

Title: Assignment 1 – Short Essay 1 (1500 words)

In 1500 words, discuss the role of prophets in ONE of the following contexts:

- a. Pre-Exilic
- b. Exilic
- c. Post-Exilic

In your discussion highlight the prophets' theological and pastoral understanding of Yahweh, Israel and the nations.

Course: Introduction to the Old Testament

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DECLARATION

I certify that this ASSIGNMENT is my own work. I have acknowledged all material and sources used in it, and that I have not plagiarised in part or whole the work of others without stating the references.

b. The role of prophets in the Exilic context – the prophets’ theological and pastoral understanding of YHWH, Israel and the nations

Introduction:

The conquest of Israel and Judah – and the exiling of their populaces – dealt a major psychological blow to the Jewish people. How could this happen to the chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6-7) – God’s own firstborn son (Exodus 4:22)? Does He not see, and does He not perceive (Psalm 94:7)?

It is against such an attitude of despair and defeatism that prophets such as Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel and (future to his own time) Isaiah brought a message of correction and reassurance to the exiles – the true theological and pastoral understanding that YHWH intended to convey to His straying children.

Nations and Their Gods

To the ancient mind, the fate of a nation was tied to spiritual forces – whether called princes (Daniel 10:13,20-21), gods (Exodus 12:12, Jeremiah 46:25), sons of God (Deuteronomy 32:8-9 ESV¹), heavenly host (Isaiah 24:21-23 & 34:2-4), or rulers and authorities (Ephesian 6:12 and other mentions of “*geographical domain rulership*”² by Paul).

The Syrians believed they had lost a highlands battle because Israel’s god is linked to the hills (1 Kings 20:23-30). The Cyrus Cylinder (corroborating 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1-4 & 6:1-5) describes his reversing the Babylonian kidnapping of gods from conquered nations³. In Acts 17:26,

¹ Michael S. Heiser, “Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God,” *LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations (2001)*, 52.

² Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham/USA: Lexham Press, 2015), 121-123.

³ “From [Shuanna] I sent back to their places to the city of Ashur and Susa, Akkad, the land of Eshnunna, the city of Zamban, the city of Meturnu, Der, as far as the border of the land of Guti – the sanctuaries across the river Tigris – whose shrines had earlier become dilapidated, the gods who lived therein, and made permanent sanctuaries for them. I collected together all of their people and returned them to their settlements, and the gods of the land of Sumer and Akkad which Nabonidus – to the fury of the lord of the gods – had brought into Shuanna, at the command of Marduk, the great lord, I returned them unharmed to their cells, in the sanctuaries that make them happy. May all the gods that I returned to their sanctuaries, every day before Bel and Nabu, ask for a long life for me, and mention my good deeds, and say to Marduk, my lord, this: “Cyrus, the king who fears

Paul echoes Deuteronomy 32:8-9 and also cites to the Greeks their own belief that nations were *allotted* to different gods⁴.

Within this worldview, nations were conquered because their gods were defeated – as Rabshakeh of Assyria arrogantly boasted (2 Kings 18:33-35). In response to this particular provocation, YHWH slaughtered the invading army (2 Kings 19:20-35) – by Rabshakeh’s own standards, YHWH decisively proved the victor over the gods of Assyria.

But then, what of the later invasions of Jerusalem – where YHWH did *not* deliver His city from the Babylonians? To the scoffing conquerors, surely the god of the Jews had finally been overcome – “*Where is their God?*” (Psalm 79:10)

The prophets therefore had to set the theological record straight: Jerusalem hadn’t fallen because YHWH was *beaten*. In truth, YHWH’s almighty presence had withdrawn from the Temple in judgment (Jeremiah 10:18-19 & 11:23). Because Israel failed to keep their promise (Leviticus 26:14-39, Daniel 9:4-16) and had bowed down to gods not *allotted* to them (Deuteronomy 29:18-28), YHWH’s shining face (Deuteronomy 6:22-27) was now hidden from them (Jeremiah 39:23-24). The Jews had to learn that simply being YHWH’s people (Exodus 6:7) didn’t give them license to sin (Jeremiah 7:4-10).

Yet, Israel’s desolation wouldn’t last forever. Through the same prophets, YHWH reminded the people of His abounding *chesed* – His ‘believing loyalty’⁵ or ‘pledged, unbreakable, covenant love and loyalty’⁶. The chastening exile would cease after seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11-14 & 29:10, Ezekiel 11:17, Daniel 9:2). And something even greater was to follow – those same promises which Israel had failed to keep would be fulfilled by YHWH Himself.

you, and Cambyses his son, may they be the provisioners of our shrines until distant (?) days, and the population of Babylon call blessings on my kingship. I have enabled all the lands to live in peace.” Irving Finkel, “Translation of the text on the Cyrus Cylinder (archived)”, *The British Museum* (accessed 17-Jul-2022): https://web.archive.org/web/20121221112524/http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/articles/c/cyrus_cylinder_-_translation.aspx

⁴ “In the days of old the gods had the whole earth distributed among them by allotment. ... They all of them by just apportionment obtained what they wanted, and peopled their own districts ... Now different gods had their allotments in different places which they set in order.” Plato, “Critias”, *The Internet Classics Archive* (accessed 28-Jul-2022): <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/critias.html>

⁵ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 164, 170.

⁶ Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross* (IL/USA: Crossway Books, 2014), 58.

By His Own Arm

The history of YHWH's chosen people is one of repeated failure – from the gutless wilderness wanderers (Numbers 14:1-12); to the chronic ungratefulness once in the promised land (Judges 2:18-19); to the evil and idolatrous kings who led Israel and Judah astray and ultimately into exile.⁷

Yet, YHWH hadn't been taken by surprise – does He not declare the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:8-11)? Can any answer before Him (Job 38:1-3), or can any question Him (Daniel 4:34-35)? YHWH knew fallible humanity wouldn't uphold their responsibilities – He was already *personally* prepared for their shortcomings.

In the giving of the Ten Commandments, YHWH had both copies (Exodus 32:15) of the 'contract' placed within the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:16). Copies of such agreements were usually kept in the presence of the respective gods of each side – acting as witnesses, guarantors and enforcers of the compact.⁸ Thus by holding both stone tablets, YHWH indicated that He Himself would uphold both ends of the Sinai covenant.

Return further, to the promise YHWH made to Abraham (Genesis 15). By right, Abraham should have sworn upon himself and his descendants the bloody fate of the slaughtered animals (Jeremiah 34:18) if they broke the bargain – but Abraham did *not* step through the blood. Instead, supernatural fire passed between the gory pieces twice (Genesis 15:17) – signifying that YHWH *and* *YHWH*⁹ guaranteed the promises.

⁷ Not to mention failings future to the exile – such as the rejection of their own Messiah, which YHWH foresaw and uses to graft in the Gentiles... and eventually, the Jews once again (Romans 11:11-32).

⁸ For example: “A duplicate of this tablet has been deposited before the sun-goddess of Arinna, because the sun-goddess of Arinna regulates kingship and queenship. In Mitanni land [a duplicate] has been deposited before Teshub, the lord of the [sanctuary] of Kahat. At regular [intervals] shall they read it in the presence of the king of Mitanni land and in the presence of the sons of the Hurri country.” Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lارسن, *No. 56A Shattiwaza of Mitanni & Suppiluliuma I of Hatti*, in *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East* (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 2012), 1:391. Quoted in Carmen Imes, *Bearing God's Name: Why Sinai Still Matters* (IL/USA: IVP Academic, 2019), Perlego Edition, Chapter 2, *Written In Stone: Why Two Tablets?*

⁹ The Jewish doctrine of 'Two Powers in Heaven' – a belief in a multipersonal, embodied God – was derived wholly from the Old Testament, long before any Christian influence of the Trinity and Incarnation. See: Michael S. Heiser, “Michael Heiser - Two Powers of the Godhead”, *Yesod Bible Center* (accessed 27-Jul-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrY-uAblOeQ> [9:49 to 11:55]; Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (N/p.: Brill, 1977), ix; and Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (IL/USA: Crossway Books, 2013), 116-118.

For even if His people are unfaithful, God remains faithful (2 Timothy 2:11-13) – His ways are not ours (Isaiah 55:8-9); His word is unbreakable (Numbers 23:19, Judges 2:1, Psalm 89:30-35); His *chesed* is everlasting (Psalm 138:8).

YHWH would not, however, accomplish His mighty works *absent* the participation of humans – the very recipients of the covenant promises. “God need not change his plan in response to human weakness ... He need not remove humanity ... to accomplish what he wants.”¹⁰ YHWH’s promise was to the human Abraham, His covenant with Abraham’s descendants, His righteous branch from David’s offspring (Jeremiah 33:14-22).

And so the prophets declared a great mystery – due to humanity’s inadequacies, it was necessary that YHWH must *Himself personally* uphold humanity’s end of the covenant... Yet, it was also necessary that *through humanity* would He do this:

In the trajectory of Biblical theology ... one of the necessities of the Incarnation is because we don’t have humans capable of fulfilling any of the covenants they entered into with the God of Israel. But those covenants were made with people, they were made with Israelites. And so, for those covenants to be repaired and resolved and fulfilled, you need a human being to fulfil them. Well, the demands of perfection – that’s impossible, so you need God to become a man to fulfil those things. Look at the Davidic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, call these terms the Law. So the Incarnation is, in an instance like that, necessary to sort of clean up the fulfilment of the covenants of the Old Testament. ... It demands that the Messiah be a human and also be this second Yahweh figure.¹¹

Fulfilling Israel’s covenant obligations would require someone who was both God and man – surely something impossible! But is anything too hard for YHWH (Jeremiah 32:27)?

¹⁰ Michael S. Heiser, *Facebook* (accessed 28-Jul-2022): <https://www.facebook.com/378543178874562/posts/pfbid028mUentRqCDTyABKWD7iaJhwDxuzuyf3QA2LLU8TrE7Aw2KtmEbzDKZR3u3W7wql>

¹¹ Michael S. Heiser, “Dr. Michael Heiser on Old Testament Binitarianism - trinities 098”, *khanpadawan* (accessed 28-Jul-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pl3AMS6-BfQ> [39:28 to 40:50].

The Servant King

Clearly by the time of the exile, Israel as YHWH's chosen servant had failed (Isaiah 42:18-25). But repeatedly, the prophets declared an inexplicable wonder to come. In Israel's place – and yet, out of their own midst – would arise a truer Servant, a vibrant shoot from their broken stump (Isaiah 11:1-5's *netser* fulfilled in Matthew 2:23's *Nazarene*).

In Isaiah 59 & 63, YHWH expresses disappointment in His human children – they had failed so utterly, that He would need to fulfil their responsibility for them. YHWH had once redeemed Israel by His outstretched arm (Exodus 6:6), and YHWH would once again save them by His own arm (Isaiah 59:15-16 & 63:3-5).

YHWH would raise up a righteous Servant who bears the suffering which guilty humanity deserves (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12; fulfilled in Matthew 8:14-17, Luke 22:37, John 12:37-38, Acts 8:30-35, Romans 10:16 and 1 Peter 2:22-23). Although a Servant, He would be *high and lifted up* (Isaiah 52:13) – descriptions that rightly belong to YHWH alone (Isaiah 2:12-14, 6:1, 33:10, 57:15).

YHWH promised that He Himself would be the shepherd of Israel (Ezekiel 34:15) – yet also, someone from the human line of David would be the *one* shepherd over Israel (Ezekiel 34:23 fulfilled in John 10:11&26-29).

YHWH would send a Son of Man to fulfil the covenant promises which Israel broke – and somehow, this representative of humanity would *also be* YHWH (Daniel 7:13-14¹² fulfilled in Mark 14:61-64¹³). The one who is rightfully king (Matthew 2:2) would come to serve (Matthew 20:28).

For a little while, the Temple of YHWH was trampled (Isaiah 63:18, Daniel 8:13 & 9:17) and His name belittled (Psalm 74:10&22, Psalm 79:12). But soon, the righteous Servant would proclaim

¹² This passage with its two divine figures worked handily as a proof-text for the aforementioned 'Two Powers in Heaven' belief, hence after the rise of Christianity the rabbis took pains to steer Jews away from such 'heretical' interpretation. See: Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 33-36.

¹³ To the high priest, there was no ambiguity that Jesus was claiming divinity – he viewed Jesus' words as clear blasphemy. In the Old Testament, the one who rides the clouds/heavens appears four other times apart from Daniel 7:13-14, and is clearly YHWH in each – Deuteronomy 33:26, Psalm 68:33 & 104:3, Isaiah 19:1. Additionally, 'cloud rider' was a well-known appellation of the pagan deity Baal which was polemically coopted for the one true God; see: James S. Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal* (Edinburgh/UK: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2018), Perlego Edition, 86-88.

good news to the captives (Isaiah 61:1-2a fulfilled in Luke 4:16-21) – and also, judgment upon the transgressors (Isaiah 61:2b).

Not only would YHWH punish the wayward nations of man – recalling the spiritual-national link, through the cross He would also defeat the powers which led the nations astray¹⁴ (Deuteronomy 32:43 ESV and Psalm 82¹⁵; fulfilled in Matthew 8:28-29, Mark 1:23-24, Luke 8:26-29 & 11:20, 1 Corinthians 2:8 & 6:3, Ephesians 1:19-23 & 4:8, Colossians 2:10 & 15, Hebrews 2:14 and 1 Peter 3:18-22). It would be YHWH's turn to scoff: "*Where are their gods?*" (Deuteronomy 32:35)

Conclusion

Israel had their foundation in the Exodus – the exile seemed to undo it all. Israel now seemed destroyed; the idolators victorious; and YHWH absent through it all. But through the words of the prophets, even amidst the loving chastening of the Father (Proverbs 3:12, Hebrews 12:6)... YHWH reminded the exiles of His unfailing *chesed*.

YHWH's people had accomplished nothing but stubbornness, rebellion and failure – but instead of the divine abandonment which they so richly deserved, YHWH would take it upon Himself to see the covenant through. His plan was to give them a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11), and one day even supersede the old covenant with a new, more perfect one (Jeremiah 31:31-34 fulfilled in Hebrews 8:6-13). Truly, He would never leave nor forsake them (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Israel would be restored to the land. The righteous Servant would lead a greater Exodus and fulfil the Torah.¹⁶ And ultimately, through YHWH's own nail-pierced hands (Zechariah 12:10), the whole world would be reclaimed as the Kingdom of God (Psalm 82:8 fulfilled in Matthew 28:18-20).

¹⁴ This view of the cross was "the dominant idea of the Atonement throughout the early church period." Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study Of The Three Main Types Of The Idea Of The Atonement* (London/UK: SPCK Publishing, 2010), 6.

¹⁵ A clue that the above passage refers to the spiritual powers over nations is Psalm 82:8's 'inherit' [root word *nachal*] also being used in Deuteronomy 32:8-9's inheritance/heritage. See: Michael S. Heiser, "Should the Plural אֱלֹהִים of Psalm 82 Be Understood as Men or Divine Beings?" *Annual Meeting, Evangelical Theological Society (2010)*, 4-5. Available at: <http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/ETS2010Psalm82.pdf>

¹⁶ Elaborated upon further in the 2022 essay submitted to Dr. Siew Woh: "How does the Pentateuch (Torah) form the foundation of the Old Testament? How does it relate to the New Testament?"

To the Jews languishing in sorrowful exile, and to every waiting believer (Revelation 22:20)... Hold fast to YHWH's promise: *With a mighty hand and outstretched arm; His chesed endures forever!* (Psalm 136:12)

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