

Expectations for Restoration among the Judean Exiles in Babylonia During the Exilic Period

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“It will be a long time” (Jer 29:28). These words, allegedly sent to the Judean exiles in Babylonia, were meant to suppress expectations that existed among them, and possibly also among some of those remaining in Judah, that the exile would end soon (Jer 28:1–4). Jeremiah declares that the opposite is true: the exiles must prepare for a long stay in Babylonia and therefore should build houses, plant gardens and do as much as they could to improve their living conditions until their long-awaited restoration.

Did Jeremiah’s words indeed respond to attitudes that existed among the exiles in Babylonia? Did the exiles expect a quick return to Israel, or did they estimate that their stay in exile would be long or maybe permanent? This paper will investigate two exilic period sources that might shed new light on this issue: the first is the prophecies appearing in the book of Ezekiel which most scholars agree were created among the Judean exiles in Babylonia during the exilic period.¹ The second is the Āl-Yāhūdu tablets that document

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¹ Although the book of Ezekiel has probably undergone a redaction process, its exact textual-redaction history is a matter of debate which lies beyond the scope of this paper. Most scholars, whether they adopt holistic or redactional approaches to the book, agree that the early sixth century provides the most suitable context for Ezekiel’s activity, and that the book’s composition process did not extend beyond the exilic period. See Walther Zimmerli, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 1–24*, Hermeneia, trans. Ronald E. Clements and J.D. Martin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 68–74; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, AB 22A (New-York: Doubleday, 1983), 18–27; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1–24*, NICOT (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), 17–23; Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 3–16; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 75–104; Tova Ganzel, *Ezekiel’s Visionary Temple in Babylonian Context*, BZAW 539 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), 7–10. Thomas Krüger, *Geschichtskonzepte im Ezechielbuch*, BZAW 180 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 317–398 distinguishes between an early book of Ezekiel (EB) and later redactional material but dates the issuance of the entire prophetic book late in the exilic period. Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, trans. David Green (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 346–355 marked the origin of the book a bit later, between 545 and 515 BCE.

The historical references in Ezekiel match well what is known of the early sixth century BCE from extra-biblical sources. The book as a whole is not aware of the Babylonian failure to conquer Egypt or the fall of the Babylonian empire. It deals with national and theological questions raised by the exile and the destruction. Ezekiel’s restoration oracles (34–48) imagine Israel’s restoration in a different manner than actually happened, making it less likely that they were created *post eventum*. To these considerations one may add that the amount of Babylonian literary and linguistic influence in Ezekiel makes a Babylonian provenance

the Judean exiles' daily life in the years 572–477 BCE.² I will argue that each of these exilic-period sources *independently* reflect concrete expectations for restoration and that the exiles themselves would soon return to their homeland.

God's Compassion for His Holy Name

Ezek 36:16–38 conveys that Israel's conduct in the land had defiled it. Therefore, God judged them as they deserved and scattered them among the nations. However, when the exiles reached Babylonia, the nations were able to identify them and to say of them "These are the people of YHWH, and they left His land" (36:20).³ The nations deduced from

particularly likely. See e.g., Stephen P. Garfinkel, *Studies in Akkadian Influences in the Book of Ezekiel* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1983); Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1991); Isaac Gluska, "Akkadian Influences on the Book of Ezekiel" in *An Experienced Scribe Who Neglects Nothing: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Jacob Klein*, ed. Yitzchak Sefati, et. al. (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2005), 718–737; Abraham Winitzer, "Assyriology and Jewish Studies in Tel Aviv: Ezekiel Among the Babylonian Literati," in *Encounters by the Rivers of Babylon: Scholarly Conversations between Jews, Iranians, and Babylonians in Antiquity*, ed. Uri Gabbay and Shai Secunda (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 163–216; David S. Vanderhooft, "Ezekiel in and on Babylon," *Transeuphratène* 46 (2014): 99–119; Shawn Z. Aster, "Ezekiel's Adaptation of Mesopotamian *Melammu*," *WdO* 45 (2015): 10–21; Ganzel, *Visionary Temple*. Much of the linguistic evidence is assembled in Rimón Kasher, *Ezekiel*, Mikra Leyisra'el (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2004), 68–72 (Hebrew).

It should also be mentioned that even if portions of the book were written and added at a later time, those portions remained much in line with the content of Ezekiel's previous chapters, and as will be shown below, they reveal a coherent message regarding the timing of Israel's restoration. Thus, to avoid awkward wording, and without implying that there is a single redactor or author for the book, I will refer to Ezekiel as the prophetic figure addressed in the book and discuss its prophetic units as a cluster reflecting exilic period trends and expectations, whether they were created by the prophet himself or by his school.

² Laurie E. Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch, *Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites in Babylonia in the Collection of David Sofer*, CUSAS 28 (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2014); Cornelia Wunsch, *Judeans by the Waters of Babylon: New Historical Evidence in Cuneiform Sources from Rural Babylonia: Texts from the Schøyen Collection*, BaAr 6 (Dresden: ISLET, 2022); Aminah Fadhil Al-Bayati, *The Archive of Zababa-šarru-ušur: Texts from the Iraq Museum*, BaAr 8 (Dresden: ISLET, 2021).

³ Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 204 maintained that these words are only an imaginative projection by the prophet. However, the Āl-Yāhūdu tablets indicate that the nations could have known these facts, thus emphasizing the exilic setting of this prophetic unit. The theophoric element 'Yahu' in the Judean names was occasionally prefixed with the DINGIR determinative indicating the Babylonian scribes' knowledge that *yaḥu* is a deity (see e.g., CUSAS 28 4:2). Moreover, the town's name, Āl-Yāhūdu, Judah town, hints at the origin of its dwellers and in the earliest tablets (CUSAS 28 1; BaAr 6 1) it is called *ālu ša Yāḥūdāia*, the Judeans' town. Therefore, it is obvious that the 'nations' could have known that "these are the people of YHWH" who "have come out of his land."

Israel's presence in exile, that God did not want, or worse, was unable to protect them and keep them in His land, and this caused God's holy name to be desecrated.⁴

According to the book of Ezekiel, Israel's poor condition may lead to the desecration of God's name, and God's utter unwillingness to face this result has guided His actions throughout history. This is, for example, the guiding principle of Ezek 20, which emphasizes that God has repeatedly avoided the destruction of Israel "for the sake of His name" (Ezek 20:9, 14, 22).⁵ However, Ezek 20 anticipates the effect of Israel's *destruction* on God's name, and not of Israel's exile. Rather, Ezek 20:23 assumes that Israel's exile would *not* affect God's name, and for this reason, God, who initially wanted to destroy Israel, was satisfied with their exile. Ironically, what God tried to avoid at all costs throughout history, happened due to another unexpected factor.

The desecration of God's holy name has caused Him to have mercy which is expressed by means of a unique usage of the verb *חמל* within the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel's judgement oracles use this verb mostly in a negative context and relate to God's declarations *not* to have mercy on Israel.⁶ In this case, however, God will have mercy, on

⁴ See Walther Zimmerli, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 25–48*, Hermeneia; trans. James D. Martin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 247; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, AB 22B (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 728–729; Baruch J. Schwartz, "Ezekiel's Dim View of Israel's Restoration," in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives*, SBLSS 9, ed. Margaret S. Odell and John T. Strong (Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 43–67.

⁵ The compositional history of Ezek 20 and 36 and the complicated literary connections between them attracted much scholarly attention. Rolf Rendtorff, "Ezekiel 20 and 36:16ff. in the Framework of the Composition of the Book," in idem, *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 190–195 considered 36:16–38 a secondary development of Ezek 20, using ideas and theology from typical divine utterances elsewhere in Ezekiel. As for Ezek 36:16–38, several scholars argued for the gradual development of the Masoretic text identifying vv. 16–23b; 23c–32; 33–36 and 37–38 as subsequent textual expansions which also had an impact on the gradual growth of Ezek 20 (especially 20:40–44). For a variety of scholarly opinions, see Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 414; idem, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 176–178; Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel*, FOTL 19 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 140; Franz Sedlmeier, *Studien zu Komposition und Theologie von Ezechiel 20*, SBB 21 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1990), 107; Anja Klein, *Schriftauslegung im Ezechielbuch: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Ez 34–39*, BZAW 391 (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2008), 84–85; Penelope Barter, "The Reuse of Ezekiel 20 in the Composition of Ezekiel 36.16–32," in *Ezekiel: Current Debates and Future Directions*, FAT 112, ed. William A. Tooman and Penelope Barter (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 120–137.

On the other hand, several scholars have argued for the unity of Ezek 20. See e.g., Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 377–388; Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, WBC 29 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 5; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 612–613. In my opinion, it is not inconceivable that the prophet himself complemented some of his early utterances while applying his typical style and ideological framework. If this is correct, Ezek 20 and 36:16–38 should not necessarily be considered the work of different authors. Either way, as mentioned above (note 1), the redactional process that led to the composition of 36:16–38 and its literary connections to Ezek 20 should not be dated beyond the exilic period.

⁶ See *חמל לא* in Ezek 5:11; 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:5, 10; 24:14; Schwartz, "Dim View," 53.

His holy name, rather than on Israel.⁷ This mercy would set Israel's restoration process in motion. God will act to sanctify His name in the eyes of the nations, and since the very presence of Israel in exile has caused His name to be desecrated, this presence must be completely terminated. God will take Israel from among the nations and bring them back to their land (36:24). It seems that God's complete unwillingness to bear the desecration of His holy name for a long time necessitates Israel's rapid restoration.

Surprisingly, God's concern for His holy name is expressed with a *wayyiqtol* verbal form: וְאַחֲמַל (36:21). This indicates that, just like the preceding *wayyiqtol* verbs in vv. 17–20, it relates to something that has already happened. It completely differs from the following *weqatal* verbs in vv. 23 and onward, which deliver statements about the future.⁸ Thus, God's concern for His holy name is, according to Ezek 36, something that *has already occurred*.⁹ Therefore, everything that must result from it, i.e., Israel's restoration process, will surely begin shortly since the event that initiates it *has already taken place*. This reflects the author's expectation that Israel's restoration will occur soon, probably in his very generation.

⁷ This is consistent with the following declaration “Not for your sake will I act, O House of Israel, but for My holy name” (36:22) and indicates MT's priority over LXX καὶ ἐφεισάμην αὐτῶν (36:21), which relates to the divine mercy on the people.

⁸ Ezek 36:23c–38 do not appear in the Greek papyrus 967 and several recent studies have maintained that it reflects an early Hebrew edition which differs from MT. See Johan Lust, “Ezekiel 36–40 in the Oldest Greek Manuscript,” *CBQ* 43 (1981): 517–533; Ashley S. Crane, *Israel's Restoration: A Textual-Comparative Exploration of Ezekiel 36–39*, VTSup 122 (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Ingrid E. Lilly, *Two Books of Ezekiel: Papyrus 967 and the Masoretic Text as Variant Literary Editions*, VTSup 150 (Leiden: Brill, 2012). However, the recognition and declaration formulas in 36:23 do not necessarily indicate the boundaries of the (original) prophetic unit since in numerous cases they do not conclude the literary unit in which they appear (see e.g., Ezek 28:22; 35:12 and 5:11; 11:8; 13:8). Moreover, the temporal clause “when I assert my sanctity through you in their sight” (36:23) seems to be a concluding remark relating backwards and not an opening statement relating to what follows. To this one may add the fact that vv. 23c–38 do appear in Hebrew fragments from Masada. See Hector M. Patmore, “The Shorter and Longer Texts of Ezekiel: The Implications of the Manuscripts Finds from Masada and Qumran,” *JSOT* 32 (2007): 232–242. And most importantly, I find Block's observations very compelling since “removing vv. 23c–38 reduces this text to a bland and truncated two-part pronouncement, lacking any explanation of how Yahwe intends to vindicate his holiness” (Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25–48*, NICOT [Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998], 341). In any case it should be noted that God's concern for His holy name and the differentiation between *wayyiqtol* and *weqatal* verbs appear already in vv. 16–23b which are agreed to be part of the original prophetic unit.

⁹ See also Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 247; Rendtorff, “Ezekiel 20 and 36.”

The Restoration of the Land

Many doom oracles in Ezekiel anticipate the land's complete desolation (שממה), with neither man nor beast passing through it.¹⁰ The complete absence of the land's inhabitants, leads to there being no one to cultivate it, and thus the devastation of agriculture only intensifies the destruction that has befallen it.

Ezekiel's restoration oracles emphasize the reversal of the land's condition and elaborate further regarding the land following the destruction. The devastation of agriculture was not only due to Israel's absence, but also to God's direct action, which prevented the land from providing its favor. Thus, Ezekiel announces that God will send rains of blessing that will enable the land to yield its produce (Ezek 34:26–27) and that the trees would once again yield branches and fruits (36:8). This indicates that previously there were no rains (22:24), the land did not yield its produce, and the trees stood as bare, smooth trunks with no branches on them. God's promises to multiply the fruit of the trees and the crops of the fields and not to bring famine upon Israel (36:29–30), indicate that previously the land did not produce its yield and Israel were forced to leave their land and suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. The declaration of the restoration of the towns and the agriculture indicates that previously they were both ruined (36:33–34). Likewise, the announcement that the desolate land shall again be tilled and replanted indicates that previously it became completely waste (36:34–36).

These descriptions may reflect the growing importance of the exilic debate over the possession of the land and an attempt to discredit those who were not exiled.¹¹ They may also reflect historical realities and the Babylonian “scorched earth” policy that left the southern Levant as a desolate buffer zone with Egypt.¹² However, in addition to these, it seems that another factor played a significant role in the formation of Ezekiel's depictions of the Land: Ezek 36:13 admits that the land was rightly accused of playing an agentive, active role in Israel's destruction.¹³ It does not specify how exactly the land bereaved and devoured its inhabitants, but other occurrences of שכל indicate that diseases, water

¹⁰ See Ezek 6:14; 12:19; 14:15 15:8; 23:33; 33:28; 35:15. See also 29:9–11; 32:13–15.

¹¹ See e.g., Jean-Philippe Delorme, “בית ישראל in Ezekiel: Identity Construction and the Exilic Period,” *JBL* 138 (2019): 121–141.

¹² See e.g., Avraham Faust, *Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period: The Archaeology of Desolation* (Atlanta: SBL, 2012); Paul-Alain Beaulieu, “Judah in the Shadow of Babylon,” *HeBAI* 9 (2020): 4–19.

¹³ MT's active verb (וּמְשַׁכֵּלֶת גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ) should be preferred over LXX passive τεχνωμένην ὑπὸ τοῦ ἔθνους σου ἐγένετο (וּמְשַׁכֵּלֶת מִגּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה) for several reasons: the passive form does not tally with the active verb אָכַל at the verse's beginning; it does not fit with the nations' words relating to the land's guilt and do not consider it a victim; and it does not correlate to the other occurrences of שכל in vv. 14–15.

contamination (Exod 23:25–26; 2 Kgs 2:19–21) and wild beasts (Lev 26:22; Ezek 5:17; 14:15) may cause the land to bereave its inhabitants. We may conclude that the land “devoured its inhabitants” by these exact means and that beside the destruction caused by Israel’s enemies, the land itself became infertile and harmful to its inhabitants.

These statements regarding the land’s desolation and restoration show many literary affinities to those appearing in Leviticus 26.¹⁴ The debate over the direction of literary dependence between the Priestly writings in the Pentateuch and Ezekiel is well known and need not be rehearsed here in detail. Suffice it to say that alongside the traditional views that argue for unidirectional influence, several recent studies suggested the possibility of a more complex relationship between the two corpora, including bidirectional influences and revisions.¹⁵ Nevertheless, in the case of the land’s destruction and recovery, Lyons has convincingly showed that Ezekiel (especially chapters 34 and 36) is the borrowing text which alludes and extends the Holiness Code’s language of security and plenty.¹⁶ This indicates that Ezekiel was familiar with Lev 26, relied on it as a conceptual framework, and anticipated the fulfillment of both its threats and promises.

In Ezek 36:8, the prophet declares that the land’s poor condition is about to change: “But you, mountains of Israel, shall yield your produce and bear your fruit for My people Israel, for their return is near.” The *yiqtol* verbs יתנו and יפְרוּ connote the volitive mood here, bordering on the imperative: they are not mere descriptions of future events.¹⁷ God commands the desolate mountains, already at the time when the prophecy is proclaimed and Israel are still in exile, to begin their restoration process.

The land’s restoration will therefore take place in several stages. Following the destruction, the land would be completely empty and desolate, and its agriculture

¹⁴ Compare Lev 26:19 with Ezek 34:26; Lev 26:20 with Ezek 34:27; Lev 26:22 with Ezek 14:15; and Lev 26:13–33 with the numerous depictions of the desolate land discussed above.

¹⁵ See e.g., Christophe L. Nihan, “Ezekiel and the Holiness Legislation: A Plea for Nonlinear Models,” in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel and North America*, FAT 111, ed. Jan C. Gertz, et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 1015–1040 and Ariel Kopilovitz, “What Kind of Priestly Writings did Ezekiel Know?,” in Gertz, et. al., *The Formation of the Pentateuch*, 1041–1054; Walter Bühner, “Ezechiel und die Priesterschrift,” in *Das Buch Ezechiel: Komposition, Redaktion und Rezeption*, ed. Jan C. Gertz, Corinna Körting, and Markus Witte (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 175–206 with references to earlier works.

¹⁶ See Michael A. Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel’s Use of the Holiness Code*, LHBOTS 507 (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 61–84; idem, “Extension and Allusion: The Composition of Ezekiel 34,” in *Ezekiel: Current Debates and Future Directions*, 138–152. See also Avi Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel: A New Approach to an Old Problem* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1982); Jacob Milgrom, “Leviticus 26 and Ezekiel,” in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 57–62.

¹⁷ See Exod 26:1; 27:20; Lev 19:3; GKC §107n.

completely devastated. Ezekiel, of course, knew that his prophecies in this matter had not yet been fulfilled and that the land was still occupied by those who “live in ruins” (33:24). Nevertheless, Ezekiel considers the desolation of the land a necessary phase in Israel’s restoration process and insists that the dwellers of the ruins will be annihilated quickly. This phase of desolation will last some time, but it will not be long, as Ezekiel declares that Israel’s “return is near” (36:8), meaning in the very near future.¹⁸ Already at this point, God commands the mountains to prepare for Israel’s arrival and to begin bearing fruits and growing branches. At this stage, then, Israel is still waiting in exile, while the land is already beginning its recovery. Only after that will Israel be gathered and brought to a fertile and restored land.

It seems that Ezekiel’s priestly heritage and the priestly depiction of the land’s restoration and inheritance in the Holiness Code (H) have played a crucial role in the formation of this gradual restoration process. H proclaims that *the land* should observe a sabbath for the Lord (Lev 25:2–4), and in this regard, its Israelite inhabitants are of secondary importance.¹⁹ As Jeffrey Stackert has emphasized, the land in this case is personified: its productive qualities during the sabbatical cycle’s first six years are conceptualized as labor resembling Israel’s labor during the regular weekdays. Just as Israel should cease from labor during the sabbath, so too the land should refrain from its conventional work during the sabbatical year.²⁰ Since the land’s obligation to stop producing is separate and independent from Israel’s obligation not to cultivate it, there is also a clear separation between the land and its dwellers if the sabbatical years are not observed. Israel will be punished through destruction and exile, while the land, for its part, will be forced to pay off all the years in which it should have been uncultivated (Lev 26:34–35, 43).²¹

The retrospective payoff of the sabbatical years will be done in the same way these years should have been observed in the first place. H forbids sowing and pruning during

¹⁸ For קרב and קרוב denoting ‘come near’, ‘approaching’ in a temporal sense see Gen 27:41; 47:29; Num 24:17; Deut 15:9; Isa 13:6, 22; 46:1; Jer 48:16; Ezek 7:7; 12:23; 30:3; BDB, 897; HALOT 3:1139.

¹⁹ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, AB 3C (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2152–2153 noted that unlike the Jubilee, the sabbatical year does not require a formal sanctification by Israel and is considered to be sanctified by God. Therefore, its restrictions apply to all the land’s inhabitants, including the resident aliens, and not only to the Israelites.

²⁰ Jeffrey Stackert, *Rewriting the Torah: Literary Revision in Deuteronomy and the Holiness Legislation*, FAT 52 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 113–164; idem, “The Sabbath of the Land in the Holiness Legislation: Combining Priestly and Non-Priestly Perspectives,” *CBQ* 73 (2011): 239–250.

²¹ For this meaning of רצה עון see Isa 40:2; BDB, 935; HALOT 3:1282; Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), 189; Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 49–74.

the sabbatical year (Lev 25:4–5). As a result, the yield of that year would decrease significantly. The uncultivated land would still produce some ‘aftergrowth’ (ספִיחַ), and the untrimmed vines would still yield some grapes. However, this yield will not suffice to provide for an entire year since it can be consumed by anyone, and not only by the field’s owner (Lev 25:6–7). For this reason, H acknowledges the concern that may arise among the farmers maintaining the sabbatical year’s regulations (Lev 25:20). It assures that the yield of the sixth year (and not the aftergrowth of the seventh year in which the land is supposed to rest) would be so great that it would suffice for providing for the next following years.

We may conclude that during the sabbatical year the land should rest and cease from yielding its produce. Therefore, the payoff of the sabbatical years in Leviticus 26:34–35 aims at a period in which Israel’s exile would make the land desolate and uncultivated, and then it could pay off its personal debt, “its Sabbaths” (Lev 26:43). Ezekiel indeed does not relate directly to the Sabbath of the land. Nevertheless, he is aware of the Sabbath as a holy day (Ezek 20:12, 13, 16, 24; 22:8, 26; 44:24) that occurs repeatedly after “six working days” (46:1). He also uses the verb שָׁבַת to denote the cessation of several activities (Ezek 6:6; 12:23; 30:18; 33:28). Moreover, several cases indicate Ezekiel’s acquaintance with the Jubilee institution and its use of specific words and idioms appearing in Lev 25. The term מִמָּכָר, “what is sold” occurs in Ezek 7:13 (cf. Lev 25:14, 25, 27, 28, 29, 33, 50), and in accordance with the Jubilee law, the text assumes that in normal circumstances a seller *would* return to his sold property within his lifetime. Likewise, Ezek 46:17 mentions שְׁנַת הַדְּרוֹר “the year of release” which clearly depends on the Jubilee legislation of Lev 25.²² Since the Jubilee year itself is determined by a count of “seven weeks of years,” meaning seven sabbatical cycles (Lev 25:8), it seems highly reasonable that Ezekiel was also familiar with the priestly institution of the sabbatical year.²³

²² See e.g., Stephen L. Cook, *Ezekiel 38–48*, AB 22B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 253. John S. Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation*, VTSup 115 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 177–190 mentions גְּאֻלְתָּךְ, “your redemption men” (Ezek 11:15) and the occurrences of the redemption of the land (Lev 25:24, 26, 29, 31, 32, 48, 51, 52); נִשְׁךְ and תְּרִבִּית together with the verbs לָקַח and נָתַן (Ezek 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12 and Lev 25:35–37); and the idiom בִּפְרֹךְ רָדָה “rule over with harshness” (Ezek 34:4; Lev 25:43, 46, 53) as further references to the H’s Jubilee legislation by Ezekiel.

²³ The Sabbath became an important religious and cultural marker during the exilic period. See, e.g., Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 108–109. This, however, does not necessarily indicate that the *institution* of the Sabbatical year was created only in the post-exilic period. The multiple literary ties between Ezekiel and Lev 25 and the rural-agricultural setting of the Holiness Code and its Jubilee and Sabbatical year legislation, indicate their pre-exilic provenance, even if their final textual form may be later. See Jan Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code: An Exegetical Study of the Ideational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17–26*, VTSup 67 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 90–92; Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 56–79.

By means of literary dependence on Leviticus 26, Ezekiel's depictions of the desolate land fulfill the threats written in H.²⁴ Israel have sinned and were exiled, and the land had to be completely abandoned to properly pay off its Sabbaths. For this reason, Ezekiel repeatedly emphasizes that those who remained in the land must be destroyed. Only with their disappearance, can the land truly become desolate and begin to pay off its Sabbaths, and only after that, would Israel's restoration to its land become possible.²⁵

God's command to the mountains to yield branches and fruits thus declares that the land's debt has been paid in full, and it can once again yield its produce. H does not specify what would happen to the land after it would pay off its Sabbaths. It seems that Ezekiel, who was influenced by this priestly theology, developed the notion that the land's payoff of its personal debt is not necessarily attached to Israel's payoff of their debt since the land has its own standing as a separate entity.²⁶ Just as the land can pay off its debt in isolation from Israel, so too can it be restored even if Israel are still in exile.

This depiction of the land's independent status leads to another priestly text that may have influenced Ezekiel's depiction of the land's restoration. H warns that if Israel would commit abominations, the land would vomit them out just as it previously did to the Canaanites (Lev 18:24–28; 20:22–24). This unique depiction relates to the land's independent action resulting from its unwillingness to bear the behavior of its inhabitants. Although it was fertile, and in the same manner depicted in Lev 26, it forced its dwellers to leave it by means of war, disease, devouring beasts and withholding its grace. The vomiting of the Canaanites from Canaan occurred, according to H, *prior to Israel's arrival*, since otherwise the Israelites would also suffer from its condition and would be forced to leave it as well.²⁷ Thus, H assumes that after the land has vomited the Canaanites, it will

²⁴ To this one may add the threat of breaking Israel's "proud glory" (Lev 26:19–20; Ezek 24:21; 30:6, 18; 33:28) which is also related to the withholding of the land's yield and making its skies like iron and its earth like copper. For Ezekiel's literary dependence on the Holiness Code in these cases see Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy*, 84.

²⁵ The descriptions of the empty land in Ezekiel are thus not only a reflection of an ideological polemic between the exiles and those who remained in the land (see e.g., Hans M. Barstad, "The Myth of the Empty Land," in idem, *History and the Hebrew Bible: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 90–134), but also a reflection of the priestly theology which significantly influenced Ezekiel's thought.

²⁶ Note that independently, both the land and Israel need to repay (רצה) their debt (Lev 26:34, 41, 43) and are expected to be remembered by God (Lev 26:42, 45). See also Joosten, *People and Land*, 152–154; Stackert, "The Sabbath," 248.

²⁷ The Masoretic accent in Lev 18:28 (באשר קצה) reflects a participle with ultimate stress. However, באשר typically introduces the finite verb and not the participle, and 18:25 (ותקא) proves that the perfect tense is intended here, and the penultimate stress is to be preferred. The past tense is thus deliberate and not anachronistic, and it reflects H's unique theological and historical perceptions. See Baruch J. Schwartz, "Reexamining the Fate of the 'Canaanites' in the Torah Traditions," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfield Jubilee Volume; Studies in the Bible*

be restored so that the Israelites who will inherit it would find it once again flowing with milk and honey.

Ezekiel's descriptions of the land's restoration indicate that he anticipates the complete re-fulfillment of H's predictions. Israel has not heeded God's warnings and, like the Canaanites, has committed abominations. The land, which is completely indifferent to the identity of those committing such grave abominations, could not digest them, and just as it previously did to the Canaanites, it vomited Israel out through God's four terrible punishments—the sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence (Ezek 14:21). The numerous descriptions of the lack of rains, the destruction of agriculture and the land bereaving its inhabitants in Ezekiel's doom oracles manifest the 'vomiting' of Israel from their land even without using the exact term. Ezekiel's depiction of the mountains' restoration thus applies H's depictions of Israel's past inheritance of the land. Once again, Israel is outside its land, waiting for the time to enter it; once again, the land has already vomited its former inhabitants by withholding its favor; and, once again, the land renews its goodness and fertility in anticipation of their coming arrival.

Israel's Shame at the End of the Restoration Process

From Ezek 36:26–32 it seems that the new heart and soul and the prosperity that Israel will enjoy in the future will not make them so happy. At the end of the restoration process Israel will remember their evil ways and realize that they were not worthy of being restored, causing them self-loathing and shame (see also 20:43).

At first sight, this prophecy seems to contradict the unequivocal approach that completely denies intergenerational reward (Ezek 18:4, 19–20). After all, if Israel's restoration will only occur in the distant future, why should the descendants of the exiled generation, some of whom will already be born in the restored Israel with a new heart and spirit, be ashamed? They themselves did not sin!

To resolve this contradiction between the stated theology of Ezek 18 and the actual predictions of Ezek 36, I suggest that, in fact, Ezek 36 refers to the same generation and thus manifests its author(s)' expectation that Israel's restoration will occur in the near future. The sinning, exiled Israelites will also be those who eventually would be restored, and for this reason they themselves deserve to be ashamed.

and the Ancient Near East, Qumran, and Post-Biblical Judaism, ed. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, and Shalom M. Paul (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 151–170.

The Altar Regulations

Following a guided tour in the visionary temple, in which Ezekiel is informed of its structure and measures (Ezek 40:1–43:12), several regulations concerning the altar are given. First, the altar's measurements are specified (Ezek 43:13–17), and then the text moves to relate to several specific regulations, which are relevant to the very day of its initiation, **ביום העשותו** (Ezek 43:18–27).²⁸

Like many priestly Pentateuchal texts, this short unit presents the ordained cultic practices as part of the divine revelation.²⁹ Thus, its very style enhances the impression of Ezekiel as a second Moses, the recipient of direct divine revelation to be communicated to the people as Torah.³⁰

The LXX version to this prophetic unit contains numerous variants that indicate the use of third person plural verb forms instead of the second person singular of MT (**ונתתה, ולקחת** etc.).³¹ However, it seems that Zimmerli was right in determining the priority of MT since the LXX itself, in vv. 23, 24, 25, has, like MT, the second person singular, and the Greek papyrus 963 has second person singular rather than third person plural forms in vv. 22–23. That makes the other instances where LXX deviates from MT suspect as attempts at harmonization.³²

It seems that the singular forms cannot relate to any other priest who might be officiating in the restored temple. Ezekiel's restoration program does not mention the high priest, and for this reason, Ezekiel mostly relates to the priests in the plural, **הכהנים**.³³ Ezek

²⁸ The originality of Ezek 40–48 and their assignment to the author of the rest of the book could not be discussed here. As for the originality of the altar rituals (43:18–27). Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 431 maintains that they are a secondary addition to vv. 13–17, and considers vv. 25–27 to be an even later interpolation. See also Thilo A. Rudnig, *Heilig und Profan: Redaktionskritische Studien zu Ez 40–48*, BZAW 287 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 275; Cook, *Ezekiel 38–48*, 199. On the other hand, Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 605 argued that Ezekiel's own involvement in this passage is quite possible. He was acquainted with the priestly regulations concerning the altar which he sought to implement on the altar he saw in the courtyard (41:22). As mentioned above (note 1), the author(s) of 47:18–27, whether Ezekiel or his school, would be referred to here as 'Ezekiel', and the following discussion will examine how this prophetic unit manifests exilic period expectations for restoration.

²⁹ See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 430.

³⁰ Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 604.

³¹ See e.g., vv. 20, 21, 22, 23.

³² See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 431. See also Michael Konkel, *Architektonik des Heiligen: Studien zur zweiten Tempelvision Ezechiels (Ez 40–48)*, BBB 129 (Berlin: Philo Verlagsgesellschaft, 2001), 84–85; Jacob Milgrom and Daniel I. Block, *Ezekiel's Hope: A Commentary on Ezekiel 38–48* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 127.

³³ See Ezek 42:13, 14; 43:24, 27; 44:15, 30, 31; 45:4; 46:2, 19, 20; 48:10, 11, 13. The only mention of **כהן** that may refer to a specific priest is 45:19, however, this priest is not addressed in the second person. The other occurrences of **כהן** relate either to the priests in general (7:26; 44:21, 22) or to Ezekiel himself (1:3).

43:18–27 also address the priests in the plural (43:19, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27), which makes it unlikely that the singular verbs address them. Likewise, since P always assigns this kind of cultic regulations to priests, it is unlikely that Ezekiel would assign them here to lay Israelites.³⁴ Thus, the only figure in this case to whom one can relate in the singular, and to whom all the former approaches in the singular in chapters 40–43 were made, is Ezekiel himself.³⁵

This conclusion may be reaffirmed by additional priestly texts that deal with the consecration of the holy precincts and use the same terminology. Exod 29 presents the cultic regulations for the consecration of the priests and the altar, and Lev 8 reports their implementation. Naturally, in a ceremony designed to consecrate the priests for the first time, there are still no priests who can participate. For this reason, all the instructions address Moses in the second person and instruct him, on a one-time basis, to perform the acts that are normally performed by the priests. Moses shall put the bull's blood (נתן דם) on the altar's horns and dash the ram's blood (זרק דם) against the altar's sides (Exod 29:12, 16; Lev 8:15, 19). He shall also turn all the internal organs into smoke (קטר) on the altar (Exod 29:13, 18; Lev 8:16). The aim of these actions is to decontaminate (חטא), purge (כפר) and consecrate (קדש) the altar (Exod 29:35–37; Lev 8:11, 15), and to ordain (מלא יד) the priests (Exod 29:35; Lev 8:33). Since Moses functions in this ceremony as a priest, he will be entitled, on a one-time basis, to receive the breast as a portion (Exod 29:26; Lev 8:29), a prebend usually given to the officiating priests.³⁶

Likewise, Ezek 43:18–27 deal with the consecration of the altar after a long period of cultic cessation. Here, as well, most of the orders address Ezekiel in the second person. Like Moses, Ezekiel shall put the bull's blood (נתן דם) on the altar's horns (Ezek 43:20) and put the sacrifices on the altar (43:22–24). Here as well, the aim of these actions is to decontaminate (חטא) and purge (כפר) the altar (43:20, 22, 23, 26) and to ordain (מלא יד, 43:26). However, Ezekiel's use of this expression indicates his literary dependence on the priestly writings. The term מלא יד, literally 'to fill the hand', is commonly used for the ordination of a person, especially a priest, for divine service.³⁷ It seems to originally relate to the filling of the officiating priest's hands with a gift symbolizing the office.³⁸ Therefore, the literary meaning of this expression fits very well when assigned to human beings.

³⁴ Compare e.g., R. Eliezer of Beaugency's exegesis of Ezek 43:19 (www.alhatorah.org); Rudnig, *Heilige und Profan*, 271; Cook, *Ezekiel 38–48*, 196.

³⁵ See Ezek 40:4; 45; 41:1, 4, 22; 42:1, 13, 15; 43:1, 3, 5–7, 10; Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 606–607.

³⁶ See Lev 7:32–34; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, AB 3A (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 525.

³⁷ See Exod 28:41; 29:9, 33; Lev 8:33; 16:32; 21:10; Num 3:3; Judg 17:5, 12; 1 Kgs 13:33; 2 Chr. 13:9.

³⁸ See Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 611; Cooke, *Ezekiel 38–48*, 197; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 539.

Ezekiel's assignment of it to an inanimate object as the altar (יכפרו את המזבח...ומלאו ידו), they shall purge the altar...and ordain *it*, Ezek 43:26) is unparalleled, and the fact that it does not fit its context indicates its dependent character.³⁹

We may conclude that the similarities between Ezekiel and Moses were not confined to the fact that they were both presented as lawgivers. Just as Moses took an active part in the Tabernacle's consecration ceremony, so too, Ezek 43:18–27 present Ezekiel as one commanded by God to lead the consecration ceremony of the restored temple.⁴⁰

Indeed, the initiation of the altar is not the only occurrence in Ezek 40–48 which addresses Ezekiel in the second person. Ezekiel is ordered to measure the plot assigned to the temple (Ezek 45:3), to decontaminate the temple in the first month (Ezek 45:18–20), and to sacrifice the daily *tāmīd* offerings (Ezek 46:13–14). Both Ezek 45:3 and Ezek 43:18–27 refer to a one-time future event in which Ezekiel was supposed to participate personally. However, Ezek 45:18–20 and 46:13–14 refer to recurring cultic events, in which Ezekiel's personal participation seems at first glance less likely.

Nevertheless, analysis of the priestly account of the Tabernacle's construction and its resemblances to Ezek 40–48, may lead to a different conclusion: both accounts refer to the future establishment of a cultic site. In both, the main protagonist (Moses / Ezekiel) is taken either in reality or in a vision to a mountain (Sinai / a high mountain) where he 'sees' in detail the future cultic orders (Exod 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8 / Ezek 40:4; 43:10–11). And, in both, the establishment orders address the main protagonist in the second person (Exod 25:11–12 and *passim*; Ezek 43:19–25).

When the cultic instructions relate to the actual, one-time manufacturing of the Tabernacle vessels, it is obvious that the narrative will address Moses directly. However, this priestly style is also evident in cases that relate to recurring cultic events, whether or not⁴¹ they use literary markers such as *tāmīd*, "law for all time" (חֻקַּת עוֹלָם), and

³⁹ Since the preceding verbs in v. 26 relate to the altar and not to the priests, and since מלא יד appears mostly in a transitive and not reflexive sense (the only possible exceptions are 1 Kgs 13:33; 2 Chr 13:9 which relate to illegitimate ordinations), MT ומלאו ידו should be preferred over LXX and Pesh ומלאו ידם.

⁴⁰ See also Katheryn P. Darr, *The Book of Ezekiel*, NIB 6 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 1600 who noted that as part of his presentation as a new Moses, Ezekiel identifies the outer boundaries of the land, a task needed just before the anticipated entrance into the land.

⁴¹ See e.g., the carrying of the Israelites' names upon Aaron's two shoulder-pieces (Exod 28:12); the golden bells and pomegranates on Aaron's robe (Exod 28:35); the order to make the incense (Exod 30:34–38); the priestly blessing of Israel (Num 6:22–27); the instructions regarding the exact method to mount the lamps (Num 8:1–3); and the order to the Levites to give one-tenth of the tithes they receive to "Aaron the priest" (Num 18:28). All these instructions address either Moses or Aaron while it is clear that they will be implemented in the future by their successors.

“throughout the ages” (לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם).⁴² This set of examples may shed light on a literary stylistic feature shared both by Ezekiel and the priestly writings in the Pentateuch. When the text deals with a one-time event, it aims for the main characters themselves to implement the orders it specifies. But even when it deals with repeated rituals, from a narrative point of view, the text still addresses the main protagonists of the narrative’s present, on the assumption that the reader will understand that following the cult’s initiation, the cultic rituals would continue to be performed by the major protagonists’ successors. Thus, the orders addressing Ezekiel reflect the author’s expectation that the prophet would serve as the initiator of Israel’s renewed cult.

At this point it is worth mentioning that, conceptually, although he was a priest (Ezek 1:1), it was not necessary to assign Ezekiel *himself* to the task. According to Ezek 44:15, the Zadokite priests have kept their guarding duties all along. Therefore, unlike the Levites who defected from God (44:10–12), they remained ready to return to their service in the temple, and Ezekiel does not mention any specific consecration ceremony to (re)ordain them. The Zadokite priests are thus ordered to participate in the altar’s consecration alongside Ezekiel from the very outset (43:19, 24). This means that unlike the priestly consecration of the Tabernacle, where priests were not yet ordained and obviously could not consecrate the altar themselves, in Ezekiel, ordained priests *do exist*, and nothing prevents them from participating in the consecration of the restored temple. The author’s choice of Ezekiel, and not of an unidentified future priest, to lead the consecration ceremony, indicates his expectation that the prophet will participate personally in Israel’s restoration, which will probably occur soon.

The opening of the temple vision, which situates Ezekiel on a top of a high mountain (40:2), resembles the depiction of Moses standing on the top of Mount Abarim (Num 27:12–13; see also Deut 34:1–4). This may lead to the assumption that Ezekiel’s depiction as a second Moses indicates that, like Moses, he will not enter the promised

⁴² See, e.g., the following instruction which address Moses or Aaron: The setting the kindling lamps in the Tabernacle (Exod 27:20–21); the carrying of the breast-piece of decision and Urim and Thummim (Exod 28:29–30), and the frontlet of pure gold (Exod 28:38); the *tāmīd* whole burnt instructions (Exod 29:42); the instructions regarding the daily burning of incense and the annual purgation of the incense altar (Exod 30:7–10); the laver regulations (Exod 30:17–21); the order to drink no wine or intoxicant when entering the Tent of Meeting (Lev 10:8–9); the regulations regarding entering the most holy precincts in the Tabernacle (Lev 16); the prohibition on defected priests to officiate in the Tabernacle (Lev 21:16–17); the order to set the kindling lamps (Lev 24:1–4); Aaron’s grant of Israel’s donations (Num 18:8–19); and Elazar’s dealing with the red heifer (Num 19:3–10).

land.⁴³ However, in addition to the fact that the depictions of Moses purport to describe actual events (at least according to their author) and Ezekiel explicitly maintains that his standing on a high mountain was a vision (40:2), there are several differences between these two depictions. First, Ezekiel's mountain is located *in* the land of Israel and not outside of it (40:2). This means that Ezekiel entered the land at the very beginning of his visionary tour, rather than gaze at it from afar. Moreover, the mountaintop is only the starting point of Ezekiel's tour. From there, he continues to walk in the temple precincts (Ezek 40–43) and eventually even follows the route of the miraculous river to the Dead Sea (47:1–12). Indeed, unlike Ezekiel's first visionary tour to Jerusalem (Ezek 8–11), which ends with Ezekiel's return to Babylonia (11:25), the temple vision does not mention any such return. This may reveal its author's anticipation that Ezekiel's (visionary) arrival at the promised land would this time be for good.

We may conclude that the findings from Ezekiel reveal an expectation for a quick restoration that existed among the Judean exiles in the first decades following their exile. How quick? The answer to this question can only be speculated. Zimmerli proposed that the unique dating formula opening the temple vision (40:1) is connected to Lev 25:9 which deals with the Jubilee, the great year of liberation in which everyone “shall return to his holding” (Lev 25:10). Thus, the temple vision, dated to the twenty-fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile, “comes to the prophet precisely in the middle of a fifty-year period, i.e. halfway through the period which must elapse before the proclamation of the great year of release.”⁴⁴ Other prophecies in the book may indicate an even earlier anticipated date. Ezekiel is ordered to lie forty days on his right side and bear the sins of the house of Judah (Ezek 4:6). Each day resembles a whole year, indicating that forty years are needed to bear the burden of Judah's sins. A similar time span appears in Ezekiel's expectation for Egypt's restoration (29:13). If these prophecies reflect the exiles' expectations, then the exile was perceived to last fifty or forty years, and half of which (if not more) had already passed.⁴⁵

⁴³ See e.g. Jon D. Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40–48*, HSM 10 (Cambridge: Scholars Press, 1976), 37–44; Milgrom, *Ezekiel's Hope*, 217. H. McKeating, “Ezekiel the ‘Prophet like Moses’?,” *JSOT* 61 (1994):97–119.

⁴⁴ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 346. See also Levenson, *Ezekiel 40–48*, 18–19. John S. Bergsma, “The Restored Temple as ‘Built Jubilee’ in Ezekiel 40–48,” *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes and Midwestern Biblical Societies* 24 (2004): 75–85.

⁴⁵ Simeon Chavel, “Ezekiel Ben Buzi, the Raggedy-Ann Prophet,” paper presented at the SBL-EABS Conference in Helsinki, Finland, July 30–August 3, 2018, proposed that the book's opening “In the thirtieth year” (1:1), refers to the time of Ezekiel's speech, thirty years *ago*, and that in the year 562 BCE Ezekiel related retrospectively to events that occurred earlier. Chavel further speculates about a connection between Ezekiel's retrospective speech and the change in attitude toward Jehoiachin by Amel-Marduk who became king at that very year (2 Kgs 25:27–30). If this suggestion is accepted, then it might serve as further evidence for concrete expectations for restoration several decades following the destruction.

But even if not, the prophecies discussed above indicate concrete expectation that Israel's restoration would occur soon and that the exiles would participate in it themselves. Ezekiel assures them that their restoration process has begun and passed the point of no return: God has already shown concern for His holy name, the Land has already renewed its abundance, and the exiles, including the prophet himself, would participate in the consecration of the renewed temple.

Expectation for Restoration in the Āl-Yāhūdu Tablets

The Judean exiles' expectations for a quick return are also independently reflected in the Āl-Yāhūdu tablets. This corpus consists of various administrative and commercial documents, with a major group written in Āl-Yāhūdu, 'Judah Town,' reflecting the established practice of naming new minorities' settlements in Babylonia after their original dwelling places.⁴⁶ Although the tablets are unprovenanced, most scholars locate Āl-Yāhūdu in the agricultural periphery surrounding Nippur.⁴⁷ The tablets are dated from 572 through 477 BCE and mention many Judean Yahwistic names,⁴⁸ in a location where they represent a significant percentage of the town's population.⁴⁹ Furthermore, one tablet, of a group created in Āl-Yāhūdu's vicinity, mentions URU ^{id}*ka-ba-ra*,⁵⁰ the town of the Chebar Canal, which is also mentioned as the dwelling place of Ezekiel and his community (Ezek 1:1).⁵¹ These details make the tablets a significant source that can shed new light on the

⁴⁶ See Israel Eph'al, "The Western Minorities in Babylonia in the 6th–5th Centuries B.C.," *Or* 47 (1978): 74–90; Laurie E. Pearce, "New Evidence for Judeans in Babylonia," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming eds. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 399–411; eadem, "Identifying Judeans and Judean Identity in the Babylonian Evidence," in *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context*, BZAW 478, ed. Jonathan Stökl and Caroline Waerzeggers (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 7–32.

⁴⁷ Laurie E. Pearce, "Continuity and Normality in Sources Relating to the Judean Exile," *HeBAI* 3 (2014): 163–184; Pearce and Wunsch, *Documents*, 7; Tero Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia: A Study of Deportees in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BCE*, CHANE 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 107–108 mentioned other localities appearing in the corpus (such as Bīt-Amūkāni, the Sîn canal, Ḥamat, and Ḥazatu) to support this geographical setting.

⁴⁸ See Ran Zadok, *The Jews in Babylonia during the Chaldean and Achaemenian Periods according to the Babylonian Sources* (Haifa: The University of Haifa, 1979), 7–34. In Neo-Babylonian cuneiform, the Yahwistic elements *yw*, *yhw*, *yh* were usually written as *-yama*, due to the Neo-Babylonian orthography, in which *m* also represents *w*. See GAG §21, 31; Michael D. Coogan, "Patterns in Jewish Personal Names in the Babylonian Diaspora," *JSJ* 4 (1973): 183–191.

⁴⁹ See Laurie E. Pearce, "Judean: A Special Status in Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Babylonia," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context*, ed. Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 267–277.

⁵⁰ See Francis Joannès and André Lemaire, "Contrats babyloniens d'époque Achéménide du Bīt-Abī Rām avec une épigraphe Araméenne," *RA* 90 (1996): 41–59, at 50 (tablet 7, line 5).

⁵¹ Clearly, it cannot be concluded that Ezekiel lived in Āl-Yāhūdu, and recently Wayne Horowitz and Peter Zilberg, "Tel-Aviv on the Chebar = Šuruppak," *BN* 187 (2020): 71–79, proposed to

lives of the Judean exiles in Babylonia in general, and especially those who lived in Ezekiel's vicinity and shared similar living conditions.

It should be stressed that I am *not* claiming that Ezekiel's prophecies influenced the Judean exiles' economic conduct or had any direct impact on the design of their business portfolio. I will relate to these distinct textual corpora as two *independent* manifestations of trends, beliefs and expectations that existed among the Judean exiles at the beginning of the exilic period.

The tablets' concise style does not always reveal the inner world of the exiles they mention. Nevertheless, people who believe that, in several years, they will no longer reside where they currently live, or even people who are willing to consider this scenario, are likely to avoid significant investments in capital or labor and long-term obligations or deals. This is because these kinds of deals bind them to their current place, without guaranteeing that they will ever benefit from their profits. It seems that the Judean exiles' economic conduct in three different aspects—date farming, plowing, and engagement in long-term business plans—may assist in reconstructing their expectations in the first decades following the destruction.⁵²

Several significant studies of Neo-Babylonian economy,⁵³ indicate that one of the most fundamental shifts in agriculture is the conversion of arable fields such as barley into date gardens and the establishment of dates as a 'leading crop,' on par with barley. The main reason for this change was that date gardening was a more efficient and intensive form of agriculture than arable farming and therefore more productive in terms of output per surface. Thus, an acre of dates yielded approximately five times more than an acre of barley. In addition to profitability on its own, date gardening was even more valuable because crops such as cereals, vegetables, and other low fruit trees could be grown under

identify Tel-Aviv with Šuruppak. Nevertheless, it seems that the socio-economic reality emerging from the book of Ezekiel is consistent with the one reflected in the Āl-Yāhūdu tablets. See further below (notes 72–73).

⁵² For a model for reconstructing the stories behind legal-administrative texts see Cornelia Wunsch, "Legal Narrative in Neo-Babylonian Trial Documents – Text Reconstruction, Interpretation and Assyriological Method," in *Law and Narrative in the Bible and in Neighboring Ancient Cultures*, FAT 54, ed. Klaus-Peter Adam, Friedrich Avemarie and Nili Wazana (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 3–34.

⁵³ See e.g., Matthew Stolper, *Entrepreneurs and Empire: The Murašû Archive, the Murašû Firm, and the Persian Rule in Babylonia*, PIHANS 54 (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1985); G. van Driel, *Elusive Silver: In Search of a Role for a Market in an Agrarian Environment: Aspects of Mesopotamia's Society*, PIHANS 95 (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2002); Michael Jursa, *Aspects of Economic History of Babylonia in the First Millennium BC*, AOAT 377 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010).

the date palms, and benefited from the labor invested in the date palms' irrigation.⁵⁴ Considering the fact that other products of the palm, such as leaves and fibers were also profitable,⁵⁵ the profitability of dates in comparison to barley only increases. Given reasonable climate conditions and political stability, then, there is a clear economic incentive to switch to date farming.

However, there is one difference that may have a decisive effect on the farmers' economic decisions. A farmer sowing barley can expect a yield several months later. On the other hand, a newly planted date grove would have needed a decade to become reasonably productive. In other words, sowing barley promises a small, but quick and safe, profit, while planting date palms requires an investment that may only be worthwhile for those who do not expect to leave their place.

The Āl-Yāhūdu tablets that mention Judeans as parties to transactions, reveal that their main occupation in the first decades following the destruction was short-term barley farming.⁵⁶ The *first* time we see any involvement of Judeans in the cultivation of both dates and barley is in a tablet dated to the year 551 BCE. The exceptionality of this tablet is evident both because it relates to a debt owed to a well-off Judean⁵⁷ and because the next known tablets mentioning Judeans involved in date farming are dated from 529 BCE onwards.⁵⁸ Only starting from 519 BCE is it evident that date farming became a central component of the exiles' occupation.⁵⁹

Avoiding date farming may indeed result from some other factors, such as the lack of enough capital or expertise in the first decades in exile, or the possibility that during these early years the Judean exiles were not completely free to decide what to grow or cultivate in a region we know was deliberately left neglected by the Neo-Babylonian

⁵⁴ See Jursa, *Economic History*, 26–27, 50–53; 181–182; 320; 437–438; 468; idem, “Economic Development in Babylonia from the Late Seventh to the Late Fourth Century BC: Economic Growth and Economic Crises in Imperial Contexts” in *Documentary Sources in Ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman Economic History: Methodology and Practice*, ed. Heather D. Baker and Michael Jursa (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), 113–138.

⁵⁵ CUSAS 28 33:22–24; 39:8–9; 53:8–9; 68:16–17.

⁵⁶ See e.g., (in chronological order), CUSAS 28 2; 3; 7; 10; 4; 5; 11 from the years 552–533 BCE; BaAr 6 1; 19; 24 from the years 567–527 BCE. See further Angelika Berlejung, “New Life, New Skills, and New Friends in Exile: The Loss and Rise of Capitals of the Judeans in Babylonia,” in *Alphabets, Texts and Artifacts in the Ancient Near East, Studies Presented to Benjamin Sass*, ed. Israel Finkelstein, Christian Robin, and Thomas Römer (Paris: Van Dieren, 2016), 12–45.

⁵⁷ See CUSAS 28 8. The creditor's name, Ṭūb-Yāma, appears as part of the toponym (*Ālu ša Ṭūb-Yāma*) indicating that he had the status of a local foreman. See Pearce and Wunsch, *Documents*, 110.

⁵⁸ See e.g., CUSAS 72 (529 BCE); 66 (527 BCE).

⁵⁹ See e.g. (in chronological order), CUSAS 28 33; 14; 15; 40; 16; 38; 19; 20; 22; 42; 36; 24; 35; 25; 39; 53 from the years 518–477 BCE; BaAr 6 33; 12; 7; 8; 13 from the years 519–491 BCE.

empire.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, as demonstrated by Michael Jursa, in the Neo-Babylonian period the necessary preconditions for a shift toward date farming, one of which was the willingness of the state to invest in the agrarian infrastructure such as irrigation canals, were present in an ideal form. The state's agency in promoting agricultural change was also evident in land reclamation, royal land allotment schemes and promoting administrative changes and measures toward an increase in efficiency in agriculture.⁶¹ This means that, in addition to personal economic considerations, the state itself encouraged farmers, both directly and indirectly, to switch into date farming. Thus, the decision not to do so is more likely to result from factors other than state limitations on free economic agency.

While there may be some questions about the Judeans' ability to make their own crop choices, there are other examples from areas in which exiled minorities surely had free agency and thus their actions reveal their expectations. The first example relates to plowing techniques in Mesopotamian agriculture. Preparation for cereal sowing in Babylonia usually began at the end of the summer, with plowing. The preparations' extent depended on the land's prior condition. Plots that had already been cultivated previously often required only light plowing for re-sowing. For newly reclaimed plots, the situation was different. At this time of the year, the hard, dry, and lumpy soil (*pašku*) had to be eliminated to enable efficient sowing. This could be done in two ways, both of which demanded a considerable investment of labor. The first was by moistening the dry ground and smashing the clods. This method required the digging of canals that would transport water from the main water courses through the date gardens to the arable fields, which were usually located the furthest away from the water sources.⁶² The second method involved the smashing of the hard soil lumps and the removal of the clods to allow planting in rows and furrow irrigation.

For this second method of early heavy-duty plowing intended to smash the *pašku* soil for removal, a special plow was used, the *majāru*, which was different from the regular seed plow (*epinnu*) that was used for the actual sowing after all the preparation stages were completed. Many texts mention the *majāru* alongside an action called *dekû*, which probably relates to what was done to the field with the *majāru*. After this, the next agricultural action seems to have been called *pašāru*, and it probably relates to the

⁶⁰ See Jursa, *Economic History*, 405–418.

⁶¹ See Jursa, "Economic Development," 119–124.

⁶² See G. van Driel, "Neo-Babylonian Agriculture, Part III: Cultivation," *BSA* 5 (1990): 219–265. Date farming required more irrigation than arable farming. Thus, date gardens were usually situated closest to the water sources.

loosening or cross-ploughing of the land. Only then, did the actual sowing (*zaqāpu*) become possible.⁶³

Since many of the documents mentioning the *majāru* are reclamation contracts, it seems that the *majāru* was used mostly in newly uncultivated land that was just becoming productive and demanded more preparatory work than ordinary land did.⁶⁴ This may explain why the *majāru* regularly appears in contracts *ana taptê*, “for opening up (the field).”⁶⁵ We may conclude that the use of the heavy-duty *majāru* plows indicates a considerable investment of labor in new, uncultivated land.

Here, as with date cultivation, the Āl-Yāhūdu tablets indicate that in the first decades following the exile, Judeans were not involved in such investment-heavy activities. Only at the beginning of the Persian period can we discern for the first time mentions of the *majāru*, which indicates an expansion of the Judean exiles’ economic activity toward the cultivation of new plots.⁶⁶ Unlike the decision to start a completely new field of work (i.e., switching from barley to date farming) which required capital and expertise, the decision to widen the scope of one’s current agricultural activity (i.e., growing more barley) does not require any new expertise and no doubt lies within the scopes of his economic agency. Thus, it may serve as an indicator of one’s economic expectations.

Long-term business plans are another area that indicates a change in Judeans’ attitudes. The Āl-Yāhūdu tablets show that in the first decades of the exile, Judeans were not party to long-term business activities. Only at the beginning of the Persian period can we discern the leasing of houses, land and livestock for long periods; long term partnerships;⁶⁷ and the division of property between heirs, which leaves a large part of the inheritance in joint ownership, indicating that the partnership between the heirs is continuous and that none of them plans to leave.⁶⁸ These economic behaviors require only a conscious decision, not significant capital or unique expertise. Thus, in comparison to a short-term lease of a house (i.e., a lease for one year), a long-term lease of that same house,

⁶³ See CUSAS 28 62:8–9; CAD M I:120–121. Van Driel, “Neo-Babylonian Agriculture,” 239 maintains that *dekû* means ‘to beat’ or ‘to crush.’

⁶⁴ See Van Driel, “Neo-Babylonian Agriculture,” 239; Pearce and Wunsch, *Documents*, 179.

⁶⁵ See Michael Jursa, *Die Landwirtschaft in Sippar in Neubabylonischer Zeit*, AfOB 25 (Vienna: Institut für Orientalistik der Universität Wien, 1995), 140–141; Pearce and Wunsch, *Documents*, 198.

⁶⁶ See CUSAS 28 62 (528 BCE); 75 (522 BCE) which use the above-mentioned terminology (*ina majāri dekû, pašāru, zaqāpu*). A third attestation of the *majāru* plow is in CUSAS 28 49:4 (521 BCE), however there are no clear indications for a Judean origin of any of the parties mentioned there.

⁶⁷ See BaAr 6 8 (land lease for three years; 507 BCE); 10 (partnership concerning a donkey mare for seven years, 507 BCE); CUSAS 28 30 (cow lease for ten years, 507 BCE); 46 (house rent for three years, reign of Darius).

⁶⁸ See CUSAS 24 45 (506 BCE).

which was usually paid annually and not in advance, did not require significant economic resources at the time of its conclusion, and the same is true for leasing land and livestock. Thus, long-term transactions may reflect the economic expectations of the parties.

The Āl-Yāhūdu tablets thus indicate that in the first decades following the destruction the Judean exiles tended to avoid economic ventures that involved large investments of labor or capital, or long-term deals.⁶⁹ Since we are dealing with a limited, locally oriented corpus, we cannot always compare the Judeans' economic conduct to that of their non-Judean neighbors. Certainly, in some cases, the exiles' economic conduct was also influenced by the lack of capital or professional expertise at the beginning of the exilic period.⁷⁰ However, not all cases can be explained in this way. This indicates that economic limitations cannot account fully for the exiles' agricultural and other economic practices, as reflected in the Āl-Yāhūdu tablets. The cumulative evidence emerging from three different types of economic activity, which is also supported by contemporaneous prophetic proclamations, reinforces the conclusion offered here. Returning to Jeremiah's words which opened this essay, it seems that the Judean exiles in Babylonia indeed built houses and planted gardens, but they began doing so only several decades after the destruction.

These concrete expectations for return to the homeland, especially among exiles living in a rural setting, are consistent with modern studies of forced migration. In her seminal work on the Hutu refugees in Tanzania, L.H. Malkki has demonstrated that involuntary migrants who had been settled in a rural refugee camp developed isolationist and ethnocentric survival strategies, accompanied by a strong desire to return to their homeland. They related to the refugee camps as a site that both enables purification from sin (the very reason for displacement) and preparation for eventual return to the homeland. Homeland rhetoric and claims for its re-inheritance were found to be crucial in times when self and community senses collapsed, and they helped re-establishing a stable identity and maintaining social coherence. Thus, displaced communities tended to use 'Homeland' as a

⁶⁹ To this one may add the fact that Persian-period texts greatly outnumber the Neo-Babylonian period texts in the Āl-Yāhūdu corpus. According to Caroline Waerzeggers, "Review Article: Laurie. E. Pearce and Cornelia Wunsch, Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites in Babylonia in the Collection of David Sofer Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology (CUSAS) 28," *BAIAS* 33 (2015): 179–194 and Alstola, *Judeans*, 158–178, the Āl-Yāhūdu materials are probably reflections of the imperial bureaucracy's needs. If this view is accepted, more documentation in the Persian period may correspond to higher government interest in the exiles' increasing economic activities and reflect their establishment in exile. On the other hand, one must admit that fewer texts, in general, may be a result of an accident which does not necessarily reflect the full extent of the exiles' economic activity.

⁷⁰ See Berlejung, "New Life."

symbolic anchor which helped them re-root themselves during a period in which almost all their significant national and identity markers were lost.⁷¹

These findings were implemented in several important studies that define Ezekiel's community as living in 'camp Chebar' and discuss the impact of this rural, refugee camp-like setting, on the Judean exiles' beliefs and expectations.⁷² They also discuss the centrality of the homeland and its future possession in Ezekiel as a key factor in reconstructing the Judean exiles' ideologies, and as a mean to counteract the geographical and social turmoil of their time. Thus, a concern with the status of the homeland and an interest in the prospect of eventual return to it are extremely typical of involuntary migrant communities, which makes engagement with this issue in contemporaneous sources (such as the book of Ezekiel and the Āl-Yāhūdu tablets) something which is highly expected.⁷³

Conclusions

We may conclude that concrete expectations for a restoration from Babylonia existed among significant parts of the Judean exiles at the beginning of the exilic period. These expectations were expressed independently in both Ezekiel's prophecies and the exiles' economic conduct documented in the Āl-Yāhūdu tablets. Historically, these expectations did not materialize, at least not in the way that Ezekiel expected them, and they surely changed over the course of times. Nevertheless, their appearance in the first decades following the destruction contribute to our understanding of Ezekiel's prophecies, the Judean exiles' views of that period, and the core ideas that helped them maintain their social and religious structure.

⁷¹ See Lisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 153–231; Elizabeth Colson, "Forced Migration and the Anthropological Response," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 16 (2003): 1–18; Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 25–34.

⁷² See e.g., Smith-Christopher, *Theology of Exile*, 75–104; C. A. Strine, "Is 'Exile' Enough? Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Need for a Taxonomy of Involuntary Migration," *HeBAI* 7 (2018): 289–315; Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "Forced/Involuntary Migration, Diaspora Studies, and More: Notes on Methodologies," *HeBAI* 7 (2018): 376–398.

⁷³ See e.g., Carly L. Crouch, *Israel and Judah Redefined: Migration, Trauma and Empire in the Sixth Century BCE*, SOTSMS (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 49–90. Thus, expectations for a return to the homeland could arise during the exilic period, even before geo-political circumstances allowed it (contra Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 352–353).