# 11 Migration in the Book of Isaiah

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It is often remarked that the Exile is strangely absent from the book of Isaiah: The book transitions from material concerning the preexilic kingdoms of Judah and Israel contained in Isa 1–39 to material concerned with the exiles' departure from Babylonia and the restoration of Jerusalem (Isa 40–66) with no more reference to how the people came to be in Babylonia than a two-verse oracle set in the time of Hezekiah, which warns that

> Days are coming when all that is in your house, and that which your ancestors have stored up until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says Yhwh. Some of your own sons who are born to you shall be taken away; they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. (Isa 39:6–7)

The shadow of the Exile unquestionably falls over the book, of course; the latter half presupposes its occurrence, as it summons descendants of those taken forcibly to Babylonia to ready themselves to return to Zion, then deals with the disappointed hopes of those who did. Ever since these chapters were recognized as having originated after the catastrophe of Jerusalem's sixth-century BCE destruction, the consequences of the experience in Babylonia, together with the difficulties associated with the eventual return to the homeland, have in some way been acknowledged by interpreters. Most recently, a small but growing body of literature has sought to consider the theological and other implications of these experiences explicitly from the perspective of migration studies, reading the second half of the book in conversation with comparative research from the social sciences (Ahn, 159–222; Boda; Crouch, 91–95, 102–110; Cuéllar; Hägglund; Smith-Christopher). Other studies have analyzed the function of "exile" from a literary perspective, recognizing the way that a historical experience came to signify a broader set of ideas and concerns, such as alienation from Yhwh (Landy) or the need for

religious, economic, and social redemption among the community in Yehud (Halvorson-Taylor, 107–149; see also Gregory; Poulsen; Terblanche).

While understandable in light of the monumental impact of the Babylonian displacements on biblical literature and theology, the focus on the role of "exile" – specifically the Babylonian exile – in Isaiah has overlooked the surprising preponderance of references to other instances of migration in the book. These are the focus of this chapter. It begins by identifying a variety of allusions to migrations by non-Israelites, then turns to analyze references to Judahite and Israelite migration apart from the Babylonian exile, before finally bringing the deportations to Babylonia and the eventual return migrations to Yehud into a richer and more complex picture of migration in the book of Isaiah.

## MIGRATION BY FOREIGNERS

Migrations undertaken by Yhwh's people naturally come to the fore in Isaiah, but the book also contains numerous references to migrations undertaken by other peoples. Broadly speaking, these passages are of two sorts: 1) oracles concerned with the migration of non-Israelites to Zion/Jerusalem, which attend especially to religious aspects of their presence in Yhwh's city; and 2) oracles concerned with the migration of non-Israelites in other lands. The latter are more common in the eighth- and seventh-century parts of the book, reflecting the historical and political realities of Assyrian imperial deportation policies, whereas the former are more typical of contributions from the sixth and fifth centuries, under the influence of the people's own experience of deportation and return migration.

### Migration of and from Other Nations

The earliest material associated with Isaiah ben Amoz of Jerusalem responds to the efforts of the northern kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Aram-Damascus to form a coalition of Levantine nations capable of throwing off Assyrian imperial domination. The latter had put great pressure on the region with the campaigns of Tiglath-pileser III in the 740s (unless otherwise stated, all dates are BCE); by the time of Isaiah ben Amoz's prophetic activity, the long-standing Assyrian policy of forced deportations in the wake of successful military campaigns would have been well known among the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean.

The reality of these imperial deportations, as well as other forms of displacement associated with military incursions – such as flight from

advancing armies and the abandonment of destroyed homes and cities – is reflected in a number of the Isaianic oracles against (or "concerning") foreign nations and peoples. Thus, when Isaiah ben Amoz is instructed to undertake a sign-act in which he is to walk naked and barefoot around Jerusalem for three years (Isa 20:1–5), this bizarre behavior is explained as anticipating the deportation of Egyptians and Cushites (Ethiopians/Nubians), following on from the Assyrians' successful conquest of the Philistine city of Ashdod: "so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as captives (*šĕbî*) and the Cushites as exiles (*gālût*), both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt" (Isa 20:4). As part of Isaiah's general antipathy toward alliances with Egypt, it may be that these deportations are envisioned as involving Egyptian and Cushite soldiers in Ashdod as part of its failed rebellion against Assyrian authority in the 710s. Or it may be that Isaiah was anticipating an Assyrian conquest of Egypt and Cush, which only occurred in the seventh century but had likely been on the Assyrian agenda earlier.

A number of other polities in the region are also described as displaced, though the cause is not always explicitly identified as Assyria's deportation policies. The otherwise difficult Arabah desert oracle (Isa 21:13–15), for example, is clear in its vision of "fugitives" (*ndd*) driven to flee their homes as a result of military conflict: "they have fled (*ndd*) from the swords, from the drawn sword, from the bent bow, and from the stress of battle" (Isa 21:15). The inhabitants of the coastal cities, especially Tyre and Sidon, are also depicted as obliged to flee as a result of war: whereas once the cities' merchants traveled freely for trading purposes (Isa 23:7), now military conflict spurred on by Yhwh will bring down their defenses and provoke their inhabitants to seek refuge in Cyprus – though from there, too, they will be obliged to move on (Isa 23:12).

Ultimately, Yhwh is portrayed as the driving force behind such displacements. This is made explicit elsewhere, in keeping with the book's theological commitment to Yhwh's global power and authority: The nations "will flee (*nws*) far away" from Yhwh's rebuke, "chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind and whirling dust before the storm" (Isa 17:13; compare Isa 24:1; 33:2). Analogous to the mass displacement of foreign peoples as an exhibition of royal social and military might among human kings, Yhwh's authority as divine king is demonstrated in his ability to effect the relocation of whole nations away from their native lands. Thus, in the opening chapter of Second Isaiah's case for the persistence of Yhwh's earthly power, the anonymous prophet declares:

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to live in;
who brings princes to naught,
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.
Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows upon them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble. (Isa 40:21–24)

Conversely, the most sustained depiction of non-Israelite migration, a pair of oracles concerning the Moabites, gives little explicit indication that Yhwh is conceived as behind the displacement (Isa 15:1–16:11) – a single anonymous "I" is suggestive of divine intervention (Isa 15:9).[1] Instead, the oracles are focused on the pathos of the migrants themselves. The specific cause of the Moabites' flight is not identified; although commentators often assume that Moab is suffering the effects of military conflict, or perhaps famine, the description of the devastated cities (Isa 15:1) could equally refer to the effects of a major earthquake.[2] The damage, in any case, is extensive, with the population of numerous cities affected negatively.

After a period of lamentation, it seems that a portion of the population concludes that remaining in Moab, at least in the short term, is untenable: Moab's "fugitives (*bĕrîʾḥ*) flee to Zoar, to Eglath-shelishiyah – for at the ascent of Luhith they go up weeping, on the road to Horonaim they raise a cry of destruction" (Isa 15:5). Subsequent verses hint at the secondary consequences of the initial disaster, as the disruption of Moab's normal societal processes impedes agricultural production and the people are forced to rely on the bounty of previous years – a tenuous grip on the resources necessary for their survival (Isa 15:6–7,

[1] The Isaianic oracles concerning Moab are related to those in Jeremiah 48, although the nature and direction of the relationship is not agreed.

[2] The cause of the Moabites' flight is described in Isa 16:4 using the same terminology (*šdd*); the participle is usually translated as a substantive (e.g., NRSV's "the destroyer"), implying a personified and thus probably military persecutor, but it may also be read more generally.

also 16:8–10).[3] These compounding effects of displacement are perhaps also in mind in Isa 15's final declaration, in which the image of a ravening lion stands for societal collapse and the resurgence of the nonhuman (Isa 15:9). Even the remnant (*šᵉʾērît*) that has escaped the immediate devastation in Moab (*pĕlêṭâ môʾāb*) will struggle to reestablish themselves in the wake of the disaster.

A second section depicts the Moabite refugees seeking support in Jerusalem (Isa 16:1–5).[4] That a host society may hesitate to welcome refugees, perceiving them as potentially burdensome, is recognized in the suggestion that the migrants send lambs ahead of their arrival, signaling that they come with resources that make them advantageous to the host society to accept (Isa 16:1, compare Jacob sending livestock ahead of him to Esau, Gen 32). The prominence of women in mass displacements is implicitly acknowledged in the comparison of the "daughters of Moab" to a flock of distressed birds, driven away from their homes and obliged to search for safety elsewhere (Isa 16:2).[5]

[3] Displacement may significantly disrupt agricultural activities; some research suggests that it may take a returning population as long as two years to reestablish itself: D. A. Korn, *Exodus within Borders: An Introduction to the Crisis of Internal Displacement* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1999), 17–18; L. Hammond, "'Voluntary' Repatriation and Reintegration," in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, ed. E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, G. Loescher, K. Long and N. Sigona (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 499–511, 505–506, with reference to L. Hammond, *This Place Will Become Home: Refugee Repatriation to Ethiopia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); C. Dolan and J. Large, *Evaluation of UNHCR's Repatriation and Reintegration Programme in East Timor, 1999–2003* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2004). David Korn notes that "child malnutrition rates as high as 70 percent have been recorded in some mass displacements" (*Exodus within Borders*, 16). In the absence of international famine aid, the situation in the ancient world may have been this bad or worse. Cohen and Deng highlight a wide range of consequences on the economic and social lives of the homeland, including major damage to agricultural infrastructure as well as homes and other buildings: R. Cohen and F. M. Deng, *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998), 23–26, citing S. Holtzman, "Conflict-Induced Displacement through a Development Lens" (paper prepared for the Brookings Institution, May 1997).

[4] These verses and thus the whole Moab section are sometimes read ironically, and thus as saying that Jerusalem is *not* obliged to admit the Moabite refugees; for a refutation of this interpretation and discussion of these oracles as an instruction to welcome refugees, in antiquity and today, see Aspray.

[5] Korn notes that "the overwhelming majority of the internally displaced are women and their dependent children," as "men either join or are drafted into the fighting ranks of one side or the other, are killed or disabled, or flee to avoid recruitment": Korn, *Exodus within Borders*, 15; cf. Cohen and Deng, *Masses in Flight*, 42, 51, 60, 66. "Daughter of [place]" can also be used to refer to cities, especially the smaller ones of a region, so there may also here be an emphasis on the rural part of the population. This, too, would be consistent with the demographic realities of most displacements, in which the rural poor are disproportionately represented: Korn, *Exodus within Borders*, 15.

Although later parts of the chapter (Isa 16:6–7, 12–13) begin to blame the Moabites for their own distress – not an unusual strategy, even among the displaced themselves – the initial oracle adjures the Jerusalemites to provide shelter for the displaced Moabites.[6]

"Give counsel (*ʿēṣâ*),
grant justice (*pĕlîlâ*);
make your shade like night
at the height of noon;
hide the outcasts (*niddāḥîm*),
do not betray (*glh*) the fugitive (*nōdēd*);
let the outcasts of Moab settle (*gwr*) among you;
be a refuge to them from the destroyer." (Isa 16:3–4)

Although the language employed is somewhat unusual – *ʿēṣâ* refers to advice or counsel, while *pĕlîlâ* is legal terminology – this oracle seems to invoke a legal and moral obligation on the part of the Jerusalemites to receive the outcasts who have been driven out of their homeland and are now arriving in Jerusalem as fugitives (*nōdēd*). A series of imperatives directed to the Jerusalemites and their city – the *de facto* equivalence of the former with the latter is apparent from the ambivalent textual tradition, which oscillates between feminine singular and masculine plural imperatives – make clear that among their obligations is not merely passively to allow the refugees to enter the city, but rather an active involvement in their protection and resettlement.

These instructions, especially the use of *glh*, suggests that the Jerusalemites should not be tempted to push the Moabites onwards to some other place of refuge; rather, they are to allow the Moabites to live alongside them indefinitely, as resident non-Israelites (*gwr*) – on the model, perhaps, of Zion's function for the Israelites themselves (Isa 14:32).

Elsewhere, Isaiah threatens the displacement of any peoples who displace the Israelites and Judahites – a view of the arc of history toward talionic (retributive) justice that anticipates the suffering wrought upon Israel being experienced in turn by those who inflicted it. Thus, Yhwh assures the audience that Assyria's apparent invincibility will someday end, and describes its eventual defeat as entailing not just death but displacement:

[6] On the narration of displacement as the result of collective sin, see Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

'Then the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of mortals;
and a sword, not of humans, shall devour him;
he shall flee from the sword,
and his young men shall be put to forced labour.
His rock shall pass away in terror,
and his officers desert the standard in panic,'
says Yhwh, whose fire is in Zion,
and whose furnace is in Jerusalem. (Isa 31:8–9)

The oracle implies that there will be displacement as a result both of the fighting itself – "he shall flee from the sword … his officers desert the standard in panic" – and in its aftermath – "his young men shall be put to forced labour."

A turn to the book of Jeremiah unpacks these and other, similar images in Isaiah; Jeremiah depicts conflict-induced displacements ranging from flight away from the path of an advancing army (Jer 6:1; 35:11; 40:11) or from a recently-surrendered city (Jer 39:4) to the forced displacement of survivors to distant lands where they are put to work for the empire (Jer 39:7; 41:17–18; 43:2–7; perhaps Jer 39:7–12 should be viewed in this light) (on Jeremiah see further Crouch, 115–146).

The hope that the Babylonian perpetrators of those later displacements would in due course also experience the consequences of such policies is expressed obliquely in Second Isaiah's description of Babylonian deities being carried into exile by Babylonian deportees:

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops,
their idols are on beasts and cattle;
these things you carry are loaded
as burdens on weary animals.
They stoop, they bow down together;
they cannot save the burden,
but themselves go into captivity. (Isa 46:1–2)

Not all the migrations of the nations are portrayed as punitive, however. There is also the more positive suggestion that a future kingdom of Yhwh will enable the free movement of peoples across traditional boundaries and borders, together with a greater degree of shared religious and cultural activity: "On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians" (Isa 19:23).

### Migration to Jerusalem

Several passages – in addition to the oracle concerning Moab previously discussed – describe the migration of non-Israelites to Jerusalem, with a particular concern for the religious integration of these immigrants into the worship of Yhwh at Zion. Most of these passages derive from post-exilic parts of the book, reflecting the more international outlook occasioned by the displacements following Jerusalem's destruction. Thus Isa 2, which seems to have served as an introduction to the sixth-century edition of the book, depicts an idealized future in which the kingdom's capital is a welcoming host to foreigners motivated by religious reasons to leave their homes and come to Jerusalem:

> In days to come
>
> the mountain of Yhwh's house
> shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
> and shall be raised above the hills;
> all the nations shall stream to it.
> Many peoples shall come and say,
> "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
> to the house of the God of Jacob;
> that he may teach us his ways
> and that we may walk in his paths."
> For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
> and the word of Yhwh from Jerusalem. (Isa 2:2; cf. 45:14; 55:5)

Even more explicit is the famous passage with which Third Isaiah begins, in which the vision of Yahwistic community is expanded to include foreigners and eunuchs (Isa 56:3–8). Here again, the principal concern appears to be the religious integration of the immigrants: The foreigners in question will not merely be Yahwistic acolytes from afar, but present in Yhwh's temple on Zion, making acceptable offerings there in a sanctuary henceforth to be known as "a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isa 56:7, compare Isa 66:18–21 and perhaps Isa 18:7).

Although parts of Second and Third Isaiah connect the arrival of foreigners in Jerusalem with their role in the return of Yhwh's (traditional) people (Isa 14:1–2; 49:22; 60:3–14; 66:20), the wider picture indicates that this is not the end of the story. Rather, at least some of these envoys are envisioned as remaining in the city and integrating themselves into its culture and religious practice.[7]

[7] On the greater likelihood of integration among migrants to urban destinations, see Malkki, *Purity and Exile*; Elizabeth Colson, "Forced Migration and

## MIGRATION BY ISRAELITES AND JUDAHITES

When biblical scholars discuss migration in relation to Israel and Judah, they focus almost exclusively on the Babylonian Exile; indeed, by convention the terms "preexilic" and "postexilic" are taken to reflect a boundary in the year 586. However, not only was the "Babylonian Exile" itself a series of several deportations that occurred over more than a decade, but the threat and reality of such displacements were already familiar to the authors of the Hebrew Bible long before the sixth century, thanks especially to the Assyrian military conquest of Samaria in 721, which triggered the displacement of the inhabitants of the northern kingdom of Israel. From that perspective, it is not surprising that a number of earlier Isaianic passages already envisioned the possibility of Israelite migration.

### Deportations Prior to "the Exile"

The oracle that refers to "daughter Zion" as "like a booth in a vineyard, like a shelter in a cucumber field" (Isa 1:8) is often thought to reflect the aftermath of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in 701, when Judah's other major cities had been laid waste and much of the country's hinterland had been stripped from Jerusalem's control and given to Philistine rulers. Although the dating of the passage is sometimes disputed, it appears to allude obliquely to the deportation of a meaningful portion of the population in connection with these events, as it laments the survival in Judah of only "a few survivors (*šārîd*)" (Isa 1:9). Some of those who are no longer in Judah are undoubtedly dead, but others would have been deported by the Assyrian army. Sennacherib's account of the city's siege reports:

> (As for) Hezekiah of the land Judah, I surrounded (and) conquered forty-six of his fortified walled cities and small(er) settlements in their environs … I brought out of them 200,150 people, young (and) old, male and female … (Sennacherib 4 49–52)[8]

the Anthropological Response," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 16 (2003): 1–18; Mila Dragojevic, *The Politics of Social Ties: Immigrants in an Ethnic Homeland* (London: Routledge, 2014); Barbara E. Harrell-Bond, *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Julie M. Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps*, The Ethnography of Political Violence Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[8] This and the following quotation from Sennacherib's inscriptions are from A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 1*, RINAP 3/1 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), here 65–66.

Sennacherib's claim that he deported 200,150 people is placed at this point in the account (here in the version inscribed on the Rassam Cylinder) to highlight Hezekiah's submission, and probably assimilates all deportees from this campaign into a single figure for rhetorical purposes.[9] That a significant number of persons were deported from Judah in connection with Hezekiah's surrender, even if not so many as this, is however quite likely. Indeed, the account goes on to provide a more specific reckoning of the persons who came from Judah to Assyria as a result of Hezekiah's surrender:

> He [Hezekiah] had the auxiliary forces (and) his elite troops … together with his daughters, his palace women, male singers, (and) female singers brought into Nineveh … (Sennacherib 4 55, 58)

This displacement is obviously coerced by Sennacherib's military offensive, though the annals present it as a voluntary tribute on the part of Hezekiah. And while the narrative account of the invasion included in the book of Isaiah is shaped from the perspective of a later time, this imperial gloss on the nature of forced displacement is reflected also in the Assyrian Rabshakeh's speech to the people gathered on the walls of Jerusalem, whom he invites in the name of the king of Assyria to

> Make your peace with me and come out to me; then everyone of you will eat from your own vine and your own fig tree and drink water from your own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. (Isa 36:16–17)

It was typical of Assyrian imperial practice to prefer to induce surrender rather than bearing the costs of battle and siege. In a neat sleight of hand, the Rabshakeh elides the familiarity of home with the inevitability of displacement should the people surrender, as he tempts Jerusalem's defenders to give the city up: He promises that the place to which they would be exiled would be just as good as home. Isaiah ben Amoz's poetic oracles sought to ensure that his hearers would take off these rose-tinted glasses, by casting a spotlight on the harsher reality that awaited those who fell prey to the Assyrians' power.

[9] On the use of numbers in the Assyrian royal inscriptions, see M. De Odorico, *The Use of Numbers and Quantifications in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, SAAS 3 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1995).

One focus of the Isaianic oracles is the impact of imperial deportation policies on those left behind. The term used in Isa 1 for the "survivors" (*šārîd*), for example, is suggestive of temporary flight in the face of battle or other life-threatening circumstances; it is a reminder that even those who were ultimately able to remain in their native land might experience temporary or internal displacement as a result of conflict.[10] A poem tracing the Assyrian army's advance on Jerusalem similarly foregrounds the chaos and upheaval triggered by military conflict:

He has come to Aiath;
he has passed through Migron,
  at Michmash he stores his baggage;
they have crossed over the pass,
  at Geba they lodge for the night;
Ramah trembles,
  Gibeah of Saul has fled.
Cry aloud, O daughter Gallim!
  Listen, O Laishah!
  Answer her, O Anathoth!
Madmenah is in flight,
  the inhabitants of Gebim flee for safety.
This very day he will halt at Nob,
  he will shake his fist
  at the mount of daughter Zion,
  the hill of Jerusalem. (Isa 10:28–32)

The consequences of the Assyrians' arrival for the capital city and its ruling elites are detailed in an extended oracle in Isa 3, which highlights the propensity of the imperial rulers of antiquity to focus their deportation efforts on those in positions of authority and others with the means to threaten to destabilize the imperial hegemon going forward. Among those to be deported from Jerusalem and Judah are

[10] On the prevalence and consequences of internal displacement, see Cohen and Deng, *Masses in Flight*, and Korn, *Exodus within Borders*. On *šārîd*, see the lexica.

The appearance of non-Israelites in Judah is also noted in this passage (Isa 1:7), although neither their identity nor the duration of their expected stay is explicit. Thus the "strangers devouring your land" may be Assyrians present to enforce imperial authority, or they may represent the Philistines who now control the Shephelah and who are perceived by the region's former rulers as interlopers. Either way, the comment is a further reminder of the pervasiveness of human mobility and movement in Israelite and Judahite experience.

warrior and soldier,
judge and prophet,
diviner and elder,
captain of fifty
and dignitary,
counsellor and skilful magician
and expert enchanter. (Isa 3:2)

Those left behind are then depicted as foundering in the absence of effective leaders, as social structures disintegrate – just as the empire intended (Isa 3:4–7). In keeping with Isaianic theology more broadly, the prophetic text identifies Yhwh as the immediate cause of this displacement (Isa 3:1), but the Assyrians lurk behind the scenes.

Ultimately, the Isaianic tradition favors those left behind after Sennacherib's invasion and related forced migrations. Indeed, it comes as something of a shock to those accustomed to the biblical rhetoric favoring those taken into exile in the sixth century to hear words of divine favor pronounced on those left in Judah after the occurrence of Sennacherib's deportations:

> On that day the branch of Yhwh shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. Whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, once the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. (Isa 4:2–4; compare also Isa 37:30–32)

Although the oracle is not clearly tied to a specific historical event – and there has been extensive disagreement about these verses' unity and date – its explicit preference for those remaining in Jerusalem forms a stark contrast to the otherwise all but universal preference for those deported to Babylonia, and suggests that its origins lie in an earlier, monarchic era.

That deportation is viewed as a form of divine judgment already in the material associated with Isaiah ben Amoz is in any case quite clear. The failure of Jerusalem's leaders to prioritize Yhwh and the divine will over their own pleasure is the direct cause of the people's coming exile (*glh*) (Isa 5:11–13). Yhwh's summons to the Assyrian invader, elsewhere described as "the rod of [Yhwh's] anger" (Isa 10:5), depicts the empire as ravening young lions, who carry off the people like raw meat (Isa 5:26–30). Those who seek to elude Yhwh's punishment – for lack of faith and

for failures of justice and righteousness – will try but find nowhere to flee (*nws*); their fate is captivity (*'ssîr*) or death (*hrg*) (Isa 10:1–5; 30:15–17; compare Isa 28:13). Beyond Judah's borders but worryingly near to hand, the fate of the Aramean-Israelite coalition threatening Ahaz of Judah will likewise be the desertion and despoliation of their lands, assured by Yhwh and achieved by the Assyrian hand (Isa 7:16–17; 8:3).

### Aftereffects of the Babylonian Exile

Although commentators commonly declare that the Babylon Exile is absent from the book of Isaiah, multiple passages clearly refer to the sixth-century deportations initiated by the Babylonian conquest. (The entire latter half of the book, of course, as well as its final form, presupposes Jerusalem's fall and the displacement of much of its population to Babylonia; here our interest is in passages that more explicitly acknowledge these events.)

It is against the theology of deportation developed in the Neo-Assyrian period that the second half of the book grapples with the implications of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its inhabitants by the Babylonians. It is true that these chapters address the realities of displacement less directly than those that originated in the monarchic era; it may be that the difficulty of speaking about traumatic experience is one reason for this reticence. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to say that the parts of the book originating after the Babylonian deportations proceed as though they did not happen; indeed, they acknowledge them quite explicitly, just not with great frequency.

Thus Zion, speaking as the mother of the Israelites, describes herself as having been "exiled and sent away" (*gōlâ we-sûrâ*; Isa 49:21). There is no divine denial of this recollection of the Babylonian deportations – unlike a few verses earlier, when Zion's claim that Yhwh had abandoned her is explicitly rejected (Isa 49:14–15). Continuing the tradition of personifying Israel as Yhwh's wife, the next chapter also recalls that she was "sent away," that is divorced (*šlḥ*; cf. Deut 24:1), on account of her sins. This is the same theology of deportation as appears in the older Isaianic traditions: for the people to be sent away from their homes and homeland is a sign of divine judgment. Although it does not spend a great deal of time describing the experience itself, the parts of Isaiah that originate after it do not ultimately contest this interpretation of events; rather, it acknowledges it, then turns to what Yhwh has planned for the future.[11]

[11] Isa 52:3–5 is often translated in a way that suggests that the Israelites were oppressed without cause" (thus NRSV, for *bᵉ'epes* in v. 3 and for *ḥinnām* in v. 5)), that is, that they were unjustly punished; the point is rather that the punishment of Yhwh's people was undertaken for nothing, that is, it was not undertaken for payment.

The oracle concerning Cyrus explicitly acknowledges the deportations when it refers to the Persian king's task as to "set my exiles (*gālûtî*) free" (Isa 45:13). A difficult oracle in Isa 22 may also allude to the Babylonian deportations, or have reinterpreted an earlier oracle in light of them; it laments of Jerusalem that

> Your slain are not slain by the sword,
> nor are they dead in battle.
> Your rulers have all fled (*ndd*) together;
> they were captured without the use of a bow.
> All of you who were found were captured,
> though they had fled (*brḥ*) far away. (Isa 22:2b–3).

This imagery is reminiscent of Jeremiah's description of Zedekiah's attempt to flee the city as it fell to the Babylonians, only to be captured and forcibly deported to Babylonia (Jer 39:4–7).[12]

**Return Migrations**

The prospect of return migration to Yehud by the descendants of those deported by the Babylonians in the sixth century was of understandably significant interest to Second and Third Isaiah. This theme has been more thoroughly discussed than other cases of migration in the book, and may briefly be summarized.

The famous summons to "Go out from Babylon! Flee (*brḥ*) from Chaldea!" (Isa 48:20) – echoed again in the imperative to "Depart (*swr*)! Depart (*swr*)! Go out from there!" (Isa 52:11) – is perhaps the most explicit call for the community in Babylonia to become return migrants, encouraging them to enter into a new phase in Israel's migrant history. Indeed, Second Isaiah's references to the return migration of Yhwh's people are cast within a network of allusions to Israel's past that foreground its earlier experiences of migration. Abraham and the rest of the ancestral family are described as having begun their relationship with Yhwh when the deity demanded that they leave their homes and migrate to a new land:

[12] The reference in Isa 22:6 to Elam and Kir has suggested to some interpreters that this oracle refers to the fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century rather than to events in the late eighth, insofar as the Elamites' involvement in the Babylonians' overpowering of the Assyrian empire is well known; the comment that "he has taken away the curtain (*māsak*) of Judah" (Isa 22:8) may also point to the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. Ultimately, the text does not provide sufficient detail to determine definitively whether the oracle – curious also for its appearance among the oracles concerning the nations – refers to the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, although if it does not, then the circumstances of the anonymous leaders' flight are unknown.

You, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, "You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you off." (Isa 41:8–9)

Later, Yhwh's people "went down into Egypt to reside there as migrants (*gwr*)" (Isa 52:4). The extent of the exodus allusions in Second Isaiah has been extensively debated, but where they appear they, too, invoke a version of Israelite history that foregrounds mobility and movement (Isa 43:2; 48:21; 51:10; 52:11–12; 63:9–14). Indeed, the Second Isaiah material begins with an image of Yhwh himself as a migrant, making his way through the wilderness in search of home (Isa 40:3; compare Isa 35:8–10, where similar imagery is used for the people's return, and other biblical traditions that depict Yhwh as a migrant, including Exod 13:21–22; 2 Sam 7:6; Ezek 11:22–25). Later, too, Yhwh is depicted as making the return migration to the Levant alongside the people (Isa 40:11; 43:5–6; compare Isa 42:16; 54:7). Elsewhere the servant is charged with bringing the people out of exile – metaphorized as prison and thus foregrounding its limited term – on Yhwh's behalf (Isa 42:6–7, compare Isa 49:5–6; 49:9).

There are, finally, a handful of passages that may be interpreted to refer to the return migrations of those displaced in the sixth century or as referring to the (actual, or simply hoped-for) return of earlier generations of forced migrants from Israel and Judah. Thus, in the midst of promises of divine recompense for Assyrian overreach comes a promise that "the remnant of Israel and the survivors (*pĕlêṭâ*) of the house of Jacob … the remnant of Jacob" will return (Isa 10:20–21). Soon after comes a long list of places to which Israelites and Judahites have been driven out (*ndḥ*) and scattered (*pwṣ*) and from which Yhwh now intends to gather them back, just as long ago he brought the Israelites out of Egypt:

On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

He will raise a signal for the nations,
and will assemble the outcasts of Israel,
and gather the dispersed of Judah

from the four corners of the earth….
so there shall be a highway from Assyria
for the remnant that is left of his people,
as there was for Israel
when they came up from the land of Egypt. (Isa 11:11–12, 16)

## CONCLUSIONS

Israel and Judah's long history of displacements lent these and other promises of being gathered back to the home land an enduring significance. From the origins of the Isaianic tradition in the eighth century to its final phases in the fifth or fourth, Yhwh's people were forced to reckon with the reality and persistence of migration. Long before the inhabitants of Jerusalem were forcibly deported to Babylonia – let alone the possibility that some of those deportees' descendants might make a return migration to the ancestral homeland – migration was a part of life.

Neo-Assyrian imperial expansion and policy brought deportation and forced migration well within the experience of the Levantine kingdoms; Hezekiah's rebellion brought their effects deep into the heart of Jerusalem, even into the royal palace. Displacement due to war and conflict was especially common, but could equally be caused by earthquake, famine, and other natural disasters. How to treat refugees from neighboring kingdoms was a live question, and parts of the book explore the possibility of welcoming non-Israelites into Jerusalem and involving them, to greater or lesser degrees, in Yahwistic worship. Throughout, Yhwh is considered the ultimate force behind these mass movements of the earth's human population: Yhwh is the divine king, capable of exercising policies of displacement that human monarchs could only dream of.

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