

HOW RADICAL MUST THE NEW BEGINNING BE? THE DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE DEUTERO-ISAIAH AND THE EZEKIEL SCHOOL*

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The notion that the prophetic books, collected, revised, and edited during the period of exile, are heavily preoccupied with a theological reappraisal of Israel's disastrous history, the destruction of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (722 and 587 BCE), has often been observed. But that they are likewise engaged in a controversial discussion of how a new beginning after the catastrophe should take place commonly goes unnoticed.¹ One of the few scholars who has recently stressed not only the proclamations of judgment, but also the promises for restoration, is Walter Brueggemann, to whom I am happy to offer my congratulations for his most impressive lifework.² In his commentary on the book of Jeremiah, which he regarded as primarily directed to the exiles, he emphasizes the consolatory function of chs. 30–33: 'The faithfulness and the power of Yahweh assure that in the depth of Israel's exile God will work a homecoming, in the face of Israel's death God will work new life'.³ Fundamentally agreeing with this statement I would like to ask: How new is this 'new life' conceptualized by the prophetic books? How far is its continuity with the past broken? Should it be available to any Israelite or only to those who comply with specific criteria? To answer questions like these, I would like to consider the most prominent prophetic collections of the exilic period, the books of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 40–55) and Ezekiel.

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1. The most comprehensive investigation of this topic is still the old study of Siegfried Herrmann, *Die prophetischen Heilserwartungen im Alten Testament: Ursprung und Gestaltwandel* (BZAW, 85; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965), but because of its tradition-historical approach it presents a harmonizing view.

2. I met him first, when he came to Heidelberg as a research fellow and joined the doctorate group of Claus Westermann.

3. Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 266.

1. *The Emergence and Date of the Books*

The literary problems of the books of Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah cannot be treated here in detail. I refer to my investigations of these two works in my monograph *Israel in Exile*,⁴ where I have also reported the scholarly discussion in detail. The following is a summary of my results.

It is still highly probable that the book of Ezekiel goes back to the priestly prophet of that name (Ezek. 1.3; 24.24), who most probably was deported with the exiles of 598/7 and was at work in Babylonia between 594 and c. 570 BCE. Thus Ezekiel is the only prophet of doom who survived the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 and remained active for a long time. According to his book, he uttered oracles of salvation (Ezek. 34–37) already during the exilic period and toward the end of his life (in the year 574) he envisioned a new temple in the land of Israel (40.1-2).

Since Ezekiel's visions of how the glory of Yhwh, which had appeared to him in Babylonia (Ezek. 1–3), left the defiled temple of Jerusalem (chs. 8–11) and would return to the new temple (42.1-13), constitute the structure of the whole collection, the editorial work on the book of Ezekiel could not have started before the latest temple vision which was only two to four years before the prophet died. Although the book is designed as a personal legacy of the prophet (1.1; reports in first person), most of its parts must have been written by his pupils. Because of the elaborate promises of return and reconstruction (chs. 34; 36–37) combined with the detailed nature of chs. 40–48, the whole book presupposes the possibility of a major political change, which was not imaginable before the end of Nebuchadrezzar's long reign in 562 BCE. A first glimmer of hope for a new beginning may have been fueled by the release of Jehoiachin from prison in the first year of Nebuchadrezzar's son Amel-Marduk (2 Kgs 25.27-30). Since Amel-Marduk was murdered after two years, it remains uncertain whether or not a major change of Babylonian policy actually took place at that time. It is more likely that the reign of Nabonidus (556–539) could have raised some hope, as he attempted to provide the provinces with more support. So, the decade between 560 and 550 BCE constitutes a *terminus post quem*.⁵ Since most of the detailed reform program for the temple and the whole society in Ezek. 40–48 could not have

4. Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century BCE* (trans. D. Green; Studies in Biblical Literature, 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), pp. 345-433 (German 2001).

5. Here I differ from my position in Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, p. 52, and come closer to the position of Thomas Krüger, *Geschichtskonzepte im Ezechielbuch* (BZAW, 180; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), p. 340, who dated the 'older Ezekiel book' after 562 BCE. The fact that in the book of Ezekiel the new beginning is not connected with the rise of the Persian empire contradicts a later *terminus post quem* during the rise of Cyrus (547/6 BCE).

been carried out along the lines the prophet envisioned, it is highly improbable that the Ezekiel tradition would have developed much later than the reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple in 520–515 BCE when the conditions were already established. Therefore, the book of Ezekiel was probably written between 560 and 515 BCE with chs. 40–48 being developed in detail in a final phase, perhaps by a second generation of pupils. On the basis of dating the book late in the period it is possible to consider most of it a literary unity. Only chs. 38–39 are clearly a later addition.⁶ The perspectives of doom and salvation were deliberately closely intermingled⁷ in order to define the criteria for a new beginning. Thus one can say: ‘clearly the book of Ezekiel is to be read from the very start from the perspective of the conditions needed for a new beginning’.⁸

In contrast to the book of Ezekiel the book of Deutero-Isaiah does not stem from a date earlier than the late exilic period.⁹ The anonymous prophet, who has to be considered as the master of a prophetic group (Isa. 50.4-9) most probably began his prophecy of salvation among the Babylonian exiles just after the victorious campaign of Cyrus against Lydia in the year 547/6 BCE. But only parts of the book, mainly the material collected in Isa. 41–48, came from an early phase of preaching and coincided with the time before Cyrus took Babylon in 539 (see, for example, the older composition of Isa. 42.14–44.22*). However, the original message that Yhwh has called Cyrus for Israel’s sake failed (45.4) because Cyrus co-operated with the Babylonian Marduk priesthood, not with the Judaeen exiles and he neither conquered nor humiliated Babylon, but instead elevated the city to the status of one of his capitals while Jerusalem lay in ruins. Thus, after 539 BCE the Deutero-Isaiah group struggled with its failure (49.4a, 6a) and reflected upon the meaning of Israel’s lasting exilic existence in the first and the second Servant Songs (42.1-4; 49.1-6).

In any event, with Cambyses’ campaign to Egypt (525 BCE) the political situation changed. Judah’s strategic location next to the route to Egypt resulted in the elevation of its status to a more important province in the eyes of the

6. Possible later additions are Ezek. 34.25-31; 36.33-36, 37-38. The oracles against foreign nations (chs. 25–36), however, were part of the exilic book, since their derision of the ravaged temple, city and land moved Yhwh to intervene and deliver his people (cf. 36.2, 3, 16-21; etc.), against Krüger, *Geschichtskonzepte*, pp. 317ff.

7. A beneficial prospect can be found in the oracles of doom: Ezek. 5.3-4, 13 (?); 6.8-10; 11.14-20; 12.16; 14.11, 22-23; 16.53-58, 59-62; 17.22-24; 20.32-44; cf. 28.25-26. Elements of accusation and judgment can be found next to oracles of salvation in: 33.23-29; 34.1-10, 17-22; 36.17-19; 43.8-9; 44.6-12; 45.9.

8. See Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, p. 360.

9. For the following, see Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, pp. 393-404.

Persians. After the sudden death of Cambyses and Gaumata's revolt, Darius' usurpation of the Persian throne (522 BCE) granted the exiled Judaeans a new chance. During a period of instability, Babylonia revolted against Darius like other provinces in the Eastern part of the empire and was conquered by him twice in the winter of 522 and the summer of 521 BCE. So the prophecy of the Deutero-Isaiah group started to be fulfilled. Out of concerns to secure the loyalty of the displaced Judaeans in the revolting province, Darius was prepared to resettle a major group of them as a means of stabilizing the Western part of his empire. It is possible that while negotiations with the exiles took place, the prophetic group fled from civil war in Babylonia in order to bring the salvific message to Jerusalem and to support the repatriation that had suddenly become possible (Isa. 48.20-22), and that actually took place in the year of 520 BCE under the official leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua.

These dramatic events of the year of 522/521 probably constitute the background for the first edition of the book of Deutero-Isaiah. In the eyes of this prophetic group King Darius was carrying out what they had prophesied Cyrus would do. Thus, they supplemented their famous Cyrus oracle (Isa. 44.24-45.7) with a series of anonymous royal oracles (42.5-9; 45.11-13; 48.12-16a), which could implicitly refer to Darius without revoking the original message. On the basis of a combination of composition criticism and redaction criticism developed by Jürgen Werlitz¹⁰ and myself,¹¹ we can now verify with a high degree of probability that the first edition of the book consists of most of the text of Isa. 40.1-52.12.¹² Probably this edition was composed in Judah for use in public recitation as a means of motivating the people. Thus, the editing of the book of Deutero-Isaiah is directly involved in the realization of the new beginning in Judah.

2. *The Concepts of the Books for a New Beginning*

Since the two prophetic books and their authorial groups are so closely connected in time and place, it is no wonder that they shared similar expectations

10. Cf. Jürgen Werlitz, *Redaktion und Komposition: Zur Rückfrage hinter die Endgestalt von Jesaja 40-55* (BBB, 122; Berlin: Philo, 1999), pp. 237-82.

11. Cf. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, pp. 391-99.

12. The thesis converges with the results of Karl Elliger, *Deuterjesaja in seinem Verhältnis zu Tritojesaja* (BWANT, 63; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933); Reinhard G. Kratz, *Kyros im Deuterjesaja-Buch* (FAT, 1; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991); Jürgen van Oorschot, *Von Babel zum Zion: Eine literarkritische und redaktionskritische Untersuchung* (BZAW, 206; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); Ulrich Berges, *Das Buch Jesaja: Komposition und Endgestalt* (HerBS, 16; Freiburg: Herder, 1998); cf. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, pp. 385-91 and pp. 397-99 for the verses included in this edition.

and theological topics.¹³ For both, the hope for a return of the exiles to the land of Israel is central. To give you typical examples.

- Ezek. 11.17 'Say therefore', so speaks Adonay-Yhwh.
'I will gather you from the nations
and will assemble you from the countries,
over which I have scattered you.
And I will give you the soil of Israel.'
- Isa. 43.5 Do not fear, for I am with you!
From the East I will bring back your offspring,
and from the West I will gather you.
- 6 I will say to the North: 'Give!'
and to the South: 'Do not hold back!
Bring my sons from afar,
and my daughters from the ends of the earth!'

In connection with the return both prophetic groups promised the reconstruction of the Judaeen towns (Isa. 44.26; 45.13; 49.19; Ezek. 36.33) and the recultivation of the land (Isa. 49.8; Ezek. 36.29, 34). The Ezekiel pupils placed more emphasis on the reconstruction of the temple (Ezek. 37.26-27; 40.1-43.12) than the Deutero-Isaiah group (Isa. 44.28; cf. 52.11). Both prophetic groups expected a similar return of Yhwh to Zion with one anticipating the deity's return to his city Jerusalem (Isa. 40.9-11; 52.7-8) and the other to his new temple (Ezek. 43.1-12). Both speak of the 'glory of Yhwh' (כבוד יהוה) (Isa. 40.5; Ezek. 1.28; 3.12; 8.4; 11.22-23; 43.2; etc.) and presuppose Zion theology (Isa. 52.1-2; Ezek. 43.7). Finally, both prophetic groups compare the return of the exiles with the exodus from Egypt (Isa. 43.16-17; 48.21; 52.9; Ezek. 20.5-10, 30-38). Nevertheless, a closer look at the two prophetic books reveals striking differences in the theological framework in which their common hopes are embedded. Unfortunately, these are largely overlooked by Dieter Baltzer.¹⁴

2.1. *The concept of the Deutero-Isaiah group*

The Deutero-Isaiah group felt instructed by God to bring a message of comfort to Jerusalem.

- Isa. 40.1 'Comfort, comfort my people!', says your God!
2 'Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her.
Truly, her servitude has ended, truly, her guilt is removed,
for she has received from the hand of Yhwh double for all her sins!'

In its view, the period of judgment has come to an end and Jerusalem has

13. Cf. Dieter Baltzer, *Ezechiel und Deuterjesaja: Berührung in der Heilserwartung der beiden großen Exilspropheten* (BZAW, 121; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971).

14. Cf. Baltzer, *Ezechiel und Deuterjesaja*, pp. 178-83.

been punished by Yhwh more than enough during the long period of exile. Accordingly, its guilt is removed and the prophetic group proclaims to it the dawn of a new age of salvation.

According to this historic-theological concept, the present message of Deutero-Isaiah deals primarily with salvation. Its core, the oracles of salvation (Isa. 41.8-13, 14-16; 43.1-7; 44.1-5) are unconditional assurances. And the little hymns, which structure the whole book of the first edition, anticipate the divine comfort and deliverance of Israel and Jerusalem as if they had already taken place (44.23; 49.13; 52.9; cf. 48.20). However, the salvific message of Yhwh's appointment of the Persian kings Cyrus and Darius to repatriate the exiles and to reconstruct Jerusalem (45.13) was not easily accepted among the exilic and the Judaeen communities. As the disputations show, the prophetic group faced many objections from their audience such as, Did Yhwh, god of this tiny ethnic group, have the power to impose his will on nations as powerful as the Persians (40.15-17)? Were their gods not more powerful (40.18-20, 25-26)? Did Yhwh actually act in history on the basis of moral categories and rational principles (40.13-14)? Was he even still interested in his people after such a long period of silence (40.12-14)? Has he not decided to get divorced from his city (50.1)? Would he be able to liberate his people (50.2)? And finally: How could Yhwh appoint a foreign king as the anointed saviour (45.1)? So, the prophetic group was confronted with scepticism, dejection, pusillanimity and theological doubts, which considerably diminished the stimulating effect of their message. If we can believe the testimony of the third Servant Song, the prophetic group was even abused and beaten by those inhabitants of Judah who were tired of all hope (50.4-6).

Thus, in spite of its unconditional message, the prophetic group had to face the problem that the majority of its people refused to trust in it. In response they started a programme of theological education in order to renew the belief of their audience. They reminded them of the old hymns where Yhwh's omnipotence as the creator of the world and the sovereign of history along with his mercy were praised (Isa. 40.12-31). They taught the deaf and the blind, who were not able to hear their message and to notice God's acts in history, that no other power than Yhwh had caused their disaster (42.18-25). Thus, for Deutero-Isaiah, the acceptance of the prophecy of doom constitutes the prerequisite of a new relationship with God. Moreover, since Yhwh had predicted the fall of Israel and Judah, he had demonstrated his purposeful governance of history down to the coming of Cyrus (41.22-23) and proved to be the only God (41.14, 28; etc.). Likewise, the prophetic group argued against the self-pity of their companions. In contradistinction to complaints that God had not honoured all the community's cultic and sacrificial efforts in the pre-exilic period, the Deutero-Isaiah group let God point out that they

had not served him, but rather burdened him with their constant sins (43.23–28). ‘Only this recognition of sin and clarification of responsibility could open the way for the restoration of Israel’s shattered relationship with God.’¹⁵ According to Deutero-Isaiah, only God—not Israel—could interrupt their sinful history. The deity has, therefore, forgiven all Israel’s sins for his own sake (43.25). Yhwh’s merciful forgiveness of Israel’s sins and the conclusion of the period of judgment constitute the secure foundation on which the new Israel can be built.

At the end of the older composition (42.14–44.23), which was so much engaged with the renewal of the people’s belief, an admonition for repentance is placed strategically.

Isa. 44.21 Think of these things, Jacob,
 for you are my servant.
 I have formed you, you are my servant,
 Israel, you are not forgotten by me.
 22 I have wiped out your crimes like a cloud
 and your sins like a mist.
 Return to me! For I have redeemed you.

That means: in spite of the unconditional status of salvation, Israel’s return to Yhwh is still necessary.¹⁶ However, Israel’s repentance is not a prerequisite for salvation, but rather its consequence. Yhwh’s assurances to Israel of his redemption and forgiveness of sins reminds each member of the community of his honoured status as the deity’s servant for which any Israelite should thankfully change his ways and thoughts in order to do justice to Yhwh’s salvific plans.

Against the background of the dramatic political history of the Persian empire in the years of 522–521 BCE the return to Yhwh included three

15. See Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, p. 411.

16. Because of this apparent contradiction, Claus Westermann, *Das Buch Jesaja: Kapitel 40–66* (ATD, 19; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 5th edn, 1986), p. 116, suggested that this admonition could not have emerged in the same situation as the oracles of salvation, but must have been spoken later by pupils of Deutero-Isaiah after their remigration. Similarly, Werlitz, *Redaktion und Komposition*, pp. 248–50, thinks of a redactional text, and Oorschot, *Von Babel zum Zion*, pp. 216–18, assigns it to his ‘Naherwartungsschicht’ dated in the late 6th or early 5th century. But already Hans Walter Wolff, ‘Das Thema “Umkehr” in der alttestamentlichen Prophetie’, in his *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (ThB, 22; München: Kaiser, 1964), pp. 130–50 (144–45), has pointed out that the call of repentance derived from the oracle of salvation. Isa. 44.21–22 must be understood, therefore, as an attracting invitation. That the admonition constituted the target for an older collection (Isa. 42.14–44.23) was shown by Christof Hardmeier, ‘“Geschwiegen habe ich seit langem... wie die Gebärende schreie ich jetzt”’: Zur Komposition und Geschichtstheologie von Jes 42.14–44.23*’, *WuD* 20 (1989), pp. 155–79 (176–78); cf. likewise Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, pp. 411–12.

conditions. First, both the golah in Babylonia and the Judaeans at home had to accept the prophetic message that Yhwh had intervened in international history in order to provide his people with a chance of salvation. This means that the capture of Babylon by Darius had to be interpreted as the very end of the period of exile (Isa. 47) and Darius' usurpation had to be viewed as Yhwh's appointment made to facilitate the repatriation of the golah and the reconstruction of Jerusalem (45.13; 48.12-16a). Second, the exiles in Babylon and elsewhere were faced with the decision about their willingness to take a chance and venture the risky enterprise of repatriation (48.20; 52.9). Third, the Judeans in Judah had to ascertain how many repatriates they were willing to accept and welcome in a friendly way (52.1-2, 11-12).

It seems that the Deutero-Isaiah group did not want to exclude anybody from the new beginning. Even the Judaeans in Egypt who had been castigated by the pupils of Jeremiah (Jer. 44) were included (Isa. 48.12). They considered their main task to be the encouragement of as many Judaeans and Israelites as possible to participate in Yhwh's restoration. In their enthusiasm they sought to avert the loss of the opportunity of return to the homeland. Since the Deutero-Isaiah group was directly involved in the political enterprise of repatriation, they were not so interested in the formulation of clear theological criteria for the new society. However, only those who had participated in the repatriation or supported it would witness the saving power of Yhwh and the extension of his supreme divine sovereignty to the nations (Isa. 44.8-13; 44.6-8; 52.9-10). In contrast, those who refused repatriation excluded themselves from Yhwh's salvific plans for his people.

2.2. The concept of the Ezekiel group

Since the pupils of Ezekiel started their editorial work during the stable phase of the Babylonian empire, their reflections about a new beginning were not connected with a definite historical development like the fall of Babylon or the rise of Cyrus, but remained more theoretical.

In contrast to the Deutero-Isaiah group, the Ezekiel pupils have given much more thought about who would participate in the new beginning. According to their view, unbroken continuity between the old and the new Israel was not a possibility. They agreed with Amos that the old Israel had come to an end (Amos 8.2): it had literally died under the judgment of God (Ezek. 7). The future Israel would be a new divine creation, resurrected from a heap of dry bones with the help of the prophetic word (37.1-11). The same discontinuity is shown with regard to the Jerusalem temple. After the glory of Yhwh had left the sanctuary, it was handed over to destruction (ch. 8-11). The new temple, which would be a totally new building, could only exist after the glory of God had returned to it (43.1-12). Therefore, 'not all those whose families had survived the catastrophe should conclude that they would automatically

belong to the new Israel, not to mention enjoy their old position',¹⁷ and no one should think that one could simply restore the pre-exilic institutions. In the new Israel the strict separation of the temple and palace, along with the consequences that such a division would entail, was a necessity!

In principle, all Israel could share the coming salvation. In contrast to K.-F. Pohlmann I would like to emphasize that no group was generally excluded.¹⁸ For certain, the first golah of 598/7, which had experienced God's judgment already (Ezek. 11.17-20) was addressed by the promise, but the second golah of 587 would profit by it as well, after it had experienced the same fate (6.8-10; 14.22-23). Yhwh would assemble both groups from among the nations and bring them back to the land of Israel (34.12-14; 36.8, 24; 37.12-14). Those who had remained in Judah and who challenged the property-rights of the golah and continued to practice their abominations, would meet further divine judgment (33.23-29). However, this does not imply their general exclusion, as the oracles of salvation for Jerusalem show (cf. 16.53-58, 59-63). Even the Israelites of the former Northern kingdom would be included among the reunited people at the end (16.61; 37.15-19; 47.15-48.29). In contrast to the Deutero-Isaiah group, the pupils of Ezekiel do not conceive of a general absolution for all previous sins. Nonetheless, according to their opinion, every member of the community, wherever that person may live, has a chance of repentance and can be sure of God's forgiveness of the individual (18.21; cf. 33.15).

However, what is true for the ordinary people is not also true for the religious and political leaders. The pupils of Ezekiel subjected the latter to more severe criteria and a more comprehensive judgment. The false prophets, whose divinations were a lie, were definitely excluded from the house of Israel and were not allowed to enter the land of Israel (Ezek. 13.9). 'Such irresponsible prophets, who had misled the people with their constant talk of *šālôm* (13.10) and thus prevented them from changing their ways, were useless for the new beginning.'¹⁹ They must be kept outside! Likewise the prophet's pupils accused those elders who outwardly had behaved devoutly and responsibly, but continued secretly to practise idolatry in their private devotions (14.1-11). Speaking with the authority of sacral law, the Ezekiel school pronounced their exclusion from the people of Yhwh (14.8). The same verdict applied to any prophet who aided and abetted these elders with a word of God (14.9-10). Such irresponsible political and religious leaders,

17. See Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, pp. 362-63.

18. He postulated a golah-oriented edition, which stresses the preferential treatment of the golah from 597 BCE, while those who remained in Judah would be seen to be eliminated (cf. Ezek. 11.14-21; 33.21-33); cf. Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Der Prophet Hesekiel/Ezechiel*, I (ATD, 22/1-2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996/2001), pp. 27-28.

19. See Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, p. 363.

who endangered the people, could no longer be tolerated in the new community. The pupils of Ezekiel brought a harsh indictment against the shepherds of Israel as well (34.1-6). All the members of the royal family and the officials who had selfishly exploited the people in the past would be removed and deprived of their power before the future salvation would happen (34.7-15). 'There could also be no continuity at the pinnacle of political authority.'²⁰ Only after Yhwh had created a just balance between the wealthy and the poor could a new kingdom be established there (34.16-24).

Although the prophet's pupils differed in their notion about the identity of the new king, be it a descendant of Jehoiachin (Ezek. 17.22-24), a new David (34.23-24; 37.24-25) or someone else (37.20-22), they all agreed that his power must be reduced. Therefore, they called him מלך 'king' only twice (37.22, 24) and more frequently used the term נסיך 'prince' (34.24; 37.25; 44.3; 45.7-9; etc.). Consequently, the pupils of the second generation stripped this future petty king of all his former sacrality (46.1-10). Moreover, they sought to remove the need for any royal exploitation of the people (46.16-18) and conceptualized a new institutional order where political and religious powers would be divided strictly between the prince, the tribal leaders and the priests (45.1-8; 47.21-48.29). Likewise, those priests who had misled the people to apostasy in the past would be degraded to the minor class of Levites (44.9-14) and would have to carry their guilt (44.10, 12). Thus, those political and religious leaders who had conducted their offices irresponsibly in the past would be either excluded or have their status diminished.

With their most critical view of the new beginning, the Ezekiel school came in conflict with other late exilic groups like the Deutero-Isaiah prophets or the tradents of the Deuteronomistic History. In consequence, they felt obliged to defend their insights in the central ch. 20 of their book.²¹ Since Ezekiel 20 refers to topics like the exodus (vv. 5-10, 36)²² and the kingship of Yhwh (20.33)²³ which are otherwise lacking in the book but of central importance in Deutero-Isaiah, we can conclude that the Ezekiel pupils entered into fierce debate with their prophetic colleagues.²⁴ Apart from this they referred

20. See Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, p. 364.

21. Krüger, *Geschichtskonzepte*, pp. 206-14, has convincingly shown that Ezekiel 20 should be considered an original unit.

22. Cf. Isa. 43.16-17, 18-20; 48.21; 51.9-10; 52.12, although the exodus theme is not as central in Deutero-Isaiah as often believed; see Rainer Albertz, 'Loskauf umsonst? Die Befreiungsvorstellungen bei Deuteroseja', in *Freiheit und Recht: Festschrift für Frank Crüsemann zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. C. Hardmeier, R. Kessler and A. Ruwe; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003), pp. 360-79 (360-62).

23. Cf. Isa. (40.10); 41.21; 43.15; 44.6; 52.7.

24. Walther Zimmerli, 'Der "neue Exodus" in der Verkündigung der beiden großen Exilspropheten', in his *Gottes Offenbarung: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (ThB, 19; München: Kaiser, 1969), pp. 192-204 (193-94), pointed out correctly that the topics of the exodus

to Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic topics like Israel's divine election (v. 5)²⁵ and God's acts with 'a strong hand and outstretched arm' (vv. 33, 36),²⁶ thereby showing that they wanted to dispute with the Deuteronomists, too.

What was the nature of the disagreement? If one conceptualizes the repatriation of the exiles as a 'new exodus', as the Deutero-Isaiah group had done, then all Israelites can participate, because Yhwh had brought all of Israel out of Egypt. The same inclusive view can also be inferred from the Deuteronomic topic of Israel's election. In chap. 20, however, the Ezekiel pupils wanted to disprove this argument on the basis of Israel's salvation history. They did not deny that Yhwh had elected Israel (Ezek. 20.5) and had solemnly promised the people to bring it out of Egypt into a wonderful land (v. 6). But according to the Ezekiel pupils, Israel's constant apostasy already made a farce of the exodus. Because the people were not willing to give up their Egyptian idols, Yhwh violently separated them by removing them from Egypt. In their view, then, the exodus was more a purgative judgment than a saving act (20.8b-10). They thus emphasized that it led only indirectly to the promised land by way of the wilderness (v. 10). Likewise, Israel's disobedience made a farce of the legislation on Mount Sinai which resulted in the cancellation of the divine promise of land for the generation currently in the wilderness (v. 15).²⁷ The Ezekielian recital of Israel's history taught that there never was an unconditional claim to enter the promised land.

According to the Ezekiel school, Yhwh made another attempt with the second generation in the wilderness, but was disappointed again. Because of their disobedience and apostasy he announced expulsion from the land while they were still in the wilderness (Ezek. 20.23).²⁸ Moreover, he gave them bad instructions, which would mislead them (vv. 25-26). Thus the pupils contradict the Deuteronomists and the Deutero-Isaiah group that there had ever existed any salvific phase in Israel's early history on which one could found

and divine kingdom occur only in Ezek. 20. But since he presupposes an early exilic dating of the text (pp. 203-204), he cannot appreciate the reference to Deutero-Isaiah. That Ezekiel 20 should rather be regarded as a late chapter of the book is supported by Pohlmann's observation that it interrupts the close thematic connections between chap. 19 and chs. 21-22 and has a wider horizon than its context (cf. *Der Prophet Hesekiel*, II, pp. 303-304).

25. Cf. Deut. 7.6-7; 10.15; 14.2; etc.

26. Cf. Deut. 4.34; 5.15; 26.8; Jer. 21.5, and many similar expressions like Deut. 7.19; 11.2; 1 Kgs 8.42.

27. As the parallel with the Deuteronomistic History shows (Deut. 1.34-36), the reversal of the land promise is probably not generally meant, but only with respect to the first generation.

28. Here the Ezekiel pupils contradicted the view of the Deuteronomistic History in which the second generation could enter the promised land without any difficulty and in their warning that the land could be lost is uttered only after the occupation by Joshua (Josh. 23).

one's claim and from which one could draw parallels with the new beginning. Even the gift of the Mosaic law on which the Deuteronomists were based was infected by Israel's apostasy and needed a critical prophetic review.

In the eyes of the Ezekiel pupils, the exilic generation persisted also in the apostasy of their fathers who had lived in the land (Ezek. 20.27-31).²⁹ In contrast to the Deutero-Isaiah group the promise of return could have nothing to do with a general divine absolution. In their view, Yhwh was ready to gather the exiles from the foreign countries and to bring them out of the nations (v. 33) in order to offset the likelihood that they would become assimilated (v. 32). Moreover, this new exodus would not automatically bring the exiles into the land of Israel, but it would lead them only to the wilderness as in the previous exodus. Here, in the 'desert of the nations' (v. 34), which the Ezekiel pupils equated with the 'desert of the land of Egypt' (v. 36), Yhwh personally would sit in judgment on the exiles and would select each person, 'who revolted and rebelled against me' (v. 38) and exclude that person from coming home. Only those who passed this purgative judgment were allowed to build up the new community in the land of Israel. They would be brought back in 'the bond', that is, in 'the obligation of covenant' (v. 37), in order that they might practice the divine laws by heart.³⁰ In addition, according to other texts in the book of Ezekiel, the defiled land of Israel (36.17; 11.18) and the new community in the land (36.25, 29; 37.23) would require a thorough cultic purgation.

While the editor of the Book of the Four interpreted the entire exile as a judgment of purgation (Hos. 3.1-5; Amos 9.7-10; Mic. 5.9-13; Zeph. 1.4-6; 3.9-11),³¹ the Ezekiel school is the only prophetic group that expected an additional purgative judgment at the end of the exile. In their eyes, it would be similar to what had occurred already in the first exodus. By formulating the return in this way—that Yahweh's judgment demonstrates his kingship over Israel (אֲמַלּוֹךְ עַל יִכָּם, Ezek. 20.33)—they explicitly contradicted the message of the Deutero-Isaiah group who proclaimed that Yhwh would reveal his sovereignty through salvific actions, the conquest of Babylon (Isa. 43.14-15) and the triumphant return (40.9-11; 52.7-9). 'Clearly they saw in the unconditional message of salvation for all the exiles the nascent danger of

29. The contradiction to Ezek. 20.15 verifies that the reversal of the land promise in this verse cannot generally be meant.

30. For this interpretation, see Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 22; New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 372-73, and Krüger, *Geschichtskonzepte*, pp. 268-69. Probably, this strange little picture should be expressed with the easier metaphor of implanting a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 11.19; 36.26-27).

31. Cf. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, pp. 204-37.

cheap grace, which imperiled the new beginning they desired.³² Although they agreed with their prophetic colleagues that Yhwh would rescue exiled Israel for his own sake (Isa. 43.25; 48.11; Ezek. 36.22, 32), or more precisely, ‘for the sake of his name, that it might not be profaned in the sight of the nations’ (Ezek. 20.9, 14, 22; cf. 20.44; 36.20-23) and that divine salvation would never be dependent on Israel’s conduct (20.44), they elevated individual responsibility so that the participation of each person in the restoration became contingent on that person’s confession and repentance. According to Ezekelian thought, a new beginning that would correspond to God’s salvific act could never take place without the feeling of shame and disgust about what was done in the past (Ezek. 6.9; 20.43; 36.31; cf. 16.53, 63).

3. Conclusion

Although the two prophetic schools mentioned above worked at a similar place—starting in Babylonia and ending in Jerusalem—and during a similar period—starting in the mid or the late exilic period and ending in early post-exilic times—they developed, in spite of some material and theological convergences, two nearly opposite concepts for Israel’s new beginning after the exile.

The reasons for the divergence are not easy to determine. Probably, the different concepts have to do with the different origin of the two groups. The Deutero-Isaiah group, on the one hand, derived in all probability from the former non-priestly ministers of the Jerusalem temple, primarily the temple singers³³ whose fathers had probably stood close to the nationalistic party of the late monarchic time where Isaiah was interpreted as a prophet of salvation.³⁴ As the universalism of Deutero-Isaiah shows, the prophetic group partly distanced itself from the nationalistic view of its earlier environment. It is understandable, then, that they were less critical of the conflicts within the exilic Israelite community.

32. See Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, p. 367.

33. Cf. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, p. 381.

34. See, mainly, the Assur-redaction from the time of Josiah, which had turned the divine judgment against the aggressor Assur; cf. Hermann Barth, *Die Jesaja-Worte in der Josiazeit: Israel und Assur als Thema einer produktiven Neuinterpretation der Jesaja-überlieferung* (WMANT, 48; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977). Christof Hardmeier, *Prophetie im Streit vor dem Untergang Judas: Erzählkommunikative Studien zur Entstehungssituation der Jesaja- und Jeremiaerzählungen in II Reg 18–20 und Jer 37–40* (BZAW, 187; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), pp. 247-436, has pointed out that the original Isaiah legend (2 Kgs 18–20*), which portrays Isaiah as a prophet of salvation, was created by a member of the nationalistic party in the dispute over alliances that occurred during the siege of Jerusalem 588 BCE.

The Ezekiel school, on the other hand, inherited the critical legacy of its master. Ezekiel had belonged to a priestly group, which—although Zadokite—had nothing to do with the leading Hilkiads, who had constituted the head of the nationalistic party.³⁵ As can be seen from Ezekiel 17 the prophet had opposed the nationalistic politics of Zedekiah and he had heavily criticized all social abuses (22.6-12, 25). In so doing, his political position was close to that of the reform party who had supported the prophet Jeremiah in Judah (Jer. 26.24; 36.9-26). It is understandable, therefore, that the pupils of Ezekiel insisted on a radical change in the future Judaeen society.

In spite of being so different, both concepts turned out to be necessary for the history of early postexilic Israel. Without the emphatic preaching of the Deutero-Isaiah group far fewer exiles would have been encouraged to risk the adventure of return; and perhaps the repatriation programme itself would have failed. The emphasis on the beginning of a new era, the assurance of divine forgiveness and the unconditional promise of salvation were absolutely necessary for the motivation of as many persons as possible. Any attempt to restrict the homecomers because of their previous deeds would have been counterproductive in this situation. A little later, however, after the temple had been rebuilt, the inner organization of the new Judaeen community was at stake. Now the more theoretical reflections of the Ezekiel school became important. Without their idea that the glory of God enforces the dissolution of the former amalgamation of the holy and the political realm (Ezek. 43.1-12), the separation of political and religious powers and the independence of the priests would probably never have been carried out. Of course, many other aspects of the two future prophetic concepts remained utopian. Nevertheless, both had an important impact on the future course of Israelite history.

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35. Cf. Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, I (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), pp. 232-41.

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