid., 125.

¹¹²J.H. Hertz, 1918, quoted by Ibid.

¹¹³Mordecai M. Noah, 1824, quoted by Ibid.

¹¹⁴Is Israel a Jewish state? By looking at statistics one has to say, No.

Zionism was one side of at least a two sided coin. As previously mentioned the other side of the coin saw no need to create a Jewish state, and in some respects, had a positive outlook on exile. Elmer Berger gives this side of the issue articulation in his book, The Jewish Dilemma. Berger was an American Rabbi writing just at the time when the State of Israel was being formed. By this book's very title one can again see that a dilemma had been facing the Jewish people: what should one make of the galut and what should a Jew think of nationalism and Zionism?

Berger criticizes the Zionist movement. He says that the cry of Jewish nationalism was that only in Palestine could Jews be normal people. He quotes a defender of Jewish nationalism speaking to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. Congress: "The Jewish people will never be able to do in any other land outside of Palestine what they are able to do there under the impulse of the idealistic drive that has its roots in centuries of history."¹¹⁵ Nationalists have spoken of the "homeless of the Jews," and "ancient and historic rights." Furthermore, Zionism "derives from the fundamental premise of their philosophy that emancipation has failed, that the Jew can never know freedom or normality, or at least not equal freedom and normality, in any nation other than Palestine."¹¹⁶ Emancipationists tend to be optimists about the evolution of human behavior, whereas nationalists are pessimistic. One argument against making Palestine a Jewish state is that it

According to Eliav who wrote in 1988, in the area controlled by Israel there are 3.5 million Jews and 2.0 million Arabs with more Arabic children than Jewish children. The population will soon be evenly divided between Arabs and Jews (Eliav, 202).

¹¹⁵Quoted by Berger on 50-51.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 54.

does to Arabs what has happened to Jews.

Berger sees the problem lying with the issue, who are "Jews"? Is a person a Jew by being a part of a nation of Jews (like the state of Israel), or is one a Jew simply in religion (Jews do not need a state because one can be a Jew anywhere)? A practical problem arose in countries where Jews became integrated in their societies in that it became difficult to establish purely Jewish communities. For Berger, then, Jewishness has become a matter of conscience. As the ghettos disappeared and Jews found more acceptance in their communities and countries, the religious nostalgia for Palestine declined. Jews began to see the world as an inviting place to live.¹¹⁷ Berger states, "Emancipation was the fulfillment of the desires of ordinary human beings who happened to be Jews, to be free."¹¹⁸ The German Jew Moses Mendelssohn first made emancipation for Jews a conscious program. Berger writes, "He was insistent that Jews were as good as other men and that what they needed was opportunity to move with the expanding freedom that was on the march through Europe. He was also insistent that Jews must prepare themselves to take advantage of freedom."¹¹⁹ Berger concludes his work by emphasizing, "Recognizing that Jews wish peace, security and opportunity in the places they have called home, it becomes obvious that emancipation and not Zionism is the liberal, modern answer to the so-called 'Jewish problem.'"¹²⁰

It could be stated that both sides of the issue have legitimate concerns. One side has found itself in the midst of persecution and hardship

¹¹⁷Ibid., 59ff.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 170.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 177.

and longs for the freedom of a homeland. The other side has enjoined relative freedom and integration and the cry of a homeland is nonsense. Exile is seen within two very different circumstances.

CONCLUSION

This paper actually has a two-fold purpose as stated in the introduction: (1) to seek to understand better the concept of exile for the Jewish people, and based upon this Jewish experience (2) to seek to offer theological statements of exile that could be universally applicable. Tentative conclusions have been offered along the way which lead towards fulfilling these purposes. The following is a summary of the major conclusions which seek to journey towards a theology of exile. A universal statement is offered with the specific application to the Jewish situation found in parenthesis.

1. Exile presupposes possession of security (land). This security for the Jews came in the way of a promise made long ago which remained in effect throughout the ages.

2. Possession of promise (land) necessitates responsibility (law). Gift requires accountability.

3. Possession of promise (land) is a free gift of God's grace and can be taken away at any time if judgment is incurred.

4. Exile is a relative term. One can have possession of promise (land) and still live in exile unless the promise is kept in the proper perspective.

5. Exile provides one with opportunity through necessity for spiritual revival because security is no longer found in self or in some other secondary element (land) but in God.

6. One means to survive in exile is to be secure in one's religious convictions (promise and possession of the land).

7. How the Jews viewed exile was often directly proportional to their physical circumstances. On the one hand, if the exilic moment was harsh, one tended to look to past promises or future redemption. On the other, if exile became relatively easy, one tended to find security in the present situation.

8. As Paul wrote to the Roman church (Romans 5:3-4), "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance produces character; and character produces hope."

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