

*Exile and Return*

*Many Judeans went into exile in Babylon. A second generation was born. Then the Persians conquered Babylon, and for economic reasons of their own, permitted the return of the exiles to Jerusalem. For this relatively late period, we might expect factual reportage. There is nothing of the sort. Instead, there are invented eyewitness accounts of this or that key moment, all of them theologically slanted. There were hopes for renewal of the Promise to David, or at least for a resumption of cultural life, with the rebuilt Temple as its focus. Neither quite took place as expected. Here are some scenes from that period.*

(55) Yehudim. This specific word for “Jews” appears only in the Exile, when the Hebrews were a separate race within multi-ethnic Babylon.

(57) The Torah Psalter. At some point early in the Exile, devotion to the Psalms took the form of meditation on 109 of them, a group newly defined by the addition of Psalms 1 and 109. What is its focus?

(58) Chronicles. It was urgent to rewrite gloomy Kings, which had ended with the Exile, so as to make it envision, and indeed prepare for, the Return. Chronicles is that rewrite. We sample some of its main emphases, including removal of anything that could be remotely negative about the Kingship.

(59) Ezra and Nehemiah. At one point, these were the second and third chapters of Chronicles, but the actual relation is more complicated, and it will be best to consider them by themselves. It is here that the ethnic self-definition of the Jews appears, with the dramatic mass divorces commanded by Ezra.

(60) Ruth and Tamar. Ruth cleverly attacked Ezra’s ethnic exclusiveness by showing that David himself was the product of a mixed marriage. Her proof was reinforced by the story of Tamar, inserted into the Joseph story as Gen 38. Such were the claims and counterclaims on this, the hottest of issues.

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*These were times when earlier history needed to be, not merely patched, but massively rewritten, to make it better address the needs of a different age.*

*Other lines of thought, in different directions, also appeared in this period. We will look at a few of them in the next and final section.*